

Chapter 7: Outdoor Education and Values Education: Mission, Mandate or Expediency?

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Introduction

In the past 10 years or so the outdoor education sector in the UK has found itself under increasing pressure to be financially self-supporting. This has spawned a wide range of stated justifications for the work of the sector and many mission statements now espouse the inculcation of values as a central purpose of the work. This overt approach is in contrast to the traditional view of 'the outdoors speaking for itself' and indeed many of the more recent approaches. At the same time, little has changed in the training of practising outdoor educators and those entering the profession. Indeed, since recent safety and licensing legislation was introduced in 1996, the focus of training in the UK has been on the gathering of National Governing Body awards in the outdoor activities. Whilst good practice undoubtedly exists, this chapter questions the premise that outdoor educators necessarily have the skills or the mandate to engage in 'values education'.

The slippery nature of values

The fact that this book focuses on 'values' does, of course, imply that 'values' and 'outdoor education' are linked. This 'received wisdom' is not new; it is implicit in the traditional utilitarian use of the outdoors for 'character building' which has been an aspect of the discipline since it became formalised in the UK in the mid-20th Century (Parker and Meldrum, 1973; Cook, 1999:157).

Cook, reviewing the factors leading to, and effects of, the 1944 Education Act focuses a great deal of attention on 'the expectations of policy makers with regard to character development' (Cook, 1999:157). The Act was a milestone in British educational history as it placed a duty on Local Educational Authorities to make provision for a range of facilities and educational opportunities which eventually became formalised as 'outdoor education'. Indeed the LEAs were also required by the Act to contribute towards children's 'spiritual, moral, mental and physical development'. The question of what such values might constitute was not left to chance as the Norwood Committee produced a report to advise LEAs on what should be taught and how this might be done (Cook, 1999:157). In tracing the implementation of the Act, Cook makes clear links with the backgrounds of the individuals who influenced its development, the Norwood Report and others. Many had a background in English public (fee paying) and grammar (exam entrance) schools and were supporters of this system. For example the Norwood Committee suggested that secondary schools should promote character training through the 'infusion of values characteristic of the public schools' (Cook, 1999:162).

Much more could be said of the impact of such influences and those of Reddie (Abbotsholme School), Baden-Powell (Boy Scout movement), Hahn (Gordonstoun School and the Outward Bound movement) (see Cook, 1999:159 and Parker and Meldrum, 1973 for further historical detail). It should also be noted that much of the development of outdoor education occurred in a post-war context and that many of those involved in the 1944 Act and its implementation would have been quite comfortable with the idea that outdoor education would, in some measure, inculcate qualities in children which would serve the nation well in times of war (see Cook, 1999). Comment could also be made on the focus of opportunities for boys rather than girls in the legislation and reports of the time. The salient point for the purpose of this argument is that those who stimulated early development of outdoor education in the UK applied their own values which were 'of their time'.

This would be true of any contemporary view of outdoor education. For example, Mortlock (1984) focuses on the importance of adventurous experiences in the development of a range of personal qualities; Cooper (1991) and Nicol and Higgins (1998) place great importance on the sustainability and environmental possibilities of education outdoors; and the Board of the European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning (Higgins et al. 1998:75) consider that 'the educational intention is to stimulate personal and social development'. None of these is right or wrong and indeed many proponents advocate inclusivity; they are simply cited here as a means of emphasising the changing and eclectic nature of 'values'.

A range of questions come to mind as a result of this. Is the role of an educator to state what values are 'right'? If so, what are they? Can values be taught? Are outdoor educators trained and qualified to do so? Does society give us the mandate to teach values?

What values, whose values?

Yaffey (1993: 9-11) is in no doubt about the answers to at least some of these questions. He speaks of outdoor education with conviction and asserts that we have a unique role to play, as nature is 'the ultimate source of all values'. He offers a list of examples of the relationship between outdoor activities and value concepts they may confer. The fact that I find myself in sympathy with aspects of Yaffey's argument illustrates my concern: he may be right or wrong but these are his values. The purpose of this chapter is not to engage in a debate on what values are, nor which ones might be 'educated' for. However, to move further a working definition must be employed and I am happy to adopt that provided by the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum (SCCC, 1995:2) as:

'A set of principles which are consistent and inform and direct our thoughts, actions and activities. That is to say, a value has essentially an intellectual base, but that this base informs and has its expression in action and in life'.

I do not intend to attempt to define these principles, but the implication is that they represent a useful code for behaviour in life. Such codes might be important to an individual or to society; there may be differences or they may be identical. If we take the case of values being taught by outdoor educators (who are employed in one way or another by society) the implication is that those values should primarily be useful to society. This is of course highly normative and may or may not generate benefits for the individual beyond training to fit in with societal expectations. It may be that the outdoor educator does not agree with this role, but if 'non-normative' values are 'taught' he/she might be expected to justify the mandate for this stance.

This issue is more complex than it might seem, as the curriculum (which may include values) will itself have several dimensions. Eisner (1985) argues that schools teach three curricula. The 'explicit', 'implicit' and 'null' curricula. In the case of values education in an outdoor setting we might consider the example of an introduction to kayaking. The explicit curriculum may be the learning of appropriate technical and judgment skills to negotiate a simple river, the implicit curriculum may be values oriented (eg self-reliance/awareness) and the null curriculum would be something left-out (eg environmental learning opportunities such as human impact on river ecology or the water cycle). If a 'values education' stance is taken by the outdoor educator the explicit curriculum might actually be the learning of the type of values mentioned above, in which case learning to kayak becomes implicit or even incidental. The degree to which emphasis is intended or given to values within these curricula is of crucial importance to the student, their family and the greater community. It is clear that the null curriculum has great relevance to the teaching of values because if some issues are given importance and others are ignored, the implication is that the latter are not relevant (eg care for the natural environment in the example above). If the outdoor educational establishment states the intention to educate for certain values, they are clearly under an obligation to say what these are and to what degree they form the focus of the curriculum as explicit, implicit or null.

Justifications for outdoor education

The original intention of outdoor education in the UK in relation to the 1944 Education Act has been noted above. In the 50 years or so since, the UK has seen growth in school and centre provision as well as in community and social work. The stated intentions and justifications have been many, and whilst these are often cloaked in philosophy, pragmatism has become an increasing feature of the field. The earliest substantial contribution was that of Harold Drasdo (1973), who did not feel the need to express justifications more forcefully than to suggest that enjoyment of outdoor experiences could have a wide range of benefits from physical to aesthetic. Such liberal views have been replaced by altogether more pragmatic arguments such as those proposed by Hopkins and Putnam (1993), Higgins (1997a) and Loynes et al (1997). The focus of the contemporary work of the latter authors is expressed in the title: 'Justifying Outdoor Education in the Formal and Informal Curriculum' and contrasts markedly with the period between 1944 and 1973 when, it seems, no-one thought it worthwhile to publish justifications or arguments at all.

During the past 50 years there has been a shift away from outdoor education being a focal element in many schools and associated outdoor centres (with an expectation that all students should have such opportunities) to much less widespread or significantly altered provision (eg Barnes, 1998 and Higgins, in press). There have been many reasons for this, but increasing curricular and financial pressures on schools and centres are high on the list. As the success of some justifications has decreased, others have been sought. For example, interest in 'outdoor management development' increased in the 1970s and '80s as did the 'therapeutic' use of the outdoors for work with young offenders. Some commentators argue that the valuable environmental learning opportunities available in the outdoors are not being made full use of (eg Crowther, 1984; Cooper, 1991; Nicol and Higgins, 1998). I do not wish to suggest that any of these are inappropriate justifications, but rather that outdoor educators have become increasingly pragmatic rather than idealistic. In terms of the teaching of values in this period the latter uses would clearly inculcate curricula which are quite different to those of an earlier period.

It is notable that in their review of research into outdoor adventure education and personal and social development Barrett and Greenaway (1995) do not appear to use the term 'values education' and make little explicit reference to values. It seems that as the old justifications are still used and 'traditional' programmes are still run, new justifications have simply been added to the list. Many of those responsible for running outdoor centres now look carefully at any new Government initiative (such as those on 'Social Inclusion', 'Citizenship' and the like) to find an opening for programme design. There appears now to be such a wide range of justifications that it is quite difficult, even for specialists, to provide a simple inclusive description of the work of the outdoor education sector.

What is special about outdoor educators?

To provide outdoor educational opportunities of the range noted above and be able to do so employing a range of technical outdoor activities within a framework of safety is, by any standards, demanding. Although there is no expectation that any individual outdoor educator would be able to provide a full range of outdoor activities and all the types of tailored courses detailed above, changes in clientele and the justifications employed require a broad and substantial initial training supported by frequent updates in the light of changing professional needs. This must surely be the expectation of those who place staff or students in the care of outdoor educators. Does this reflect reality?

In the UK there is no professional body, nor regulatory body dictating or advising on training and qualification (Higgins, 1997b; Barnes, 1998). Consequently outdoor educators receive their training in a variety of ways, although it is true to say that the majority now follow a general tertiary level course and also pursue a range of National Governing Body (NGB) awards in the individual outdoor activities. There are Higher

and Further Education courses offering degrees or diplomas with a wide range of names, such as 'Outdoor Education', 'Outdoor Studies' and 'Outdoor Recreation'. To these, outdoor educators add NGB leadership and coaching awards at a variety of levels in mountaineering, canoeing etc. As the latter are technical by nature, one would expect the 'academic' courses to satisfy other requirements; but this inevitably generates a tension between academic and professional demands (Higgins and Morgan, in press). In terms of 'values', one would suppose that such courses would provide extensive training in such issues, or if not the selection process for prospective outdoor educators would select rigorously for a solid personal grounding in values. It seems logical to suggest that, if this individual wishes to be adaptable in the workplace, then he/she should be able to offer both the 'technical' and 'educational' qualities and therefore must receive appropriate training. Is this the case?

A brief survey of advertisements (eg in Horizons - The journal of the Association for Outdoor Learning and the Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres) for 'outdoor' courses at Further and Higher Education institutes gives little indication of a strong 'values education' focus. If it does take place it does not seem to be a priority in advertising. These show a preference for stressing outdoor activities (as, incidentally do those for outdoor centres).

There is evidence to suggest that the impact of the deaths of four young people on an activity holiday in Devon in 1993 has been highly significant for the outdoor sector. The subsequent enquiry led to the conviction of the company manager for manslaughter and eventually to the Activity Centres (Young Persons Safety) Act, 1995. This Act legislated for an inspectorate and tight controls on the supervision of outdoor providers. The upshot has been an even greater focus on the gathering of National Governing Body Awards, which are seen as a form of assurance of technical competence and therefore safety. Evidence for this comes from the directors of training of the National Governing Bodies and the Principals of the National Outdoor Training Centres (where much of such training and assessment is carried out) who report an increase in the number of those coming forward for assessment in recent years.

The situation for those who are maturing in their career in the outdoors raises questions about their training opportunities. Where it exists, in service training opportunities in the brochures of Local Education Authorities reflect an NGB focus, as do the requests for course attendance from staff in centres (Nicol, in prep). If further evidence were needed, one might point to the total UK memberships of most of the individual NGBs which run to many thousands versus the sector associations such as the 'Association for Outdoor Learning' and 'Outdoor Scotland' (hundreds). The preference or perceived need for NGB awards is obvious.

A survey of the agendas of the meetings of the Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education and the Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres over recent years

also shows no example of discussion on 'values education' or its synonyms, whereas there appears to be considerable appetite for debate on changes to the fine detail of NGB awards.

This situation contrasts sharply with the technical level at which many outdoor educators operate (frequently an introductory level) and the stated personal, social, educational intentions of most programmes. In summary there appears to be a disproportionate emphasis on technical and safety aspects, which provide the framework within which we operate, at the expense of other critical professional skills. Job advertisements reflect this focus, often stating the minimum NGB awards applicants should hold.

What values should outdoor educators have?

The nature of the present discourse on values education in outdoor education implies that the discussion has not really taken place in the past, or that there are now particular opportunities for values education in the outdoors which could be capitalised on. If we are to be 'values educators' (and I am not sure the case has yet been made) we should explain our own philosophical position and what educational perspectives we can offer.

Values education is engaged in (explicit, implicit or null) in the home, school and community. An outdoor educator is part of this community and can support this in a number of ways. By accepting and promoting these values (normative); by challenging these values; or by encouraging questioning of these values and the process by which they are arrived at.

A normative approach presents some difficulties as there may be many approaches and many values expressed or implied in the wider community. For an educator to promote certain values he/she must be confident that these are absolute (eg honesty, self-control, courage, justice, charity, compassion?). I would argue that these could, and must be disputed in values education. Other values (eg environmental) may be less clear-cut, and indeed in the case of outdoor education, the environmental behaviour of many individuals and institutions seems to contradict espoused values. This poses a problem for the learner. Adopt the values the educator displays or those they say they have! There is substantial evidence to suggest that learners pick up on and adopt the former much more readily than the latter (eg Elliott, 1993; Posch, 1993). Lilley (in press) makes a case for the adoption (in outdoor adventure education with young people 'at-risk') of the advice of the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority's 'National Forum for Values in Education and the Community'. This contains statements on Society, Relationships, Self and Environment which emphasise the 'common good of society', the value of families etc. Whilst many would consider these to be worthy aims, they are clearly 'normative' and this is in itself a good reason for questioning them. I take a similar view to the arguments (and the list of virtues and vices) Mortlock (1998) has constructed.

A challenging approach implies that the educator adopts an adversarial approach to values issues. This too is beleaguered by the problems noted above as there may well be confusion over the personal stance of the educator and their relationship to the broader community.

A questioning approach requires sensitivity, but I believe has several major benefits. It does not imply that there is always a 'right value' and that this is the same 'right value' in all circumstances. It encourages the student to learn and apply critical thinking to all such issues and this will lead to confidence in the values they arrive at (robustness), and the value of critical thinking in other circumstances (adaptability). It does not place the educator in the role of one who delivers the answers (humility). The process is an application of longstanding experiential tradition of outdoor education (consistency). This also requires the educator to be particularly aware that the approach itself promotes certain values such as those noted above.

Concluding comments

My purpose in this chapter is to challenge the assumption that outdoor educators can move easily into the territory of values education. Those who work in the closely related field of environmental education have been wrestling with such difficulties for some time. Many would be of the view that there is a pressing need for 'education for sustainability' but as Jickling (1994) argues, educating for something is really just a form of instrumental training. I believe he gets to the essence of the values issue by asking 'is it the job of education to make people behave in a particular way?' (Jickling, 1994:7).

I suggest that in order to seek 'answers' we have to engage in several debates on the motivation and mechanisms for our work in this field. Only by addressing such questions openly will we reach a point where, as individuals and as a profession, we can say we have the integrity and consistency to work in this area. I believe that if we do so, outdoor education can make a significant and substantial contribution to values education. The following comments constitute a summary:

A question of definitions and the definitions of questions. In attempting to engage with 'values' we are moving into the home territory of generations of philosophers who have wrestled with three connected issues: 'first, on what sort of property or characteristic of something its 'having value' or 'being of value' is; second, on whether having value is an objective or subjective matter; third, on trying to say what things have value, are valuable' (Dent, 1995:895). In the context of 'values education' further definitional questions arise which are associated with the degree to which we are really dealing with an ethical code, moral philosophy or the nature of 'goodness'. It should be clear then that this issue is fraught with ontological and epistemological difficulties and we would do well to inform our debate through consultation with those who work in mainstream education and philosophy.

Social and cultural influences play a central role in determining what values are acceptable and what might be 'taught' in outdoor education. In a recent analysis of the development of outdoor education in the UK, Nicol (in prep) makes the point that 'social values of any particular period provide an historical framework of reference to contextualise the forming and changing of developments'. Further, he suggests that 'in order to understand outdoor education it is necessary to disentangle the philosophy which underpins it, the methods adopted by its practitioners and the objectives it is intended to meet'. All of these imply that individual and establishment values will, inescapably, have an effect on the whole outdoor educational process.

Wysiwyg - What you see is what you get. The values we display in everyday actions are those which define us (and hence are educationally most powerful) rather than those we say we hold. Any process which purports to help students to develop their own values, but which is, even covertly directed towards certain values is disingenuous and will be seen by students to be what it is (Posch, 1993:29).

Values education, like outdoor education is a process rather than an outcome. The process of deciding on a set of values and putting these forward as those which should be encouraged is prescriptive. This can be seen as antithetical to the preferred methodology of outdoor education which is to encourage learning through experience and to develop confidence in self-directed learning and critical reflection (eg Hopkins and Putnam, 1993; Dahlgren and Szczepanski, 1998). Friere (1998) expresses the centrality of this notion to emotional and spiritual learning in the 'Pedagogy of the Heart'. 'The important thing is to educate the curiosity through which knowledge is constituted as it grows and redefines itself through the very exercise of knowing' (Friere, 1998:31).

Working to our strengths. I do not wish to suggest that I view the issue of values education in outdoor education as pointless or sterile. In fact there are good arguments in favour of engaging in values education in an outdoor context. The outdoors provides a different framework for addressing such issues than say a school and can offer opportunities for young people to 'confront themselves' (Martinez, pers com). Another strength is that outdoor education can be used to present a broad range of issues in an interdisciplinary manner (Nicol and Higgins, 1998). In discussing the difficulties in handling values in environmental education, Elliott (1993) asserts that values education is only likely to become a

'significant pedagogical issue in schools when there is a serious attempt at adopting an interdisciplinary approach. A uni-disciplinary approach is an excellent way of reducing the awareness of complexity and of promoting a particular value stance to the exclusion of others' (Elliott, 1993:19).

So here, it seems we may be on home ground. If we are to engage with this issue, and I believe we should, we must be cautious about the influence of our own values and the great potential in approaching the issue by working to the strengths of outdoor education.

A garden of a thousand flowers? Carr (1999:302-3) suggests that 'the garden of values education might be seen as one in which a thousand flowers bloom (and ... a few weeds also)'. His intention is to assert that a 'general problem with the current spate of values education ... lies with the extraordinary diversity of educational and other aims which seem to be entertained within its overall compass'. He also stresses that 'unwillingness to co-ordinate a set of diverse practical activities to bring them in line with some overall strategic plan is liable to become a serious logistical problem' in the light of differing normative and evaluative underpinnings (Carr, 1999:302-3). Although he is careful to avoid a prescriptive approach, essentially Carr argues that values education should be clear in its aims and methods and that an attempt should be made to be consistent. In claiming a role for outdoor education in this arena we must ask ourselves why we are doing it at all (see Carr, 1999 for a challenging analysis) and, if we are to do it how we ensure that those who engage in such a difficult area of education are properly trained to do so. Despite (or perhaps because of) the enthusiasm the outdoor education sector is showing for this new role I would suggest that we need to remind ourselves that we are just at the beginning of this process; the perfect time for a thoughtful debate, informed by consultation with a wide range of professionals in other fields.

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