

This article was downloaded by: [University of Wales Lampeter]

On: 22 August 2011, At: 13:29

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/raol20>

Ideologies of adventure: authority and decision making in sail training

Kenneth H. McCulloch ^a

^a The University of Edinburgh, Scotland

Available online: 06 Aug 2007

To cite this article: Kenneth H. McCulloch (2004): Ideologies of adventure: authority and decision making in sail training, Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning, 4:2, 185-197

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14729670485200531>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Ideologies of Adventure: Authority and Decision Making in Sail Training

Kenneth H. McCulloch

The University of Edinburgh, Scotland

Abstract

Case studies of the contemporary UK sail training movement are used to illustrate the competing expressions of purpose in this field. Two sail training organisations are described and a case study voyage under the aegis of each is presented. The differences between the approaches are analysed as “traditions” or ideologies, articulated through distinctive interpretations of power and contrasting approaches to participation in decision making. It is argued that choices regarding the type of vessel used and the voyages made are not neutral technical decisions but have ideological significance. In conclusion the application of such an analysis to other kinds of outdoor and adventure education is considered.

Introduction and Context

There were, at the beginning of 2004, somewhere between 24 and 30 Sail Training organisations in the UK. There is a very clear core of organisations that meet a broad definition of sail training as “taking young people to sea as a means to social and educational objectives”. In this formulation the core purpose is not to teach seamanship but to use seafaring as a context for education. Sail training might be said to provide a context for learning, but to form only a modest and perhaps not ultimately very significant part of the content of that learning. Alfred Holt, co-founder of the first Outward Bound “school” at Aberdovey, Wales is quoted as advocating “less a training *for* the sea than *through* the sea” (Miner, 1990, p. 59). As well as Sail Training organisations *per se* there are settings where sail training is used as an adjunct to or integrated element in some broader enterprise. Examples of this last category would include the national youth work charity Fairbridge, and a number of private schools of which the best known UK example would be Gordonstoun, who operate a 25 metre ketch as an integral part of the school’s programme.

This paper draws on case study material illustrating the distinctive approaches in two “traditions” of UK sail training to develop an argument about decision making and authority. The paper begins with an outline of the methodology underlying the research, and goes on to provide brief descriptions of two organisations, and two voyages under the auspices of those organisations. The model of ideologies or traditions is presented and the broader application of such a perspective is considered. The current paper draws on an extended practitioner research project (McCulloch, 2002) exploring the development and contemporary practice of sail training in the UK.

The concepts *ideology* and *tradition*, as they are used here, require some preliminary explanation. Ideology is used in its narrower sociological sense, to describe and delimit a linked and coherent system of values and practices in a particular social context. It draws on Althusser’s (1971, p. 162) notion of ideology as “the imaginary relationship of human beings to their real conditions of existence”. More simply it is concerned with the often unexamined beliefs and practices that frame and mediate interaction and relationships. Tradition is used here in the sense used by Smith, as a set of ways to act, think and talk about their work that “give workers a place in the world”. Practitioners

will, in Smith's view "share ideas and practices and these in turn will be distinguishable in some significant way from those of other groupings [of practitioners]" (Smith, 1988, p. 61).

The two traditions in sail training described here are the Tall Ship tradition and the Recreational or Yachting tradition. The Tall Ship tradition has its origins in the technologies and practices of pre 19th Century mercantile and naval seafaring. It uses square-rigged vessels carrying numerically large crews, and is characterised by hierarchical authority structures and a highly structured way of life aboard ship. The Recreational tradition has roots in the kind of leisure sailing that was developed during the 19th and 20th Centuries. This tradition is typified by the use of the "fore and aft" rigs typical of leisure yachts, by the use of vessels carrying a crew of staff and trainees numbering no more than 18 or so in most cases, and by less formal, less structured ways of life and structures of authority and control.

Methodology and Sources

The purpose of the research was to investigate the significance of the experience (participation in sail training voyages) for participants. What were the effects of participation, how was participation perceived by young people, and how did that match up to claims made by sail training organisations and practitioners? The research from which this paper emerges was therefore concerned with questions about the purpose and benefits of sail training, understood from a perspective which combined personal involvement and experience as a practitioner in the field with curiosity about how and why such phenomena develop, and on what basis they are judged successful. The approach used was sociological and ethnographic.

Sociological ethnography is a well-established research tradition, and has drawn on a range of ideas and practices since its emergence in the "Chicago School" in the first half of the 20th century (Deegan, 2001). It has been strongly influenced by ethnomethodology, concerned as it was with "The analyzability of actions-in-context as a practical accomplishment" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 9). Silverman (2000) links "naturalism", associated with "a reluctance to impose meaning" and a preference for fieldwork, with ethnomethodology in respect of concern with attention to detail and concern with "talk-in-interaction" (Silverman, 2000, p. 78). Benson and Hughes (1983) suggest that a central implication of phenomenology as a theoretical foundation, providing ethnomethodology with its principal concerns, is to see social actions as mutually negotiated productions, as *work* done by the members of society.

The methodological stance of this study is also defined by concerns with structural inequalities and social justice (Griffiths, 1998, p. 26). It is influenced by feminist researchers such as Stanley and Wise (1983), and by the movement towards participatory research (McCulloch, 1997; Reason, 1994; Weiss, 1986). This changes the conceptualisation of those the researcher interacts with in the course of her or his work from the status of subject or informant to that of collaborator or co-investigator. It is important to note that this was not "applied ethnography" in Chambers' sense, in that it was not "directed toward the interests of one or more *clients*" (Chambers, 2000, p. 852) (emphasis added). Rather it was directed towards understanding the *participants'* experience of a situation "where culture is perennially under construction" (Chambers, 2000, p. 857).

The research took the form of a series of case studies. Hakim (1987, p. 61) observes that "case studies are probably the most flexible of all research designs", and this research took advantage

of that flexibility. Cases were identified at two distinct levels. First the organisational level was considered. There were about 25 separate organisations providing sail training in the UK in 1999, three of which were the subject of detailed study (two are briefly reported here). Case studies of specific voyages were then developed. Each particular voyage forms the essential framework within which individuals and groups have their experiences; the voyage is therefore the fundamental unit of analysis.

The investigation of sail training organisations was undertaken using techniques including documentary analysis and extensive use of telephone and face-to-face interviewing. Interviews are quoted in the current paper on the basis of verbal consents given by informants at the time the interviews were conducted. The majority of effort however went into fieldwork at sea. This involved a combination of participant observation and interviewing, taking place over eleven voyages of two to fifteen days duration. The data thus generated may be considered from a range of analytical perspectives, and offer a number of possibilities in terms of insight and argument. The focus here is on traditions or ideologies, and the case studies illustrate some critical differences. Space however precludes the presentation of more than brief outlines and some selected illustrative material.

The role of participant observer had to be negotiated both at the organisational level to gain access to the settings, and at the setting level to establish workable relations as a practitioner—researcher with both colleagues on the staff of each vessel and with participants themselves. An established record, technical qualifications and reputation as a practitioner was essential to this goal; there are few opportunities for supernumerary adults aboard sail training vessels. All the organisations whose vessels I sailed aboard had agreed to the process and general approach, and I had undertaken to seek the specific co-operation and consent of each individual skipper for each voyage. Skippers or Masters are formally *in loco parentis* in relation to younger trainees and able to give reasonable consent. More importantly I made my role as a researcher known to trainees collectively and individually at all times; explicit consent was always sought to record interviews. This was in accord with a view that “deceptive and covert practices” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 70) ought to be avoided. In this approach, a distinct boundary is drawn around the ethnographic research process, defined temporally by “entry” and “disengagement” or “leaving the field” (Delamont, 1992, p. 139). In my case as a practitioner these boundaries were much more ambiguous than they would be for an authentically naïve researcher.

It should be said that sailing in Northern European waters is physically and technically demanding. Weather is extremely variable even in summer, and the demands of navigation in tidal waters with many hazards and busy with shipping of all types are considerable. Attending, as a staff member, to the wants and well being of young trainees and the achievement of the particular objectives of a particular voyage leave relatively little time and energy for observing, interviewing and recording as discrete activities. An ongoing challenge in this project was therefore the integration of the roles of practitioner and researcher.

Sail Training Organisations—The Sail Training Association and The Ocean Youth Club

These two organisations represent (strictly, represented) the two main traditions in UK sail training. In each case they were the largest organisation of their type, and in each case there was a strong commitment to a particular style and approach to sail training. The past tense is used because between

the start of this study in the mid 1990s and the drafting of this paper both have undergone major structural changes. In 1998 the Ocean Youth Club reorganised itself as the Ocean Youth Trust, and then in 1999 went into voluntary liquidation. The demise of the national body however led to the birth of five new regionally based Ocean Youth Trusts taking over the vessels and continuing to work in a similar way. A number of changes also took place at the Sail Training Association (STA) during the early 21st century, with a name change to Tall Ships Youth Trust in August 2003.

The STA was founded in 1956 to organise the first international Tall Ships Race, and only subsequently took on a role as a sail training provider (Hamilton, 1988). Initially a vessel was chartered in order to ensure a British entry in the Tall Ships Races, and in 1966 the first of two new vessels, the topsail schooner *Sir Winston Churchill* came into service. That was followed a few years later by the launching of a sister ship *Malcolm Miller*, named for the son of a wealthy Edinburgh businessman who donated a substantial part of her building costs. The STA retained, until 2002, a dual role as a sail training provider and as the organiser of the annual Tall Ships Race, although legally and organisationally these two activities were quite separate. (Tall Ships Races are now organised by Sail Training International). In 2000 the STA commissioned the first of two new vessels, the *Stavros S. Niarchos*, once again named for a major donor, with a sister ship *Prince William* coming into service the following year, the schooners having been sold to new owners in 2000.

Statements of purpose in relation to the STA emphasised three features. These concern respectively the subordination of individuality, social class, and the exercise of authority. First there is the matter of self-interest versus the requirements of the ship's company as a whole. This is evident to some extent in claims about purposes in all traditions, but is particularly emphasised in the Tall Ship tradition. The specific formulation of size and type of vessel with the required number of trainees is claimed to create a climate that permits or even necessitates an important degree of subjugation of individuality. For a full account of the data supporting this analysis see McCulloch (2002).

Second there is the treatment of social class and the emphasis on creating a "social mix". Much is made of the bringing together of young people from different "backgrounds". Several informants spoke of the benefits of bringing together, stereotypically, a public schoolboy and a young offender. For example:

You can put an Etonian up there and someone from the probation service, probably those two are going to learn the most, because they're coming from extremes if you like, they'll learn the most about each other. I think someone who's been to boarding school benefits slightly less because they've already got some of the corners knocked off them, our experience is it still has a beneficial effect. (Sir Robin Knox-Johnston, President STA, Interview, 1999)

Or:

It's a matter of living together, and so a boy who has been a prefect at public school for instance, will suddenly realise that he gets seasick, and he is tired, this, that and the other. And a fellow who has perhaps been a borstal lad will realise that he's not worthless but in fact he has leadership qualities and so—it's a huge balance. (Peter Love, Board Member STA, Interview, 1998)

These and other informants are clearly talking about social class although some circumlocution is often evident in the effort to avoid using language that specifically refers to class. "Background",

“walk of life”, “circumstances” and “privilege” were some of the commoner terms used to code references to social class.

This might simply be taken at face value, but it is more convincing to see as evidence of a powerful conservatism. The Board membership and senior staff of the STA (and, it must be said, many other sail training organisations) convey a strong impression of being predominantly white, mostly male, and middle or upper class; this last evidenced by speech and language, and by features such as personal titles signifying social status. It was not apparently representative of the kind of social mix that is claimed as a value for sail training.

At sea in the STA vessels authority is very clearly distributed within the organisation of the ship, with strategic decisions taken and implemented by the Master and senior officers, with little if any input from trainees. For example, although trainees are required to carry responsibility, as lookouts or for one another's safety when working aloft or on deck, they have little opportunity to contribute to decision making at even the most trivial level. Even decisions about when to sleep or eat are largely outside individuals' control, with the routinisation of life one of the most striking features of life aboard an STA vessel.

The Ocean Youth Club began in the early 1960s, when Chris Ellis, an Eton schoolmaster and his friend Rev. A.C. Courtauld began using their own private yachts to take groups of boys sailing. These participants were drawn both from public school and, through the public school settlement movement, from working class areas of London. They were following an impulse that would lead before long to the beginnings of the Ocean Youth Club which was formally constituted in 1960 (Ocean Youth Club, 1985). The Ocean Youth Club became the Ocean Youth Trust in 1998, and in 1999 it ceased operating as a national organisation, but was succeeded by five autonomous regional trusts.

These early innovators used their own or their families' yachts to pursue their particular vision of sailing opportunities for young people. These vessels were traditional wooden yachts, rigged in a traditional style with gaff sails and very simple accommodation. Subsequently the OYC used a range of different types of vessel, and the numbers of staff and trainees carried are definitive in this tradition. No more than twelve trainees and between two and six staff are claimed to provide an environment that can facilitate the transition, over a short period, from a group of strangers to a tightly bonded group. Vessels as small as 10m/35ft in length may be used but the commonest size is about 22m/72ft.

Right from the start an apparently similar impulse to mix young people from different social class groups as described in relation to the Tall Ship tradition was evident. There is some evidence however suggestive of a somewhat different end being in view. There is significant evidence that the work of Ellis and Courtauld was motivated at least in part by their wartime experiences. There is a widely held view that during the Second World War conditions were created in the services, whereby aristocratic privilege was undermined and the historic construction of social class began to unravel. According to Crosland, (in George & Wilding 1993, p. 77) “The capitalist class lost its dominance in society” at the end of the War, with the landslide election of 1945. The political values expressed were clearly liberal rather than socialist but these men were very clearly working in a post war atmosphere of social change. The use of first names was normal from an early stage

in contrast with the culture of the STA where evidently the use of first names between staff and trainees was unusual until relatively recently.

Finally, and in an expression of what has been described as the social democratic tradition in youth work (Butters & Newell, 1978), the contemporary practice in this tradition places considerable emphasis on young trainees involvement in decision making aboard. It would be commonplace to find that at several stages in a voyage the staff and trainees would spend time all together discussing “the plan”. There are always external constraints to be taken into account but it is common for trainees’ wishes, preferences and enthusiasms to have an immediate influence on the planning of activities on a day-to-day basis. At a more strategic level, it would be common to see trainees’ views being taken into account when discussing objectives for a week’s voyage, such as an intention to make for a particular port or island.

A North Sea Crossing

I arrived at Newcastle to join *Sir Winston Churchill* only having been aboard this type of ship once before for a brief visit. The vessel was larger than anything in my previous experience, and the style of organisation and physical complexity of the vessel were in many respects as new to me as to any novice trainee. Staff arrive on the evening of the day before trainees, and the first day’s activity is set out in great detail with activities timed at very precise intervals throughout the day. The entire first day is spent on these activities, the structure and sequence is repeated unchanged on every voyage.

My role aboard was as a Watch Officer, which involved oversight of a group of 13 trainees, responsibility for evaluating their individual responses to the voyage and writing a short report on each trainee. During the staff briefings on the morning of the first day the three watch officers as a group met with the Captain, later with the Chief Officer and finally with the Bosun. Although informal and relaxed in tone these meetings were focussed on ensuring that lines of responsibility and supervision were understood, and that in relation to a number of technical aspects the same procedures and techniques would be demonstrated to all trainees.

Shortly before one o’clock the trainees began to arrive. Each trainee was allocated according to a pre-prepared list to a watch leader and a numbered bunk in the half-deck. At two o’clock, with all the trainees aboard, the entire company assembled in the half deck. The captain gave a short talk, welcoming the trainees, introducing the staff and setting out some of his expectations for the voyage. The first, manifest purpose being to identify the various staff to the trainees and to outline the planned programme of activity over the coming hours. The second more implicit task was to establish the authority of the institution and of the individual staff. This was achieved through the display of uniforms and the use of language which established formality and hierarchy. The trainees were not engaged in this event as active participants but as an audience.

During the afternoon a series of induction rituals took place. Trainees were organised in watches and “rotated” through a set of activities. All the trainees go “over the mast”, climbing the rigging on one side of the foremast and descending the opposite side, supervised by the Bosun and by the respective watch leaders. This was highly reminiscent of the traditional test of any potential novice seaman in sailing ships. Newby (1990, p. 37) describes his “aptitude test”, being instructed by his Swedish mentor to climb “op [sic] the rigging” almost two hundred feet to the very top of

Moshulu's mast. This ritual was intended to discover whether potential seamen had the capacity to work aloft.

The final and most striking induction ritual was the signing on of the crew. Everyone aboard had to have signed the ship's papers, and were told that by so doing they were subject to merchant navy regulations. Trainees were brought into the chartroom singly and sat opposite the captain, who shook hands with them, his manner warm but fairly formal, and introduced himself and the two others. The medical officer made some inquiries about health, partly based on information in medical declarations completed by or on behalf of each trainee. The purser then collected from the trainee all his or her valuables including keys, passport, credit cards, train or bus tickets, mobile phones and cash. Trainees were told that this was done for their protection, because there was no secure storage for individual possessions in the half-deck.

This process can be understood as an "admission procedure" of exactly the kind that Goffman (1968, p. 27) describes. The dispossession of the trainees of their money, keys, credit cards and phones clearly establishes an abrogation, for the duration of the voyage, of some important rights and opportunities. Specifically trainees lose the means and the right to communicate directly with the world outside the ship while at sea. By having their money, cards and passports held they lose the wherewithal to travel independently and consequently withdrawal from their commitment to stay aboard would require negotiation. A trainee would find it very difficult to simply pack her or his bags and step ashore, without money or passport. The justification for this procedure, that there is no secure storage in the crew quarters, is convincing at face value, however the process also expresses the nature of the relationship that is being established between the trainee and the vessel as an institution.

Training and preparation took until midday the following day, and by mid afternoon we passed the breakwaters at North Shields and began our passage towards Esbjerg on the East Coast of Denmark. There was no intermediate halt, the sails were hoisted off North Shields and a course set. The passage across the North Sea involved three nights at sea, arriving off the Danish coast early in the morning of the fourth day. The conditions for the first day and a half were fairly rough with near gale force winds for most of that time and waves three to four metres in height. These conditions would be very unpleasant in a smaller vessel and were certainly sufficient to make a lot of trainees quite seasick for a while. More benign conditions had arrived by the time we came alongside, on a dry sunny morning in Esbjerg. The structured, almost regimented nature of activity was maintained right up until the crew were given shore leave after lunch.

On our second day in Esbjerg further shore leave was given with a strict curfew imposed which all but a couple of the trainees observed. The following morning the Captain's briefing informed staff that we were to leave Esbjerg that morning and head back for the UK. Our return passage West across the North Sea took us to Whitby, where we anchored half a mile offshore and were shuttled from ship to shore and back by tender, and finally to Hull where the trainees were discharged.

This was the longest voyage undertaken in the context of the study. A fortnight aboard and two extended sea passages gave time for relationships to form and for all the trainees to learn what was expected of them, becoming strongly acculturated into the way of life aboard. Trainees were particularly consistent in their evaluation of the experience, with frequent references in interviews to cooperation with others and to "teamwork". For example:

Interviewer: What do you think you have gained from being on the boat?

Trainee A: A sense of working together with other people. Having to get on with other people, almost diplomacy really, [it's a very varied group isn't it] yes. Teamwork is a lot of it. Picking up things quickly as well, you have got to be able to sort of get the thing.

Although this was not always seen in positive terms:

Trainee B: The whole ethos of working together as a crew, there are fifty people on this boat and unless everyone pulls their weight then it's not going to work. There are some people on this boat who just don't seem prepared to do that. Just a few, four or five maybe. I suppose it's that I expected anyone who comes to be on a ship for two weeks is going to. I suppose probably people don't realise how much they are going to have to chip in, but you would think that most people would have some idea that they were going to have to do something towards the boat.

Trainees' views of the experience were almost all positive and by the end of the fortnight even some of those who "Trainee B" castigated on Day 6 (above) were contributing more enthusiastically and expressing positive views of the experience and their own participation in it.

A Journey Around the Hebrides

The story of this voyage begins aboard The Ocean Youth Club vessel *Taikoo* at Oban on the West Coast of Scotland. The young trainees arrived as they had been requested, between two and three p.m. Although there were significant differences in respect of social class and educational attainment (some had already left school while others, I was to learn later, confidently expected to go on to University) this was in many respects a fairly homogeneous group. The age range was narrow and there were many areas of common ground between the young people in terms of culture and interests.

By mid afternoon all the trainees had arrived and everyone gathered in the saloon. It is a little crowded with eighteen people in this space, but all the trainees were seated around the table. Tom, the Skipper for this trip, made a very short speech welcoming everyone aboard and introduced a "name game", with each person around the table having to give their own name, say "what I am looking forward to about the trip" and repeat all the names that came before their own, in order. Trainees were divided into "watches" normally with four trainees in each, and helped to find a set of waterproof clothing in the right size. They were shown how to put on lifejackets and safety harnesses, how to operate the toilets and required to listen to a "safety briefing".

Once the induction activities were completed the boat was untied, and a passage of about eight miles was made to an overnight mooring. Some key features of the interaction between staff and trainees in this initial stage of the voyage were the reciprocal use of first names, and the use, by staff, of language which sought cooperation rather than exercising authority. There was very clearly authority being exercised, particularly around matters where safety is a primary focus. There was also evidence of an intention to encourage the trainees to express their wants and preferences, at this preliminary stage through the lens of "what I am looking forward to about the trip". This may be understood as consultative participation in decision making, as a sharing rather than as a transfer of power.

In the early afternoon of the second day, after a morning spent in sailing instruction, all the trainees and staff were asked to gather in the cockpit and Tom outlined the options:

“We can go into Tobermory, which is quite a nice little place, but it’s a pity to waste all this wind. We could go round the corner there (*points to the North*) where there’s a really nice bay to anchor in. What would be more interesting would be to keep on sailing, and head for Barra which is an island about fifty miles out that way. (*He waves his arm in a westerly direction.*) So it’s really down to what you guys want to do.’

Several voices were heard almost at once “Let’s go to Barra”,

“Do we have to sail all night?”, “Will there be shops in Barra?”

The decision is made, there and then to follow the Barra plan. Several of the trainees have not contributed to the discussion but none of them conveyed any sense of dissent or anxiety.

This is a typical example of the kind of directed decision making that is used to engage trainees in a form of participation. The options presented were clearly differentially valued by the staff presenting them, and it would have been unusual for that explicit recommendation to be challenged by the trainees. Nevertheless a dialogue did take place, options were outlined and the decision was made *with* the trainees rather than simply being imposed. Later in the voyage decisions were made where the trainees’ preferences, in this instance to make a longer overnight passage rather than stopping at an island anchorage, were respected despite the preference of several staff for a full night’s sleep.

We arrived, as predicted, early the next morning in Castlebay, Barra. The passage of 50 miles across the Sea of the Hebrides was uneventful in that the moderate breeze and gentle sea conditions made the whole experience quite comfortable. The moderate winds of the first day persisted up to the fourth day of the voyage when a change to almost totally calm conditions accompanied the onset of continuous light rain, signalling the start of a day spent on a passage under engine power from the Isle of Harris back towards the Scottish mainland.

On the penultimate day, with sunnier and breezier weather developing we headed into Kyle of Lochalsh where the trip was due to end. By early evening, we ate dinner with the boat securely tied up at the pier, and spent some time reviewing the trip. The following morning was spent on a prolonged clean-up, with the floorboards lifted and scrubbed, the bilges washed with a hose and brushes, and all the stowage spaces emptied and cleaned. When all this was complete everyone gathered in the saloon, almost a mirror-image of the joining day in several senses. Where there had been anxious silence, there was now a buzz of conversation and laughter. D, a fifteen-year-old, handed out teas and coffees from the galley. Tom entered from his cabin carrying a bundle of papers. “Well here we are then. How was it for you?” A few voices said “Great” “Tiring” “Wicked”. Tom went on “Just a quick chat before we all go.” He opened the chart and engaged the two nearest trainees to trace the week’s journey. Most people contributed some detail to the narrative, this was where we had the barbecue, that was where we saw a whale, this was where some people were seasick.

Next, Tom handed out some documents to individuals. Every trainee was given a certificate describing his or her participation in the voyage. Some were given competent crew certificates and log books; these awards are endorsed by the Royal Yachting Association (RYA). Two trainees were given their Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme logbooks, with the *residential* section completed. As each individual name was spoken there was applause and cheers. Finally Tom named and thanked

the volunteer staff, to further applause, and everyone then went on deck. Group photographs were taken with every camera aboard, and handshakes and hugs preceded the dispersal of the group.

Traditions in UK Sail Training

Sail training in the UK is, in its contemporary forms, a modern phenomenon. The practices adopted in many other European countries of using large sailing vessels as institutional settings for the training of seamen during the early and middle twentieth century were rejected in the United Kingdom. In this context the term sail training referred to the initiation of young seamen into the skills and attributes of seamanship through time spent living and working aboard a sailing ship. These practices are still employed by many national navies, the US Coastguard Service, and until the end of the regime were a prominent feature of Soviet merchant marine training.

Aspects of the culture and practice of sail training can be understood both in the context of maritime history and as part of the diverse range of youth work practice. The language, social organisation and routines of life aboard seagoing vessels of any size are deeply enmeshed in a range of traditions. As a framework for analysis of the development of contemporary sail training, two principal maritime traditions are postulated.

First there is the tradition, naval in its roots, that I have called the “tall ship” tradition. An important distinction must be made between mercantile and warlike naval traditions, but for the current purpose these can be treated as sub categories, united by the common features of full-time professional service, explicit hierarchies of expertise, and legal-rational authority (Weber, 1947) made visible through certification, uniforms and formal social practices. It can be claimed with some justification that the use of large square rigged vessels is the essence of the tall ship tradition. One informant expressed the difference in these terms:

The big argument in sail training is, as I understand it, and it's not resolved, is between a big square-rigged boat where everyone gets the thrill of going aloft, and it's spectacular, it looks fantastic [and smaller vessels]... But you have a big crew so you don't get much personal attention, character building wise, whatever. If you don't, if you want to drop out you can, and you don't get much responsibility. (Boat Manager, Shaftesbury Homes and *Arethusa*, Interview, 1999).

There is no easy correlation between the size of vessels and the tradition within which they operate. It is true to say that larger vessels will be more likely to fit within the Tall Ship tradition where trainees are in one sense there to serve the vessel. A square rigged ship of even modest size needs a significantly larger and more regimented crew to conduct any sailing manoeuvre, and it is the number and organisation of trainees that is crucial. The Tall Ship tradition is only partly about particular sailing technologies. The essence is to be found in the size of the crew and in the style of organisation. Numbers of trainees are a crucial element in the distinctive experiences offered. It is not possible unequivocally to specify a minimum number of trainees required for an authentic Tall Ship culture, but it is probably around 18 or 20.

Policy makers and practitioners in this tradition explain and justify the hierarchical and regimented style of operation as being imposed by the requirements of larger vessels, where both the operation of the ship and the organisation of life are necessarily complex. Simply feeding fifty or so people several times a day is a major practical and organisational challenge. Viewed from a sociological

perspective however, it may be seen that it is the choice of this type of vessel that is critical. The value system or ideology being expressed in practice is not derived from the ship as an object, but the choice of this particular kind of ship is an expression of values.

Second there is the Recreational or yachting tradition. This may be distinguished by the voluntary nature of practitioners' involvement, the expectation that people have other jobs or professions, by the less visible character of authority, the lack of external symbols such as uniforms, and fewer formal titles. The higher levels of control and authority available to trainees are a distinguishing feature of the leisure yachting tradition. While this aspect may have become more prominent over time there is evidence that such practice has a long history. The type of decision making described in the case study of a voyage aboard *Taikoo* is strongly characteristic of this tradition. The balance of power between staff and trainees is less unequal and the organisation of life and work more flexible, and as the case study illustrates, more socially intimate. In sociological terms it may be understood as pluralistic, with multiple centres of power. This contrasts with the Tall Ship tradition with its more hierarchical, centralised structures and top-down decision making. Once again the choice of vessel is critical. The yachting tradition in sail training prefers vessels from 10–20 metres in length, with fairly simple modern rigging, carrying between six and twelve trainees and up to six staff. This choice of operating approach facilitates and may even demand a less hierarchical, less authoritarian approach.

In addition to these two main traditions there is what I would describe as the adventure and exploratory sailing tradition. This might best be exemplified by the activities of such as H.W. Tilman (Tilman, 1982) or the less well known Adrian Seligman who in 1936 organised a circumnavigation in a modest square rigged ship with a crew of young men, the large majority of whom had never been to sea before (Seligman, 1939). The distinctive characteristics of this tradition are commitment to a project or objective (such as visiting a particular, remote island or making a circumnavigation), full-time but temporary engagement for the duration of the project, and an emphasis on a more collaborative organisational style where authority is functional and based more on expertise.

These traditions or ideologies are proposed very much as ideal types (in the sociological rather than the moral sense) to aid analysis. They express, through their organisation, statements of purpose and through their practices, coherent and distinctive systems of beliefs and values. Such systems or ideologies are present in all human affairs and are concerned with power and with the rules of social order (Foucault, 1991). Even a passing familiarity with sail training would provide evidence that the characteristics are widely distributed, and that most sail training can be seen as embodying aspects of more than one tradition. The Sail Training Association, while retaining many features of the naval tradition, has become less formal. Many of the organisations clearly rooted in the yachting tradition have employed full-time professional skippers, and the adventure tradition is often evident in the conceptualisation of both routine voyages and of more ambitious projects such as circumnavigations and transatlantic passages.

Conclusion

Despite the very different historical surroundings and huge changes in, for example, the social and technological context, remnants of practices rooted in eighteenth century naval culture are still evident. It is therefore possible to make a generalised analysis of such aspects as ideology and purpose in respect of sail training with a reasonable expectation that some at least of such features

are persistent and well established. The Royal Navy was one of the first European Navies to abandon sail training as an integral component of its training programmes. An Admiralty Circular of March 1903 specified that “Physical and mechanical training is to be largely substituted for mast and sail drill and such other drills as are not suited to the modern seaman.” (Phillipson, 1996)

The traditions and values of the Royal Navy nevertheless appear very much alive in the contemporary context, most obviously in the Tall Ship tradition with its larger vessels and complex shipboard hierarchies and routines, but also in more subtle ways. An example would be the attention still paid by many sail training vessels to “flag etiquette” with respect to the taking in of the national ensign at night when in harbour, and its reappearance at 8 o’clock the following morning. More significantly the structures of command and authority found almost universally on all but the very smallest vessels reflect naval hierarchies both in their organisation and their characterisation. Vessels are commanded by Skippers, managed by First Mates and the crews of trainees supervised and coordinated by Second and often, Third Mates.

The central issues remain nevertheless, those of power, authority and control, expressed through forms of interaction, staff and trainees roles and through characteristic approaches to decision making. In these respects sail training may have many parallels in other forms of outdoor and adventure education. Applying this form of analysis to the diverse practices across the field may reveal some surprising findings and considerable food for thought. Activities carrying obviously higher risks, such as technical mountaineering and river canoeing will dictate higher levels of control over novices’ activities and more authoritarian forms of decision making. From this perspective the classic Duke of Edinburgh’s Award type of expedition with its emphasis on group decision making and independence takes on quite a different hue. We may not think of that scheme’s eponymous sponsor as a radical but supporting young people to travel autonomously through challenging environments may be understood, through the theoretical lens demonstrated here, as radical and empowering.

Choices in respect of the particular adventurous activities we present to young people, and the conduct of those activities, tend to draw principally on practitioners’ own experiences. The lesson of this study is that the unexamined assumptions expressed through decision making and the conduct of practitioners are key elements of the experience. Applying this kind of analysis to any professional encounter is both desirable and necessary if outdoor education is to contribute effectively to young people’s education as citizens and participants in decision making.

References

- Althusser, L. (1971). *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*. London: NLB.
- Benson, D., & Hughes, J. A. (1983). *The perspective of ethnomethodology*. London: Longman.
- Butters, S., & Newell, S. (1978). *Realities of training—A review of the training of adults who volunteer to work with young people in the youth and community service*. Leicester: National Youth Bureau.
- Chambers, E. (2000). Applied ethnography. In N. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 851–869). London: Sage Publications.
- Deegan, M. J. (2001). The Chicago School of Ethnography. In P. Atkinson A. Coffey S. Delamont J. & L. Lofland (Eds.), *Handbook of ethnography*. London: Sage Publications.
- Delamont, S. (1992). *Fieldwork in educational settings: Methods pitfalls and perspectives*. London: Falmer Press.
- Foucault, M. (1991). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. London: Penguin Books.

- Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- George, V., & Wilding, P. (1993). *Welfare and ideology*. Harlow: Prentice-Hall.
- Goffman, E. (1968). *Asylums*. London: Penguin Books.
- Griffiths, M. (1998). *Educational research for social justice: Getting off the fence*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Hakim, C. (1987). *Research design: Strategies and choices in the design of social research*. London: Routledge.
- Hamilton, J. (1988). *Sail training: The message of the tall ships*. Wellingborough: Patrick Stephens Ltd.
- Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and practical guide*. London: Falmer Press.
- McCulloch, K. (1997). Participatory evaluation in distance learning. *Open Learning*, 12(1), 24–30.
- McCulloch, K. (2002). *Four days before the mast: A study of sail training in the UK*. Unpublished PhD, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh.
- Miner, J. L. (1990). The Creation of Outward Bound. In J. C. Miles & S. Priest (Eds.), *Adventure education* (pp. 55–66). State College, PA: Venture Publishing, Inc.
- Newby, E. (1990). *The last grain race*. London: Picador.
- Ocean Youth Club. (1985). *Silver jubilee spynyarns*. Gosport: The Ocean Youth Club.
- Phillipson, D. (1996). *Band of brothers: Boy seamen in the Royal Navy 1800–1956*. Stroud, Gloucs: Sutton Publishing Ltd.
- Reason, P (Ed). (1994). *Participation in human enquiry*. London: Sage Publications.
- Seligman, A. (1939). *The voyage of the Cap Pilar*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. London: Sage Publications.
- Smith, M. (1988). *Developing youth work*. Open University Press.
- Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (1983). *Breaking out: Feminist consciousness and feminist research*. Routledge.
- Tilman, H. W. (1982). *Adventures under sail: Selected writings of H.W. Tilman*. London: Gollancz.
- Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organisation*. Oxford University Press.
- Weiss, C. H. (1986). Toward the future of stakeholder approaches in evaluation. In E. House (Ed.), *New directions in educational evaluation*. London: Falmer Press.

Author Biography

Ken McCulloch Ph.D is a lecturer in Community Education at the University of Edinburgh. Originally trained as a Youth Worker he has engaged in a range of outdoor settings for work with young people, most recently at sea in a range of sail training vessels as a volunteer staff member. E-Mail: ken.mcculloch@ed.ac.uk

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the many sail training practitioners, participants and policy makers who gave me their time and attention during the research of which this paper is a product. I am particularly grateful to the many colleagues I went to sea with and who helped me to conduct and record interviews and observations, and supported me in juggling the competing demands of sociology and seamanship. Finally I must thank the anonymous reviewers whose careful reading and helpful comments on earlier drafts have helped to shape this article.