

Theories of Society

Evolutionary Theory

Like organisms, societies evolve from simple to complex (*Herbert Spencer*)
Religions evolved from animistic to polytheism and monotheism (*Edward Burnett Taylor*)

Societies evolve from theological (dominated by religion) to metaphysical (speculative thinking) to positivist (empirical, science-based) (*Auguste Comte*)

Ranking of societies from “savage” to “barbarian” to “civilised” and then classified by levels of technology. Assumed polygamy was followed by monogamy, and matrilineal descent was followed by patrilineal descent (*Lewis Henry Morgan*)

Critique

Oversimplification, rigidity and linearity

Ethnocentrism (Western-centric)

Narrow economic focus

Created categorisation of humanity and societies

Deterministic without considering the diversity of human cultures

Functionalism

All parts of society must be harmonious. Regarded the increasing division of labour as a basic process (*Emile Durkheim*)

Every part of society has a role/function to play

Society is stratified

The development of the Western society was unique, capable of rationality that brought modern capitalism, modern science, and rational law (*Mark Weber*)

Critique

Ignores that the elites often create an illusion of harmony and stability.

Does not consider inequalities within social factors like race, gender or class.

Fails to recognise the power of individuals.

Ignores social change, only explaining it as an occurrence to recover balance.

Conflict

Focuses on inequality and competition.

Society is unequal

Society is divided into social groups – class system

Conflict is evident between class groups

Opportunity depends on ownership of the means of production.

Stages: primitive communism – ancient slavery – feudalism – capitalism – future socialism (*Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels*)

Cyclic theory of cultural change in the West, describing repetitions of change from the ideational to the idealistic and sensate and back again (*Pitirim Sorokin*)

Critique

Underestimation of the adaptability of capitalism

Oversimplification of complex social dynamics

Contemporary Theories

Postmodern – Free will and individual choice, importance of unpredictable events. Rejects determinism and “grand” narratives (*Jean-François Lyotard*). Blurring of reality through simulation (*Jean Baudrillard*). Knowledge is not neutral, it is a result of power relations (*Michel Foucault*)

World Systems Theory (Wallerstein) – interconnected economic and political systems

Feminist theories – Gender is socially constructed (Judith Butler). Acknowledges structural inequality, oppression and varied forms of violence.

Critique

Ethnocentric, over-emphasis in economic factors while lacking acknowledgement of power relations between richer and poorer countries; does not explain the economic growth on developing countries.

Universalises women’s experiences, risks lack of intersectionality and reinforcement of gender binary.

Non-Western Theories

Islamic Social Theory – 14th century work on social cohesion and group dynamics (before the emergence of “modern sociology”) (*Ibn Khaldun*)

African Social Thought – promotion of unity, cultural identity, self-determination and decolonisation as key elements for social progress (Pan-African Theory)

Indigenous knowledge – Holistic perspectives, with deep ecological insights. Reciprocity and community are characteristic factors (from American native nations to Oceanian aboriginal cultures)

Critique

Overgeneralisation of experiences for larger regions and groups.

Power dynamics within groups and gender roles.

Prioritisation of ideological perspectives over empirical evidence.

What is Outdoor Education?

Definitions

Outdoor Education - Definitions

Outdoor Education is widely accepted as the term to describe all learning, social development and the acquisition of skill associated with living and journeying in the outdoors. In addition to physical endeavour, it embraces environmental and ecological understanding. Outdoor education is not a subject but an integrated approach to learning, to decision making and the solution of problems.

(Cumbria Education Committee, 1990)

Outdoor Education is learning about relationships – human (inter/intra-personal) and environmental (eco-systemic/ekistic)

(Priest, 1989)

Outdoor Education is learning in the outdoors, through the outdoors and for the outdoors.

(Hammerman and Hammerman, 1990)

Outdoor Education is the use of the resources outside the classroom to meet educational goals and objectives.

(Knapp, 1990)

Outdoor Education is “the promotion of aspects of personal, social and environmental education through direct (adventurous) experience out-of-doors

(Higgins, 2004, 135)

Outdoor Education is an empowering, experiential and adventurous approach to learning that is individual and holistic and seeks to clarify the relationship between choice and consequence.

(Williams, 2007)

Outdoor Education is where nature meets culture.

(Williams, 2016)

Outdoor Education is...
a phenomenon of post-modern Western society; it does not occur (as we currently understand and define it) in Eastern society or in pre-modern Western society because it requires a distancing of civilization from nature, in order for “nature” to have novel effects and an “indoorisation” of education, in order for “outdoor” to be considered worthy of identification.

(Neill, 2004)

Outdoor Education

“What can be done in the outdoor classroom rather than doing it within four walls? What effect does it have on understanding reality? How can knowledge of nature, culture, and society penetrate the rooms that for so long have been considered the core of education?

(Szczepasinski, 2001, p.20)

What does Outdoor Education look like when it is included in formal curricular learning curricular?

OR

What are the key design features of a formal curriculum within which Outdoor Education must fit?

Key design features

National Curriculum

Subjects / Area of Learning

Short lessons

Cognitive focus

Short term memory?

Testing

Abstracted Learning?

Norm Referenced

Employment focused

Outdoor Education

(in theory/history)

Multi-disciplinary

Extended learning

Multi-domain /affective
learning focus

Reflective & transferable
learning

Lifelong learning

1st hand experience
(experiential)

Individual/personal

Personal meaning

Hegemony

Gramsci coined the term 'hegemony' to provide a theoretical explanation for the organisation, development and changing nature of western, capitalist society.

'Hegemony is the **achievement of leadership** by a particular class or group over the rest of society. Its views are **accepted or accommodated by the society as the natural way of things** – they are not imposed by force.'

(A. Gramsci, 1958, The Prison Notebooks translation)

[Link to Friere 'Banking system of education'](#)

Characteristics of Hegemony

- Control of Power
- A traditional base
- Non-violent
- Forms alliances & accommodates / incorporates cultural challenge
- Evolutionary but never lose control or power

Emergence of cultural memes to challenge hegemonic norms and empower disenfranchised?

Its traditional / historical location in the UK is:

- Landed Gentry
- Socio-political structures of Government, Judiciary, Religion, Civil Service, Army, Russell Group Universities & Public Schools CREATED to maintain privileged groups

In practice hegemony demonstrates itself as a
system of CULTURAL PRODUCTION

(Williams, *Marxism & Literature* 1977)

The process of cultural production involves:

DOMINANT.....

RESIDUAL.....Cultural forms/practices

EMERGENT.....

Discuss

Society is in a constant state of CULTURAL
STRUGGLE

- ‘A lived hegemony is always a process...it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be reviewed, recreated, defended and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered and challenged by pressures not all its own.’

R.Williams. *New Left Review*, Vol. 82, p.9

Concluding Questions

Is outdoor education part of, or a challenge to, the hegemony and dominant values of western, capitalist, consumer culture?

Should it be?

Does your practice reflect your ideological perspective?

Outdoor Education as formal learning within the Official Curriculum

Does/should Outdoor Education reflect the dominant system / approach to education or does / should it challenge the status-quo?

DISCUSS

Synonyms of Outdoor Education

ADVENTURE EDUCATION

Adventure = challenging experience that involves uncertainty of outcome.

Education = a process of intellectual, moral and social growth that involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills and experience.

(Hopkins & Putnman, 1993, 6-7)

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Learning by doing combined with reflection.

(King, 1988)

Holistic learning for the whole person

(Loynes 2000)

"Experiential education is a teaching philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities." (AEE, 2021, p.1)

Additional readings

- Pike, E. and Beames, S. *Outdoor Adventure and Social Theory*. London: Routledge, 2013.
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- Carr, W. (Ed.) *The Routledge Falmer Reader in Philosophy of Education*, Oxon: Routledge, 2005.
- Friere, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (see OE701 Module outline)
- Hopkins, D. and Putnam, R. *Personal Growth through Adventure*, 1993.
- Williams, R. *Marxism and Literature* (see OE701 Module outline)
- Gramsci, A. *The Prison Notebooks Translation*, 1958.
- Willis, P. *Learning to Labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*, Hampshire: Saxon House, 1977
- Dahlgren, L. and Sczepanski, A. (2005) *Outdoor Education: Literary education and sensory experience*, Kisa (sweden): Linköping University, 2005.