

'Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind'
(Kant 1933 : 93)

This paper explores the 'tension' between the demands of academic and professional training for outdoor educators. The courses offered at Moray House Institute, University of Edinburgh provide an example of one attempt at resolution.

A Historical Context

The roots of outdoor education as a distinct subject area in the formal and informal education sectors are spread both deep and wide. It is probably true to say that at various stages in its development its proponents have been functional, reactive, opportunist and occasionally proactive. Most of the developments in the UK have taken place in response to events of national or legislative significance and even with the benefit of hindsight it is difficult to discern a pattern or clear direction. Perhaps because of its inter- and multi-disciplinary approach it is difficult to place developments against a time-line. In preference developments in a number of significant areas are outlined below.

The many significant events and initiatives in the UK between the early 19th Century and early 1970s are considered in some detail by Parker and Meldrum (1973). The most significant of these themes are:

1. the impact of legislation relating to protection of the countryside, (eg National Parks, Forestry Commission, Protection of Wildlife etc) holiday provision for employees;
2. increasing public awareness of exploration through expeditions to the Arctic, Antarctic and the greater ranges (especially the successful ascent of Everest in 1953);
3. the development of environmental studies in education through a number of significant reports and education acts, a number of which make direct reference to the educational importance of direct contact with the natural world;
4. the development of outdoor activities in education which had its origin in physical education provision in the 19th Century, but subsequently became the more directed 'character development' promoted by amongst others Kurt Hahn (the founder of the Outward Bound movement);
5. the 'progressive' education movement which grew in influence throughout the

College of North Wales, Bangor. Additionally many colleges (eg Loughborough) incorporated outdoor education as an integral part of their physical education teacher training courses, though this provision is now very limited. In recent years many other Further and Higher Education institutions have entered the field, offering a wide range of levels of training courses.

In order to meet the academic requirements of a Certificate, Diploma or Degree those following such courses are assessed in one way or another. However the 'professional' aspect of the work of an outdoor educator requires training and assessment of a different nature. In many cases the 'measure' of this is provided by the National Governing Body awards of the individual outdoor activities, but issues of professionalism and sound judgement are difficult to address. The following case study is presented as one attempt at resolution of this issue by an institution with one of the longest histories of involvement in the UK.

Outdoor Education at Moray House Institute:Scotland

Since 1972 Moray House Institute of Education (formerly Moray House College) has conducted a Diploma in Outdoor Education each academic year. Much of the impetus for this development came as a result of demands for training following the 'Cairngorm incident' in which 6 Edinburgh schoolchildren under the supervision of a school teacher died in a blizzard in 1971. Normally 12 to 14 students have been accepted for the course which is designed to meet the needs of those who wish to enter or further develop careers in outdoor education.

In 1987 Moray House College and Dunfermline College of Physical Education merged. Both had long traditions of involvement in outdoor education, formal courses both pre-service and in-service being features of life in the colleges for many years. The original concern was largely to ensure the safe conduct of parties on school excursions. The emphasis in these courses was primarily on outdoor activities and this resulted in a very strong practical programme. (In 1998 Moray House Institute merged with the University of Edinburgh and became its Faculty of Education.)

However, the broader responsibilities of outdoor education teachers soon became recognised and the emphasis in training has, for some time now, been on encouraging teachers and instructors to extend their aspirations for their students beyond the physical to the academic, aesthetic, spiritual, environmental and social. This is a view which we believe would be supported by the majority of those who have taken a philosophical perspective on outdoor education (e.g. Drasdo, 1972; Mortlock, 1983; Higgins and Loynes, 1997).

Throughout this 26 year history there has been a frequent need to revalidate the course. Through this process it has metamorphosed from a Diploma to a Postgraduate Diploma which was subsequently modularised, and now a Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma/Masters pathway is available. The changes reflect shifts in philosophy but more so the expediency of maintaining a resource-intensive

of outdoor education courses and at all levels: primarily the result of financial pressures rather than a response to an educational debate.

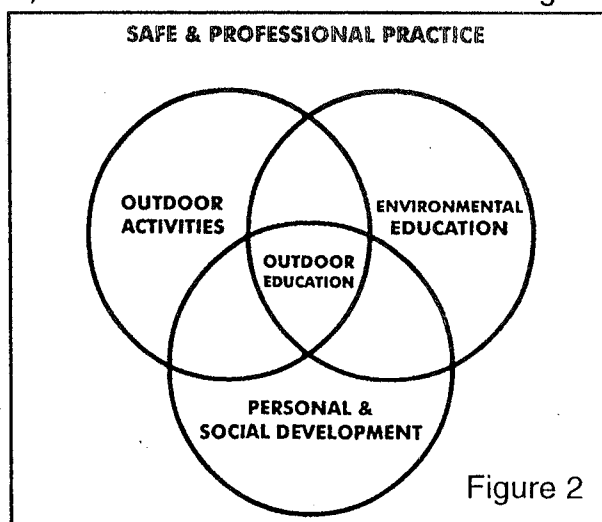


However, at Moray House there has always been an emphasis of practical experience in the field which reflects the philosophy of all those who have been involved in this type of work within the college. Maintenance of this position continues to be a struggle in the face of these financial pressures.

Through this approach course members have acquired an appreciation of the wide potential of the outdoors as a learning environment, and of the skills necessary to conduct groups successfully and safely in wild country and on water, whilst developing an appreciation and understanding of this environment and natural heritage. Also course members have gained an awareness of the opportunities offered in outdoor teaching for developing knowledge of self, allied to the achievement of a range of social goals.

Course Structure

The structure of the course is represented diagrammatically in Figure 2. This conforms to the 'Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer System' which requires four academic modules (defined in terms of student effort etc) for exit at Postgraduate Certificate; a further four for Postgraduate Diploma and a further extended study leading to a



encourage academic expansion but consequently restricts the uniquely practical nature of outdoor education.

There is a clear professional requirement for technical ability in a range of outdoor activities. Furthermore the experiences gained whilst on placement and on the group expedition have long been considered valuable by both course members and future employers and may be considered as gelling agents for the core academic inputs. Repeated attempts were made to accommodate them within the conventional academic structure, however this always proved unacceptable and resulted in compromise to their detriment. Consequently a separate Competency Programme was devised for those embarking on the Diploma pathway.

The safety and professionalism arguments behind insistence on a Competency Programme for Diploma course members are compelling. Furthermore, if an experiential approach is the essence of outdoor education, without this there would be no shared experience to draw upon in the more academic aspects of the course. A small number of recent fatal accidents have continued to reinforce the notion that competent leadership and sound judgement remain vital. An increasing readiness amongst the public to resort to litigation in incidents involving personal injury and death, and the Government's new policy of inspecting and accrediting outdoor agencies further emphasises the importance of experience and appropriate qualification. Despite its essentially practical nature there is great scope within the Competency Programme for academic analysis, reflection and research.

For the purposes of the present course 'competence' on the part of the leader is defined in three main areas:

a Technical Competence

This is a measure of technical skills in a number of outdoor activities. It is convenient and appropriate to adopt the requirements of the various National Governing Body awards as performance indicators. Course members should develop the skills of moving over and living in wild country, gain teaching skills associated with these activities and develop an awareness of the conditions necessary for the safe conduct of parties. Focus is on the nature of experiential learning through participant centred approaches. Course members are expected to select a minimum of five activities of which at least one must be water based and one land based. Activities offered include mountaineering (summer and winter), rock climbing and orienteering skiing (alpine or nordic), kayaking, open canoeing, windsurfing and dinghy sailing.

b Professional Competence

In this instance this is taken as an expression of the ability to 'teach', 'instruct' or 'facilitate' in a vocational context. Substantial varied experience in the field of outdoor education is regarded as an indicator in this respect. To allow course

The Future

The above programme was devised whilst attempting to balance ideology and expediency. Whilst it is demanding of staff time it does comply with our own philosophy of outdoor education and provides the opportunity for course members to engage in an 'apprenticeship' experience which should serve them well in employment.

So far this and the majority of programmes at Institutes of Further and Higher Education have managed to preserve some balance in course structure and provision. However, it is our experience, and that of many of our colleagues in other institutions that the pressures are increasing and that it is difficult to win the arguments for an experiential approach without which 'outdoor education' ceases to have much meaning. At present it is still possible to find good practice in a range of courses available in the UK where both the academic and professional demands are satisfied.

The continued existence of this situation is, we believe, vital both for the professional outdoor sector and the development of outdoor education as a distinctive, philosophically based academic discipline.

References

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