

THE CONTRIBUTION OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION TOWARDS TO SUSTAIN

NEVILLE CROWTHER, PETER HIGGINS, ROBBIE NICOL

The Scottish polymath Sir Patrick Geddes argued that education should be about 'Hand, Heart and Head', implying that affective development was of vital importance³⁷.

"As for art and music, so for nature and other studies: better to do no teaching at all than without the feeling for the subject."

Kurt Hahn recognised the educative potential of the outdoors. When he founded Gordonstoun School in 1934 he set in motion an educational ideal which formed a template for much contemporary outdoor educational practice. Outward Bound adopted the Hahn model, which is characterised by 'a training plan to maintain physical fitness; the expedition, to test endurance; the project, to inculcate craftsmanship; above all lifesaving.... to kindle the spirit of (community) service'¹¹⁰

In the sixties and seventies, following earlier encouragement, there was great interest in the value of Outdoor Education. Local Authorities in Scotland bought and converted old mansions or built new Outdoor Education Centres, investing heavily in Outdoor Education convinced of its worth. Scotland at this point probably had the most comprehensive Outdoor Education provision anywhere in the world with Lothian Region being a model of its type¹⁵.

Relationships between Outdoor Education and the Environment

To Outdoor Education the natural environment has become explicitly an educational resource⁵⁰. Colin Mortlock's *The Adventure Alternative*⁶⁴ summarises this position stating "there is a tendency for a modern man to use the natural environment entirely for his own needs". Mortlock himself, whilst still recognising the usefulness of the natural world goes further in demonstrating its *intrinsic* worth. Referring to the humility of humanity he asks "if he (humanity) seeks happiness, then why should he not view this as an aim of all forms of life?". He goes on to quote the works of his heroes John Muir and Henry David Thoreau whose philosophy, shared by others such as Aldo Leopold and some protagonists of the Deep Ecology movement, go a stage further in suggesting that nature transcends both instrumental and intrinsic worth and has in itself *inherent* value; that is value independent of human beings.

Outdoor Education in Britain has, over the last fifty years, developed as two quite distinct movements with their own philosophies¹⁶. The first of these has been termed **Outdoor Pursuits** characterised by the Outward Bound movement. This approach would recognise the environment for its instrumental value with perhaps some intrinsic attachments. Essentially, however, the environment is used as a playground.

The second category is **Field Studies**, the early development of field studies linked to the study of science particularly biology, geography and geology. This concentration on the cognitive domain places it in the instrumental perspective where natural phenomena are the object of study but not recognised for intrinsic or inherent value. What remains largely unrecorded is the extent to which individual teachers and outdoor leaders took it upon themselves to go beyond the instrumental and engage in a more affective role in their teaching for the environment.

Outdoor Education and the School Curriculum

Outdoor education is found in several documents of the 5-14 National Guidelines for Curriculum and Assessment. *Environmental Studies*¹⁰⁰ refers to "the various ways in which humans can act on the environment..." leaving the mode of delivery to the teacher's discretion. The *Expressive Arts* document⁹⁹ on the other hand does recognise the role of outdoor education. Framed within the context of Physical Education it is seen in terms of skill acquisition and safety. It is also recognised that pupils should "experience residentially based work, e.g. 4/5 days engaged in outdoor activities" (p69) and participate in group work. The *Personal and Social Development* (PSD) document¹⁰¹ gives outdoor centres a substantial role: the residential nature of many programmes together with activities involving cooperation dovetail successfully with the 'education of the whole child'. The learning outcomes of this document, self-esteem, independence and interdependence, are readily

Outdoor education on the ropes
Photograph: Peter Higgins



facilitated and find expression in programmes with a strong environmental focus.

It is, however, in the context of informal provision and cross-curricular links that many of the most fruitful connections to environmental education and education for sustainability may be developed.

Training Provision in Outdoor Education

Those who work in the field are primarily trained through Further and Higher Education courses and in the appropriate skills through the National Governing Body Award Schemes. There is no widespread agreement on syllabus or course content for such courses or schemes, though recent arguments⁴⁴ have supported the case for environmental education or education for sustainability to be a substantial proportion of an outdoor education training course. The long-standing postgraduate courses at Moray House Institute of Education, for example, have a strong environmental focus, which now comprises almost a third of the taught part of the courses⁶³.

The National Governing Bodies for mountaineering, canoeing and skiing all incorporate environment in leadership training schemes, but in practice this depends on the individual interest of the trainer. Most of the focus is on the impact of the activities themselves, which is important and laudable, but leaves scope for trainers to do more to set the impact in a wider context.

The Role of Outdoor Education Centres

A 1964 Circular (No 550, Appendix II) stated that "it must be one of the functions of all outdoor centres to train young people to respect the

countryside"⁶⁴. More recently SNH has sponsored work on the potential of Centres for Environmental Education⁶². The responses to a questionnaire indicated that most Centres felt they were making a contribution to environmental education. Around a quarter indicated that their work was 'exclusively' or 'predominantly' environmental education, while a further half said that they engaged in activities which encouraged 'respect'. A wide variety of methods were used by the Centres to achieve this, from an expectation that students would learn by respectful example through to fully integrated programmes of field studies or environmental sensitisation programmes such as 'Earthkeepers'. Whilst the majority felt that environmental education at the Centre would increase, few had a formal policy or had carried out an environmental audit. It seems likely that results may have been skewed by a lower response rate from Centres which specialise in Outdoor Pursuits. However, the results did indicate a positive trend in the expectation that Environmental Education would increase.

Over the past twenty years, however, other issues have been higher on the agenda of Centre staff. The Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Act 1995 and the disaggregation of the Regional Councils have resulted in the closure of a high proportion of Local Authority Centres. Only time will tell if Outdoor Education remains a feature of the education of most young people. Those Local Authority Centres which still exist, the commercial and charitable sectors, and the staff redeployed to other duties will still find ways to educate out of doors, but how much of it will be environmental education or education for sustainability?

After carrying out the survey, SNH organised a successful and well-attended course on Environ-

OUTDOOR EDUCATION: ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

SEEC organised a seminar in Stirling in December 1996, supported by SNH, to explore matters of concern in Outdoor Education. A summary of discussions is available from SEEC. The main conclusions were:-

Outdoor Education Provision

There is evidence that the provision of outdoor education is under threat, despite the strong recognition given to its value in Learning for Life.

- ◆ *Local government re-organisation has led to the break up of established community based provision and the loss of qualified and experienced staff.*
- ◆ *One quarter of the staffed residential outdoor education centres have closed and others are under threat and having to charge higher fees to participants.*
- ◆ *Outdoor education needs to be marketed and linked to the curriculum and pupils' records of achievement.*

Qualifications and Safety

- ◆ *The current statutory requirements for staff training and safe procedures have led to incoherence in policies and practice between and within local authorities.*
- ◆ *Awareness of the different legislation and guidance needs to be raised so that there is greater uniformity in their interpretation.*
- ◆ *Qualifications need to be reviewed to ensure their suitability and comparability.*

- ◆ *Training and licensing should be extended to areas such as low level ground activities and people over 18.*

Taking Pupils out of School

- ◆ *Environmental Studies 5-14 places a strong emphasis on the importance of study out of school but a lack of resources for transport and staff cover, and laborious and impenetrable bureaucracy are preventing its full implementation.*
- ◆ *Local Authorities need clear guidance on how to draft their procedures in the light of the existing legislation.*
- ◆ *More training in organising and running out of school activities is required in Pre- and In- service training for teachers.*

Summary

The priorities identified in Learning for Life and supported by the Secretary of State in the Scottish Strategy for Environmental Education have not been translated into action. There is an urgent need for guidance from The Scottish Office to encourage local authorities and others involved in outdoor education to improve provision, qualifications and licensing and simplify the bureaucracy involved in carrying it out.

IAN PASCOE



Outdoors on the beach
Photograph: Mary Dodge

mental Awareness for Outdoor Education Leaders at Kindrogan Field Centre in November 1995. This clearly demonstrated a continuing interest which should be cultivated.

Outdoor Education, Sustainability and the Future

“Scientific understanding is not going to change our habits or give us the political will to change our life - even the hard facts which tell us we shouldn't do this or that don't actually persuade people as much as a spiritual experience can. You have to reach the hearts of people.¹⁸”

There is evidence to suggest that sustainability will become an increasing component of Outdoor Education programmes. Long before the term sustainability was applied in this way, Crowther²⁵ argued that Outdoor Education teachers should “provide for the needs of tomorrow's society”. More recently Cooper¹⁶⁻²⁰ offers evidence of programmes based on the concept of sustainability and fully grounded in practice. Higgins^{41,42} makes further suggestions for practical programmes for sustainability which are based on a theoretical underpinning. Cooper believes that Scotland, through publications such as *Learning for Life*, is at the forefront of developments in the UK.

Positive influences continue to come from abroad: for example the ‘wilderness experience’ through ‘the journey’ is common to many Outdoor Education programmes and minimum impact

(sustainability) an essential element of it.

The Scottish Sports Council has recently published *Earth, Wind and Water*¹⁰³ its policy document for the planning of natural resources for sport and physical recreation. The Council stated its “support for the principle of sustainable development” and sought “the wise use of the natural environment when provision for sport is being developed”. This clearly places a responsibility on the National Governing Bodies to promote proper understanding and use of the countryside. People may have a personal love of the countryside, however, but without support and information their engagement may go no further while broader issues such as the sustainability of their lifestyle and the value of the biodiversity around them are unlikely to figure.

Outdoor recreation now represents one of the largest and fastest growing sectors of the Scottish Tourist economy⁴³. Recent reports by the Scottish Tourist Board^{104,105} and Highlands and Islands Enterprise⁴⁵ indicate that perhaps a third of all tourist income to Scotland is contributed by those who engage in walking, mountaineering or watersports as the main or subsidiary reason for their visit. The impact of such use of the outdoors, must be substantial and this implies great opportunities for education. Whilst a causal link between Outdoor Education and recreational Outdoor Activities has not yet been established it seems highly likely that there will be some effect. If so, appropriate training of Outdoor Educators to promote issues of sustainability, maintenance of biodiversity and respectful use of the outdoors must be a high priority.

Outdoor Education remains a significant contributor to environmental education. Many people are attracted to Outdoor Education through the excitement of the activities themselves, but much can be done in the longer term by selecting for training as leaders and instructors people who have an openness to issues of environment and sustainability. Similarly many environmental educators could profit from some exposure to Outdoor Education as a different approach to learning: there are many ways in which the processes can be complementary. The case must now be compelling for a review of both forms of engagement with the aim of encouraging (Outdoor) Education for Sustainability.

University of Edinburgh
Moray House School of Education
Outdoor Education Department

We offer the following programmes:

Postgraduate Certificate in Outdoor Education

Postgraduate Certificate in Personal and Social Outdoor Education

Postgraduate Certificate in Environmental Education

Postgraduate Diploma in Outdoor Education

MSc in Outdoor Education

PhD by research

If you are interested in information on the courses of study we offer please take a look at our web page at

<http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/outdoored/>

You can also email us at:

Prof. Pete Higgins, pete.higgins@ed.ac.uk

Dr. Peter Allison, peter.allison@ed.ac.uk

Dr. Robbie Nicol, Robbie.nicol@ed.ac.uk

Dr. Simon Beames, simon.beames@ed.ac.uk

Further publications by the Outdoor Education faculty can be found in the Research section of the web page as well as in each faculty's biographical page under the heading publications.