

Outdoor Education: Research Topic or Universal Value? Part Two

Robbie Nicol

University of Edinburgh, UK

Preface

This paper is the second of a three part series. Parts one (Nicol, 2002) and two look at aspects of the historical development of outdoor education in the United Kingdom. Part three builds on this historical platform and explores the importance of environmental education and its relationship with outdoor education.

Abstract

This paper follows the theme of part one in that it sets out to discover if the history of outdoor education provides its modern exponents with a legacy of prescribed conservatism or alternatively a form of education which embraces, or is capable of embracing, diversity of theory and practice. Focusing on local authority residential outdoor education centres it begins with the 1970s through the 1980s and ends with the 1990s.

Secondary sources are used and include government and civil service education circulars as well as the body of literature that relates to outdoor education. The paper analyses how discussions of philosophical underpinnings and aims, together with the public perception of safety and risk came to influence the practice of outdoor education. This leads to a discussion of terminology and the role of outdoor education as a curricular subject. The influence of market forces on the provision of outdoor education and the increasing call for cost effectiveness is analysed in relation to the increasingly diverse range of activities coming under the umbrella term of outdoor education.

The evidence shows that throughout this period significant changes regarding the nature of outdoor education are observable. However, within this flux one point is clear. The body of outdoor education literature attaches more importance to outcomes relating to personal and social education than environmental education and this point will be the bridge between part two and part three.

1970s: A New Kid in Town

In 1971 the Scottish Education Department (SED) published a circular in response to the growing provision and importance attached to outdoor education. The intention was to assist education authorities and school managers to prioritise those aspects of outdoor education which would contribute to the general education of pupils. It is a supportive document suggesting that pupils should have a “continuous and progressive outdoor experience...including, if possible, at least one period of residence at an outdoor centre” (SED, 1971, 804 [I]: 1). The importance of this document lies not only with its general support of outdoor education but in dealing with definitional aspects such as the recognition that outdoor education is an umbrella term comprising a broad range of component parts. For example, three distinct areas of outdoor education are identified and include outdoor pursuits, curriculum field studies and social education. However, the circular points out that each component has been treated with unequal status and states that, “less attention seems to have been paid to social education at outdoor centres” (SED, 1971, 804 [I]: 1).

Here then is an explicit and official indication that the Scottish Office would like to see more attention paid to social education at outdoor centres. Whether intended or not it also represents a challenge to the body of thought which held that to engage in outdoor pursuits for their own sake is sufficient intrinsic justification. It would also appear to represent a counter to the “skills for leisure approach”. The SED report, therefore, was championing the view that the pursuit of activities on a recreational basis was not enough and that instrumental outcomes were required.

Nomenclature

During this time the use of the term “outdoor education”, as opposed to “outdoor pursuits” or “outdoor activities”, became more prominent. Cheesmond and Yates (1979) suggest that this is directly attributable to the formation, in 1970, of the National Association for Outdoor Education (NAOE). By adopting the term “outdoor education” within its own title the Association was endorsing its use as the favoured term. Cheesmond (1981: 14) suggests that the choice of the term signified the intention to draw together divergent outdoor practices within “a broadly based definition which, it was hoped, would appeal to a wide variety of teachers”.

That outdoor education became a favoured term instead of outdoor pursuits is directly attributable to the attempt to link it with the school curriculum. In order to do this it had to gain respectability from within the mainstream educational establishment. Cheesmond (1981: 28) suggests that “outdoor education as opposed to pursuits can be seen as an example of a trend in education towards subject integration. It represents a subject amalgamation, an applied area of knowledge which draws from several established parts of the school curriculum”. This was a deliberate attempt to establish validity by using nomenclature that would appear acceptable and fit in with the established curriculum. In terms of curricular subjects the most accommodating subject was physical education (Cheesmond, 1981; Yates, 1981; Keighley, 1998). Environmental education offered a second means by which outdoor education could claim to be involved in curricular subjects (Parker & Meldrum, 1973). Residential visits presented opportunities for pupils to become involved in curricular field studies. Opportunities such as these strengthened the potential for links with school based education.

At this point it is possible to say with assurance that outdoor education had become something more than outdoor activities, with policy documents supporting the areas of personal and social development or environmental education. Also, outdoor education was increasingly seen as an innovative pedagogical endeavour. For example, the General Teaching Council for Scotland (1990: 3) reported that in the 1970s outdoor education represented a “shift from passive learning to active inquiry methods”. At this stage the future of outdoor education with its alternative methodological practices looked optimistic.

The “Game” Becomes Deadly

However much outdoor educators may have wanted to be guided by issues of pedagogy, external developments took precedence in shaping the nature of outdoor education. A series of incidents resulted in the deaths of children whilst engaged in outdoor programmes (Mortlock, 1984; AHOEC, 1988). The resultant public concern called into question the educational justification for such adventurous activities (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993). The aspiring outdoor profession responded by adopting a more prescriptive approach to safety (AHOEC, 1988) and a general clarification and tightening of safety procedures (Hopkins & Putnam 1993). This reinforced an existing trend where a codified hierarchy of qualifications represented the means by which outdoor educators could evaluate their professional competence (Cheesmond, 1981).

The deaths of the pupils was a turning point in the development of outdoor education. Crowther (1999) states that the response to these incidents was the introduction of training courses for teachers of outdoor education at Edinburgh's Moray House and Dunfermline colleges. They also coincided with developments in the wider recreational arena where National Governing Bodies (NGBs) were responsible for the establishment of a range of qualifications in outdoor pursuits (Cheesmond & Yates, 1979). Given the absence of formal recognition and lack of promotion prospects the pursuit of qualifications became a measure of professional reflexivity for those working in the outdoors. Thus it can be seen that the nature of outdoor education came to be influenced by, on the one hand, the pursuit of qualifications, and on the other, academic influences from tertiary education institutions.

The First Philosophical Treatments

Mortlock (1984) saw this as a key turning point in philosophy. Up to this point educational benefits were seen to arise out of placing pupils in positions where they would experience adventure, fear, physical hardship and discomfort. However, the public's concern for safety, the developing trend for instructors to pursue qualifications, together with a desire to secure a place in the school curriculum, provided the seed bed from which new ideas about outdoor education would germinate. Mortlock (1984: 13) wanted to challenge the view that "by combining outdoor activities with environmental and field studies, educational and academic respectability were achieved". Mortlock did not necessarily concur with this form of "respectability". He published two essays which represented a direct challenge and rebuttal of the public concern over risk (Mortlock, 1973 & 1978). By carefully redefining the notion of risk Mortlock developed the concept of "adventure education". Central to his thesis was that elements of risk and adventure, properly managed, could be used to heighten learning experiences in areas of "courage, compassion, determination, integrity, humility and self reliance" (Mortlock, 1984: 17).

A contemporary of Mortlock, Harold Drasdo published a critique of outdoor centres suggesting they were failing to provide experiences which would lead to self-fulfilment and personal growth (Drasdo, 1973). Like Mortlock, Drasdo's concerns were as much about the nature of experience as they were about the content of outdoor education. Focussing on the phenomenological rather than the technical provided new opportunities for the rationale of outdoor education. Drasdo was particularly interested in the aesthetic element. In this he was not the first but his contribution was at that time the most eloquent and advanced. I have written elsewhere (Nicol & Higgins, 1998: 50) that,

Drasdo's experiential involvement as a climber provided him with a feeling for the activity to which he felt the goals of outdoor education should be directed. In what must now be seen as a pioneering book on Education and the Mountain Centres Drasdo (1973: 16) suggests "the climber's lonely dance is infinitely expressive. The cliff writes the choreography, the weather reinterprets it, the climber reveals himself through it in his own performance". This sentiment will strike a chord in all climbers remembering their own moments of oneness where a collection of movements became a unity of physical and mental experience, where the climb becomes more of a flow of graceful movements than a series of physical exertions.

Drasdo's contribution is a landmark publication that marks a break from the traditional view that outdoor education consisted simply of field studies, or a series of "rugged" activities. By introducing an aesthetic dimension Drasdo challenged his contemporaries to rethink their relationship with the natural environment and the whole purpose of outdoor education as a pedagogical endeavour. It should be noted that Drasdo met with limited success and came to admit that the outlook of many of the newly established centres did not fully reflect his own philosophy. However, both he and Mortlock (1984) draw on a similar philosophical position that, I have argued, is rooted in a particular perspective,

that is to say, the individual who has enjoyed those experiences that Drasdo talks of will instantly relate to this relationship between self, activity and the environment but at a personal level. Colin Mortlock has, in his own way expressed similar existential tendencies. His (1984: 58) use of Schopenhauer's phrase "know thyself and know the world" goes to the very heart of a personal philosophy whereby enlightenment begins with knowledge of self. Perhaps the most telling aspect of Mortlock's (1984: 4) philosophy is expressed in his description of the "inner journey" which appears at once both metaphorical and literal: "Your success is determined by your efforts and not by your results, and you may come to realise that the most important journey is the journey inwards" (Nicol & Higgins, 1998: 51).

There is a significant gap in published philosophical material from these early treatments until the appearance in 1993 of Hopkins and Putnam's text *Personal Growth Through Adventure*. However, another early publication appeared at this time which was *Outdoor Education* (Parker & Meldrum, 1973). Whilst advancing the claims of outdoor education it did so in a descriptive manner stopping short of an interpretive critique of the roles, aims and objectives of outdoor education. Indeed they comment that "there is certainly the need to clarify the aims of sending young people to centres...(and warn that whatever outdoor education)...does contain or expand into should be educationally sound and born out of proven evidence and not intuition" (Parker & Meldrum, 1973: 19). Here then is an indication of unease over a profession short on both philosophical and empirical rationales. The strength of this text however lies in its concern with an overview of outdoor education. Whereas both Drasdo (1973) and Mortlock (1984) focussed on ideas that were foremost to them as individuals, Parker and Meldrum cast their net wider to include historical, contemporary, technical and definitional aspects of outdoor education within the context of public, charitable, voluntary and commercial modes of provision.

In terms of landmark publications the 1975 Dartington conference was the first "systematic attempt...to identify and categorise the different goals of outdoor education and to identify the process by which they might be achieved" (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993: 45). Convened under the auspices of the Department of Education and Science the conference clarified definitions, aims and content in the following way.

Definitions

In recognising that the term outdoor education had many meanings the Dartington conference findings took issue with the National Association for Outdoor Education definition as a "means of approaching educational objectives through guided direct experience in the environment, using its resources as learning materials" suggesting that it "does not help to identify and emphasise certain important educational aims" (DES, 1975: 1). The definition offered instead was that outdoor education was "education out of doors...including disciplines such as geography, history, art, biology

field work, environmental studies and physical education”. These proceedings offer further confirmation of the growing tendency to favour instrumental aims and curricular links over intrinsic aspects. Furthermore, there was no overt attempt to translate the philosophical writings of Drasdo and Mortlock into the diverse practitioner contexts which exist.

Aims

The aims that were adopted at the Dartington conference have shown much resilience since they remain observable in current texts (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993). These aims, after Mortlock (1973), were to heighten awareness of and foster respect for,

- a. Self — through the meeting of challenge (adventure)
- b. Others — through group experiences and the sharing of decisions
- c. The natural environment, through direct experience (DES, 1975: 1).

These aims were a formulation of what conference delegates already perceived their job to be. However, the aims were not arrived at as the result of empirical analysis and so there is no evidence to suggest, for example, that by “heightening awareness” “respect” would be fostered for any of the three aims. In terms of philosophy Cheesmond (1999: 1) has suggested “maybe each strand has a distinct philosophical underpinning; the mountaineer, the group worker, the biologist for example, but they have proved to be uncomfortable bedfellows in achieving something overarching”.

This is confirmed later in the Department of Education and Science (DES) document where, once again, it is pointed out there is a lack of understanding in philosophical underpinnings (DES, 1975: 4). This raises a fundamental problem which has eluded the outdoor profession to the present time. The basis of the problem is the relationship between philosophy, methodology and practice. If outdoor education lacks a stated philosophy one wonders at the means by which knowledge is produced, verified and transmitted. Without this context outdoor education lacks validity. It may be valid to its practitioners but unless that validity is demonstrable to an external audience then whatever philosophy that exists remains insular.

Content

The content is described in terms of activities such as expeditions, exploration, canoeing, sailing, hill walking, rock climbing, gliding and skiing. It is interesting to note that the content of outdoor education is still expressed in terms of activities and this poses a fundamental issue yet to be addressed. In the absence of stated philosophical underpinnings and empirical evidence it is clear that outdoor education has developed, to some extent, as a series of practical activities. Simply put, the practice came first and the theory, what there is of it, came later. This has important philosophical implications which are discussed in the following pages.

Back to Philosophy

However, outdoor education is not alone in this respect, a point which is clearer when viewed within the context of other forms of education. For example, Mackenzie (1970: 53) suggests that “the story of education is a story of unexamined assumptions”. He cites mathematics as a legacy of “classical education” which maintains its place in the curriculum because of tradition rather than its useful application to everyday life. This is the point that Crowther (1999) made above, that some subjects are valued because of an unquestioning acceptance which leads to a tradition of supremacy which in turn hinders the inclusion of “newer” subjects.

Without calling into question all of the subjects deemed worthy of inclusion in the curriculum it is probably more realistic to ask “at this stage of its development what can outdoor education bring to education to warrant its recognition as a valued educational endeavour?” As an example, Mackenzie (1970: 53) asks that we consider his assumption that a major purpose of education is for young people “to decide for themselves what education is about”. One of the greatest advantages the outdoor educator has over a class teacher is the ratio they work with. Working normally with groups of less than ten they have potentially more contact time with each particular pupil. The ratio alone provides more opportunity to give the individual attention needed to create ways in which pupils may consider their own perspective on education. In this I am following Mackenzie’s (1970) distinction between the purposes to which education is put as opposed to what people learn.

I raise these issues at this stage because it appears that outdoor education has “evolved” into what it is more by chance than design. Consequently philosophical debate proceeds in defence of what has always been done. However, this should not be seen as any different from those subjects which are seen as foundational to the curricular timetable. In this respect outdoor education shares with mainstream education a philosophy which is more likely to be a reinforcement of the status quo than a visionary pedagogical endeavour. Where it differs is that outdoor education has never enjoyed statutory protection nor a societal tradition to support it whereas many existing school subjects are considered to be a good thing and beyond question. This leads Crowther (1999:1) to conclude “it was (with hindsight) in the 1970s that the battle for formal inclusion of outdoor education was lost. The aftermath of the Stimpson Report (the 1976 review entitled *Non-Teaching Staff in Secondary Schools: Youth and Community Workers, Librarians and Instructors*) and the attempts to get outdoor education teachers recognised by the General Teaching Council for Scotland ultimately failed because of rejection by the Scottish Office”.

In summary therefore the 1970s was characterised by issues of safety, qualification, definition and aims. Despite the contributions of Drasdo (1973) and Mortlock (1973, 1978), outdoor education literature failed to provide a coherent philosophical standpoint. These issues were debated against a backdrop of changing provision which saw a progressive decrease in the length of residentials in some centres from 28 days to 8 days and less (Noble, 1995) and with no more residential centres being opened in Scotland towards the end of the 1970s (Cheesmond & Yates, 1979). Within this context of diminishing provision outdoor education was unsuccessful in becoming established as a mainstream school subject supported by statutory authority.

1980s: Trouble at t’Mill

Concern with aims continued into the 1980s leading McDonald (1997: 294) to conclude that by then “most centres had compiled or written aims”. However the concentration on aims made little contribution to developing an underpinning philosophy. An indication that this was so is apparent in a debate which took place over whether outdoor pursuits had a legitimate place in the school curriculum. The two protagonists are the same Cheesmond and Yates whose empirical study (1979) has featured throughout this chapter. Yates’s (1981: 27) position is summed up in his statement,

I can see little justification for including outdoor pursuits as a compulsory part of the school’s programme, and can find no strong argument for the subject which rests its case on educational principles’. He is very sceptical that simply by participating in outdoor pursuits (his terminology) the activity will “challenge the individual and pose to the individual the need to consider others when engaged in group activities”

Cheesmond (1981), on the other hand, argues the case for inclusion on a number of fronts. There is a sociological argument that suggests the stresses of urban lifestyles require a rural antidote which may be found in outdoor pursuits. Also there is a curricular argument where Cheesmond (1981) uses Scottish Education Department documentation (*Physical Education in Secondary Schools: Curriculum Paper 12*) to defend the inclusion of physical activities. In addition both polemicists support their arguments by citing educational philosophers. In his own words Yates (1981: 30) states,

I might add that I hold to (my) conclusion on philosophical grounds. My personal involvement in an evaluation of the Lothian Region's Outdoor Education Programmes which endorsed in every respect their value as seen by teachers and pupils left me with a very strong admiration for the excellent work and generous commitment of time by a large number of dedicated teachers and advisors, so my conclusion is one reached in relation to fundamental principles rather than current practice.

The project Yates (1981) refers to was a collaborative project undertaken by both himself and Cheesmond (Cheesmond & Yates, 1979). At first glance it may seem strange that both now disagree. Closer analysis, however, reveals the disparity. Yates (1981) suggests that his argument begins with first principles which implies that outdoor pursuits will be critiqued from and evaluated against a particular philosophical standpoint. Cheesmond (1981) on the other hand begins from the point of practice and looks to various policy, curricular and philosophical arguments to support the case. In short Yates (1981) is employing deductive reasoning, going from the general to the specific, whilst Cheesmond (1981) appears to adopt a more inductive approach going from the specific to the general. Without necessarily putting any value on either approach it is imperative that the difference be understood. This is because if an argument begins and is developed from a deductive standpoint it may well have a different conclusion than if it began and was developed from a position of practice (induction).

Of the collaborative work with Cheesmond, Yates (1981: 32) concluded, "I am unable to provide any answers to these difficult philosophical issues, but would wish to point out that at root many of the problems to which this research project pointed us are problems of this philosophical kind". The interface between ontological assumptions about the nature of the world (reality) and the epistemological means by which you come to understand that reality has been central to the history of western philosophy (Russell, 1979). It is possible that Yates' (1981) search for first principles to justify practice and Cheesmond's (1981) search for philosophy arising out of practice has its origins within this metaphysical domain. It is also possible that in reflecting upon their collaborative work both protagonists are defending their different positions using post-hoc rationalisation. For the moment, however, this was the limit of the philosophical frontier within outdoor education in the 1980s in the United Kingdom where treatments were both social and justificational. In other words, despite approaching the issue from different knowledge construction standpoints (inductive) Cheesmond (1981) and (deductive) Yates (1981), the philosophical battleground remains uncontested from the point of view that both look to instrumental as opposed to intrinsic rationales.

Mortlock expanded on his earlier writings (Mortlock, 1973, 1978) and published *The Adventure Alternative* (Mortlock, 1984). This is a conscious attempt to portray outdoor education as something different from what had gone before. *The Adventure Alternative* is written from personal experience and added an important philosophical element. Whereas earlier treatments took the view that the issues to be resolved were the use of activities, Mortlock's (1984: 4) prime concept of the "inner

journey” indicated that phenomenology, not content, was the key element in outdoor experiences. Like Drasdo (1973) eleven years before Mortlock (1984) believed that the vital ingredient was not what people were doing (activities) but what they were experiencing. The nature of experience (phenomenology), therefore, became the defining element which distinguished adventure education from outdoor education.

This in turn offered new educational opportunities particularly within the area of environmental education. Since the defining element was experience Mortlock (1984) could now consider the essence of the relationship between people and the “natural environment” they encountered. Using references to Schumacher, Muir and Thoreau, Mortlock made some attempt to portray the human and non-human world as a series of interconnections. This attempt to consider the nature of human experience and integrate it with the non-human world represents a milestone in this history.

Residential Centres, Markets and Demand and Extent of Provision

At this time a research report pointed out that between 1970 and 1982, 55 new centres opened bringing the total to 163 outdoor centres in Scotland, 66 of which belonged to local authorities and of these, sixteen were fully staffed (Faulkner, 1983) . Whilst the trend, at this time, appears to be one of expanding provision this needs to be considered within the context of divergent demand. For example, the report indicates that the use of some local authority centres is on the increase. At the same time not all centres were operating at full capacity and also that use of centres had been extended to members of the public. This raises the issue of whether residential outdoor education is provided for educational purposes or meeting the demand of public recreational consumption.

This tension adds another dimension to what is becoming an increasingly complex understanding of the nature and provision of outdoor education in relation to its consumers. For example, AHOEC (1988) note that the range of activities within outdoor education at this time expanded to include newcomers such as mountain biking and board sailing. Williams (1994) points to the dramatic growth in popularity of residential education in both the public and private sectors. At the same time trends within countryside recreation show that more people are going into the countryside to pursue an ever increasing range of activities (Harrison, 1991; Dargie & Briggs, 1991). The question might be asked, therefore, “what is the relationship between the increasing diversity of public recreational use of the countryside and the parallel patterns developing within outdoor education?” In terms of local authority residential centre provision Faulkner (1983: 16) indicates that outdoor education has a role in both suggesting they are “a resource of considerable value to both the education and leisure markets”.

From the perspective of delivery, tensions within these “markets” may not be apparent since many activities remain the same regardless of user groups. However, as I have pointed out above a philosophical argument does not necessarily begin from a starting point of practice, and as Mortlock (1984) has indicated educational value comes from the type of experience people have as opposed to the activity itself. Therefore practice tells little of rationale. There is a fundamental issue at stake here to establish the rationale behind the provision of outdoor education for differing “markets”. If this issue is not resolved then there is little way of knowing which of the markets is the dominant force in shaping the nature of the amorphous term “outdoor education”. In this example the tension is between whether public use of the countryside is influencing the nature of outdoor education or vice versa. If the latter is true then there may well be a conflict between whether outdoor educational values should be driven by public recreation. Yates (1981: 28) raised this issue when he suggested that,

the increased popularity of outdoor pursuits has had little to do with the sponsorship of such activities by the educational system, and even less to do with the place of outdoor pursuits within school curricula...The subsequent inclusion of such pursuits within schools therefore was a clear case of activities being justified by their already increased leisure popularity boosted by a trend towards P.E. programmes being increasingly synonymous with leisure education.

Whilst the philosophical and practical debates remained unresolved, local authority provision of outdoor education was at this time increasingly questioned in terms of cost effectiveness (Ernst & Donald, 1993). There was a recognition that outdoor education may be perceived as expensive because of its transport and building maintenance costs. Drawing conclusions from studies conducted in 1970 and 1982 Faulkner (1983: 19) suggests that for financial reasons “the future of outdoor education centres does not appear as bright as it was at the conclusion of the 1970 survey”. Cheesmond (1999) concurs suggesting that many authorities would have done better if they had invested more in urban based schemes and less in distant residential centres.

Meantime outdoor educators were becoming increasingly concerned about the impact on the natural environment caused by both education and recreation groups (Adventure & Environmental Awareness Conference, 1984). In a sense this conference was born out of negativity since the environmental degradation it sought to address (e.g. footpath erosion, litter, crowded activity sites) was already at an advanced stage. It had taken this level of degradation to motivate the organisers. However, one particular conference delegate stands out precisely because his contribution is not reactive but forward thinking. Loynes (1984: 17) likens much outdoor education practice to an “express train” where groups are racing through the countryside without thought of the landscape through which they pass. Instead he offers a model whereby the experience is slowed down and individuals encouraged to seek a “spiritual” connection with the land. In this way, he argues, responsibility towards the environment would result from such experiences and “that alone could be a major step forward in how we treated (these places)” (Loynes, 1984: 19). In this respect Loynes follows Mortlock (1984) in leading outdoor education philosophy into a tentative discussion into the relationship between human beings and the non-human world.

In summary, the 1980s represented a decade of metamorphosis for outdoor education leading AHOEC to claim that “the nature of outdoor education has changed” (AHOEC, 1988: 10). Mortlock (1984) and Loynes (1984) have restated Drasdo’s (1973) neglected position that educational aims are not restricted to personal and social development. In so doing they advanced the claim that the relationship between human beings and the environment they inhabit is one in which outdoor educators have a pedagogic role. This is deemed possible through outdoor educators approaching the environment in a more sensitive manner and achieving their aims by slowing down the processes in which they were involved.

AHOEC (1988) acknowledge that the decade was characterised by a growth and variety of educational experiences. These changes have been brought about largely by “the rapid pace of economic and social change, and above all the attempt to justify all new initiatives on the basis of cost-effectiveness” (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993: 59). These comments may also serve as a reminder that despite efforts within outdoor education to develop philosophical principles, external forces had a greater influence in strategic direction. It was within this context of financial stringency coupled with the government of the day’s ideological commitment to redefining the role of the

State in funding public services that led to the first cuts in Strathclyde's staffed centres (Halls, 1997a, 1997b). These socio-economic factors in conjunction with the recognition that outdoor education exists without statutory status provides a clear indication of the frailty of local authority provision of residential outdoor education in Scotland.

1990s: A Nest of Vipers

In 1993 the Scottish Office Education Department published national guidelines for curriculum and assessment in Scotland. These offered, and still offer, a curricular endorsement that outdoor education has a role to play in the education of primary and early secondary pupils. There is a statement that "outdoor education can provide an invaluable means of delivering all the outcomes of personal and social development. In particular residential experience, with its different rules and conventions, provides excellent contexts for developing skills" (SOED, 1993c: 24). Within the *Expressive Arts* document outdoor education is noted as one context in which pupils may achieve certain outcomes namely: "using skills...expressing feelings, ideas, thoughts and solutions" (SOED, 1993b: 64–69).

However it is financial rather than curricular issues which dominate and link the 1980s with the 1990s. A research report commissioned in Wales found that "as a consequence of financial pressures, many centres, including local authority centres, are seeking to diversify their activities in order to generate more income and to minimise their reliance on a single source of income" (Allison & Taylor, 1995: vi). Scottish local authorities also experienced financial burdens leading to a general series of cuts in education department budgets which, in Strathclyde's case, led to the closure of outdoor centres (Halls, 1997b). Referring to the future of residential outdoor education, Williams (1994) concludes, on the one hand they could become self-financing organisations subject to the demands of the marketplace, or on the other hand they will close down.

Local authority funding of residential outdoor education took on a new dimension with the introduction in 1991 and 1992 of Devolved Management of Resources (DMR) also known as Devolved School Management (DSM) (Scottish Environmental Education Council, 1996). This system devolved responsibility for the management of budgets and spending from education departments to the heads of residential outdoor centres and heads of schools though some issues such as building capital, maintenance and employee costs remain at departmental level (Fowler, 2000). This allowed centres greater autonomy in the spending of individual budgets; and allowed schools, on an individual basis, to decide whether or not they wanted to use the centre and then, whether or not they wanted to subsidise residential visits for their own pupils. Whereas previously, departments would allocate school provision centrally, schools were now free to decide for themselves. Following the introduction of DMR, evidence of the distribution of devolved responsibility versus central control from one authority to another does not exist in the public domain. However, where DMR is in operation, outdoor centres are more accountable for their own trading. This had the effect, in Halls' experience at Strathclyde, where "for the first time, all bed night statistics and expenditure and income of each establishment could be monitored" (Halls, 1997b: 27).

Within this context of financial imperatives the concept of "the customer" enters the vocabulary of centre staff with schools, pupils, visiting teachers and non-educational bookings coming under the term. Conforming to the market place has created new demands on centre managers. A report by

the Scottish Environmental Education Council (1996: 1) stated that “remaining outdoor education centres face reduced subsidies and the need to recover a higher proportion of their costs from clients”. This meant centre principals became financial managers in addition to their educational role.

Notwithstanding existing financial imperatives, the reorganisation of Scottish local authorities in April 1996 inflicted the greatest loss on residential outdoor education centres since their establishment in the 1960s and 1970s. Whereas nine regional authorities had administered local government prior to reorganisation 32 single tier authorities replaced them. Consequently, these smaller councils are funded proportionally by central government in keeping with their reduced geographical remit. In the process of prioritising services, therefore, some of the smaller authorities decided that they could not afford the running of residential outdoor centres and consequently closed them. Prior to reorganisation the Scottish Advisory Panel of Outdoor Education indicated that fifteen staffed, local authority residential outdoor education centres were being run by the regions (Scottish Environmental Education Council, 1996). A study conducted after reorganisation found nine remaining (Nicol, 1999).

The Poor Relation

Throughout the 1990s there was a general trend within published literature to favour Mortlock’s (1973, 1978, 1984) term “adventure education” over “outdoor education”. Subsequent texts maintained the “adventure” nomenclature with the publication, in 1993, of *Personal Growth Through Adventure* (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993). Hunt (1989) added the term “outdoor adventure” which although published in the late 1980s was to have a significant effect in the 1990s. For example, this term was adopted in a subsequent publication *Why Adventure?* (Barrett & Greenaway, 1995). It is interesting to note that this publication was commissioned by the Foundation for Outdoor Adventure whose title offers further evidence of favoured terms. These are key findings because when the texts refer to “adventure education” they are talking of learning outcomes related to self–esteem, self–concept and interpersonal relations.

Consequently, a review of outdoor education and adventure education literature shows that when authors write of adventure education there is more of a concern with the personal and social aspect than the environmental. For example, from 263 pages of text Hunt’s (1989) treatment of environmental education is limited to 13. Hopkins and Putnam (1993) do not address environmental education at all in their contents list and there is only very rare, and then brief, descriptive references. A count of the pages of Barrett and Greenaway’s (1995) review of research shows that 6 of 54 are given over to research related to the environment generally whilst the remainder of the substantive content focusses on areas of personal and social development. At this point it is not clear in these instances whether the focus presented represents the authors’ particular interests or whether the presentation of research relating to the environment is indeed proportional to what exists in practice. However, Cooper (1991: 10) has stated “the potential for encouraging environmental education through programmes at (outdoor centres) is enormous and yet their influence on raising awareness has been limited”.

It wasn’t until the end of the 1990s that a book was written where the author’s intention was directed explicitly towards environmental education (Cooper, 1998). Even so this is a guidebook for leaders and not a philosophical treatment. Notwithstanding the authors already cited it is clear that environmental education is subordinated to personal and social development

in outdoor education literature. This point becomes more apparent when considering a research report which suggests that “as a consequence of many different economic and political pressures facing the management and staff of public, private and voluntary sector outdoor centres, environmental issues are often not considered a priority within the centre programme” (Allison & Taylor, 1995: vii). Additionally, Cheesmond (1999: 1) claims “in most local authority centres fostering environmental understanding has always been marginal with the emphasis being on the activity, self and group”. The lack of texts and empirical research relating to environmental education within outdoor education represents a gap in the literature which warrants further enquiry.

Summary

Although the structure and definition within which outdoor education takes place has changed over the period 1950–1999, contemporary writers remain convinced that the roots are intact. For example, Hopkins and Putnam (1993: 3) state that “the aims identified by the Dartington conference are, we believe, the vital aspirations for adventure education”. Likewise, Higgins and Loynes (1997) see outdoor education arising out of personal and social development, environmental education and outdoor activities mirroring the Dartington conferences concern with self, others and the environment (DES, 1975).

However, the debate over definitions has been at the expense of other areas of enquiry. First, I have already pointed to the lack of a philosophical underpinning; second, there are indications that of the three indicative areas less concern is given to environmental education; third, there is the ever present threat of closure and cuts for local authority residential centres; and last, there is a frank admission from Hopkins and Putnam (1993) that the effectiveness of outdoor education is unclear. It is for reasons such as these that Beedie (1996: 13) calls for,

a complete re-appraisal of the claims made for outdoor education from a contemporary socio-cultural perspective...In particular, on the question of definitions, for example, it is not enough for practitioners to understand the subtle differences between outdoor pursuits and outdoor education if other teachers and the public do not. The question of historical antecedents again needs clarification. There is no doubt that without our imperial origins the whole momentum of outdoor education might never have evolved as it did. What is certain, however, is that the socio-cultural context of that era has passed and outdoor educationalists need to understand our present position.

The point here is that whether the favoured terminology is outdoor education or adventure education it doesn't have to be the way it is simply because of historical precedent. It could instead be strategically guided with an eye to government policy, through strategic mechanisms which take account of philosophical and sociological issues.

It has been my intention from the outset of this series to dispute McDonald's (1997: 377) claim that “we don't need independent research to prove the value of outdoor education; we believe in it” (quoted at the start of part one). By presenting the historical emergence of appropriate themes I have endeavoured to show, through secondary sources, that outdoor education was never a single homogeneous entity. Instead it developed out of diffuse roots, was modified by statutory, ideological, practical and financial influences and is an arena within which competing and contrasting claims are made of it by an equally divergent range of practitioners and researchers. From this standpoint

there is no such thing as “it”. In order to understand outdoor education, there is a need to disentangle the philosophies which underpin it, its content, the methods adopted by its practitioners and their objectives.

McDonald (1997) may be accurate in his assertion but he does not present a philosophical, or contemporary socio-cultural perspective to support his views. These views from the past may well be accurate and have contemporary relevance. However, if they are accurate it is by accident rather than design. These insights provide some indication of why research to “prove” that outdoor education works is destined to fail if its starting point assumes homogeneity. Furthermore, the role of outdoor education has a values component which can only be understood in relation to the social milieu in which it is practised. Within this contemporary setting those various claims and counter claims must be verified by linking theory to practice in relation to stated social and educational goals.

In this series I also aimed to discover if the history of outdoor education provides its modern exponents with a legacy of prescribed conservatism or alternatively a form of education which embraces, or is capable of embracing, epistemological diversity. Whilst outdoor educators of notable standing have made significant, if tentative and implicit, attempts to answer this question (Drasdo, 1973; Cheesmond & Yates, 1979; Mortlock, 1984; Hopkins & Putnam, 1993) an explicit framework is yet to emerge. The challenge therefore, is to develop a theoretical position which celebrates the diverse range of concepts and practices which currently constitute outdoor education. If, as I have shown, outdoor education is characterised by its diversity, and not homogeneity, this leads to the question “what would a philosophy of outdoor education look like”? In part three of this series I will be addressing this question.

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Robbie Nicol Ph.D. is a lecturer in the outdoor and environmental education section at Moray House School of Education of the University of Edinburgh. He has worked as an outdoor educator within the public, commercial, charitable and voluntary sectors. He is involved in Continuing Professional Development through involvement with a European Union funded Socrates programme titled “Outdoor Education: Authentic Learning in the Context of Landscapes”. E-mail: robbie.nicol@ed.ac.uk