

Value Pluralism and Outdoor Adventure Education

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This paper explores some of the main philosophical issues surrounding the concept of value, and proceeds to draw out the implications for 'Outdoor Education'.

Educational activities are widely supposed by philosophers to satisfy at least two conditions: The knowledge condition and the value condition (Clayton, 1993; Griffin, 1996; White, 1982). The first demands that any activity describable as educational must involve the acquisition of knowledge and understanding. The second stipulates that what is learned is in some way worthwhile or beneficial.

The focus of this paper is on the second of these requirements, and in particular with the question of how outdoor adventure education might be said to fulfil it. The theoretical exercise of elucidation and analysis called for by this task is worth undertaking. There are views of outdoor adventure education which are confused or inadequate, and such views are likely to have harmful consequences if they influence educational policy or the practice of instructors and facilitators (Reid, 1996).

Outdoor adventure education is analysed from the perspective of educational aims in terms of the various components of human well being (Langford, 1985). These include: Intellectual or cognitive value associated with certain kinds of systematic inquiry (Humberstone, 1997); Ethical value, as expressed in notions of principled conduct, interpersonal respect, courage and self-control (Newton et al., 2001); Economic value as expressed in the ideas of work, usefulness and productivity (Hal, 1999); Hedonic value, which is the value attached to our capacity for pleasure, enjoyment or satisfaction; Health and welfare value, that is physical and mental well-being (Armstrong and Biddle, 1992).

The argument of this paper is that a pluralistic account of value is required to capture the variety of ways in which outdoor education satisfies the value condition of education.

Perspective

Educationally significant knowledge is theoretical, or significant knowledge, and this knowledge has intrinsic rather than instrumental value, argues Clayton (1993). Griffin (1996) on the other hand explains that its acquisition is a deepened contemplative understanding and appreciation of the world and one's place in it. Looking at things from this perspective threatens to impale outdoor adventure education on one horn or another of the dilemma. Outdoor adventure education must either define and be legitimated in its role in education, or else acknowledge its marginal status.

Why should educational institutions, which arguably have matters of more pressing urgency to occupy them, be involved in an enterprise which admits to no goal more dignified or serious than the pursuit of education through adventure? It is perhaps reflection along these lines which causes some outdoor adventure educationists to feel that a more worthy account of outdoor adventure education is needed, one that emphasises the undeniably serious matter of the health and social development of young people.

The aim of this paper is to develop a positive account of the educational value of outdoor adventure education as an alternative to this dilemma. The educational value of outdoor adventure education must be elucidated in terms of how it contributes specifically to educational values in general.

From the axiological point of view human life can be assessed in terms of quality fulfilment, worthiness, development, enhancement, well-being and so on (McNamee, 1998). An account of human well-being as the ultimate aim of education will require some specification of the ways in which its plural component values are reflected in relation to school curricula or in relation to educational experience. If the axiological principle of value pluralism as our basis in constructing a positive account of the value of outdoor adventure education is adopted, then it is necessary to show how this might connect with a more general view of values in education.

Values and education: Philosophical considerations

Connection between values and outdoor adventure education suggests two possible ways in which such an account might be given. The first approach takes the idea of value roughly for granted and focuses on how it relates to various contending views. The second approach tries to explore some of the main philosophical issues surrounding the concept of value and proceeds to draw the implications of this analysis for outdoor adventure education. It is this second approach which is adopted here.

This analysis adopts the point of view according to which education involves the promotion of personal and social benefits of various kinds and in particular, as White (1982) pointed out, the idea of personal well-being. It is argued that the promotion of this idea provides the most appropriate focus for the investigation of educational values of outdoor adventure activities. White's position is that the values which constitute human well-being are to be understood in terms of satisfaction of desires and preferences. As some desires might not be good or desirable, White stipulates that those desires must be informed or rational. The good life, or human well-being, then, consists essentially of activities, experiences and relationships, which we could choose to have if we were fully informed and fully rational. The task of education, in his view, is to equip young people to make these rational and informed choices.

The rational preference account appears as one among a number of views on the nature of value in the work of axiological orientation philosophers. The main feature of this philosophical tradition is an emphasis on the plurality of values or forms of goodness. Kekes (1993) and his predecessors maintain that there are different kinds of goodness or value, such as moral or ethical value (manifested in

human virtue), intellectual value (knowledge), aesthetic value (beauty) and hedonic value (pleasure). The axiological philosophers contend that the good life is one characterised by the pursuit and achievement of these plural and heterogeneous forms of goodness. For some philosophers, within this tradition, values must be rooted in the idea of desire or preference. Others subscribe to the view which makes values independent of our preferences. What is important for the theme of this paper is the belief that goodness or values assume a variety of forms.

The various constituents of the axiological framework, and the relation of order in which these constituents stand to one another, need further examination. Some of the components comprising the minimal, uncontroversial list of values related to good life can include:

1. *Ethical value*, as expressed for example in notions of interpersonal respect, fairness, principled conduct, human rights and responsibilities, freedom, justice and virtues of character such as honesty, integrity, self-control and courage.
2. *Cognitive value*, which plays an essential role in the traditional, academic view of education and which is associated to transformative illumination associated with systematic inquiry, knowledge and understanding.
3. *Health value* associated to physical and mental well-being, understood in terms of normal functioning of various organs and faculties.
4. *Economic value* as expressed in terms of the ideas of work, productivity, material security, self-sufficiency, efficient use of resources, environmental awareness and so on.
5. *Hedonic value*, which encompasses the importance attached to human capacity for enjoyment, pleasure, satisfaction, and activities associated with the idea of exploration.

Taking into account the fact that values associated with education in general are to be understood in terms of the values outlined above, it is intended to ask further what part can be played by outdoor adventure education in relation to the promotion of these values. The focus is on both internal necessary or logical connection, and on empirical claims about the benefits which outdoor adventure education might promote. Each of these values is examined in turn.

Ethical value

The claim that various outdoor adventure activities are important from the point of view of moral education is well known. The origin of adventure education can be traced to Kurt Hahn who founded Outward Bound in response to what he called the social declines of society. These included, but were not limited to, declines he noticed in initiative, imagination, self-discipline, and compassion (Richards, 1999). The fact that outdoor education has a particular kind of importance in relation to moral development is one that has been recently argued (Newton, 2001). Shields and Bredemeier (1995, 2001) propose a model of moral action as a structural approach that draws from Rest (1984, 1994) and is based on the work of Piaget (1923), Kohlberg (1981, 1984) and Haan et al. (1985). The model of moral development, which Newton, Sandberg and Watson (2001:487), suggest is being employed in outdoor adventure education, is the consequence of a four-step process.

'The participants must first perceive a given situation as containing a moral dilemma that will require a moral decision'. In process two, called judgement, 'the individual must determine, among possibly numerous alternatives, the correct or morally ideal action to take'. In process three, called choice, whether the individual intends to act in a moral manner is assessed. In process four, named implementation, the individual must act according to the moral decision made before.

It can be argued that the question about the ethical value of outdoor education involves an ambiguity. Most of the research in this area has assumed that its solution depends on whether we can establish some kind of ethical significance, positive or negative, with regard to the content of outdoor adventure education. It might be better to say that what matters, more than the content of the outdoor adventure activities, is the nature of the relationship established between participants themselves and between participants and educators. This relationship entitles the use of the words 'outdoor adventure education'. It is part of every educator's professional responsibility to promote the ethical development of participants. Research in this area has stressed the importance attached to ethics in outdoor adventure education: 'Values and feelings are arguably central to outdoor educators' (Humberstone, 1997:8). Of course it must be acknowledged that outdoor education has a limited role in respect of ethical value. Whether or not participants will be able to generalise or apply elsewhere the ethical ideas learned is a question that concerns all educational settings. The extent to which knowledge of ethical nature, acquired in educational institutions, is implemented into practice is influenced by a complex of situational factors and difficult to assess. Important for educational activities is to transmit ethical knowledge and encourage the implementation of ethical behaviour. Outdoor adventure education seems to be an appropriate setting in which such processes can take place.

Cognitive value

If knowledge is understood as theoretical knowledge only then, it was thought, outdoor adventure education has a minor role to play in education. Becker (2000:7) argues that the cognitive value of outdoor adventure activities consists in its capacity to provide another way of explaining the world than the 'instrumental rationalistic way' which uses texts, picture books, coloured films and virtual reality programmes. The alternative way is going into the woods, into the mountains, on to the stormy water and mastering the problems arising. The intellectual and hence cognitive illumination provided by such experiences is much richer in terms of humanistic values. Reid (1996) attempted to argue that the concept of knowledge can be interpreted broadly, so as to include practical knowledge as well as theoretical knowledge. When educationally significant knowledge is understood as the kind of theoretical understanding which is valued for its illuminative power, then it seems clear that outdoor adventure education has a particular role to play in developing such knowledge. However, we must recognise that there is a variety of knowledge, theoretical and practical. At the same time there is a variety of forms of goodness which arguably have a role to play in enhancing the quality of human life. It would not be absurd to suggest that outdoor education's value is of the

illuminative kind we associate with intellectual understanding. We often engage in outdoor adventure activities to deepen our understanding of the world and our place in it. Barrie and Roggenbuck (2001) argue that most of the time the broadening of horizons is an emergent outcome of participation in outdoor adventure activities. Of course the general argument here is that outdoor activities can promote well being in terms of values in addition to those of intellectual illumination.

Health value

Health is understood here as physical and mental well-being, as they were defined by Armstrong and Biddle (1992). The assumption is that most of the activities comprising familiar outdoor adventure education will have some positive contribution to make in relation to this value. Activities such as orienteering, mountaineering, kayaking, exploring and others can be considered equally from the hedonic and health value perspectives. There are three main issues in relation to health values and outdoor activities.

First, it might be argued that physical health and well-being, in spite of being considered good things, might have no relevance in relation to education. If education is concerned with the various values which are relevant to human well being, and not just intellectual value then it is concerned with health value. On the other hand outdoor adventure education must satisfy the knowledge condition of education. Outdoor adventure education's concern with the promotion of health is to be understood as a concern with the promotion of health related knowledge including practical skills, theoretical understanding, attitudes and habits.

Secondly, the health value of outdoor adventure education in the sense of well-being, is a logically internal feature of many activities. The physical and motor characteristics of the participants in outdoor activities, such as weight, height, strength, co-ordination, agility, fitness and others have an obvious importance. Physical well-being and its expression, development and maintenance has an important role in the outcomes of outdoor activities.

Economic value

Reasonable material security and prosperity is a component of personal and social well-being, therefore it is right to argue that education must recognise its technical and vocational functions. Education has a crucial role in helping young people to enter the adult world of work, of earning a living, of taking responsibility for the maintenance and welfare of self and others. Work is no mere instrumental matter of making money: it represents in itself a set of values, which are of great human significance. The ideas of skill, care, excellence, craftsmanship, discipline, vocation, dedicated service to others and efficiency, are components of work ethics whose validity extends beyond the boundaries of paid employment. It seems reasonable then to suppose that outdoor adventure education, which encourages the acquisition of a large variety of team work related attitudes and abilities, is not excluded from the domain of economic value.

The attempted connection between outdoor education and economic value or work ethic might seem paradoxical. While acknowledging the importance in the context of outdoor education of at least some of the work-ethic values outlined above, it might be felt that outdoor education is about enjoyment or relaxation, which are fundamentally understood in terms of leisure. The point of view here is that outdoor education does have indeed a hedonic dimension but this should not exclude its economic value from the point of view of the attitudes and values that are promoted.

On the other hand, the economic importance of outdoor activities should be analysed from the perspective of its role within the industry of tourism and leisure. Higgins (2000) for example, argues that recreational use of the outdoors represents a major source of revenue within the UK economy and is a vital component of the Scottish rural economy. The multiplier economic effect of outdoor adventure activities brings a stronger argument for the case in point.

Hedonic value

It is attempted here to locate the value of outdoor education within the axiological framework postulated earlier, and to justify this location in terms of internal features of outdoor adventure activities. Essentially these activities are free leisure activities, which are unconstrained by the responsibilities of work and duty, and engaged in for the sake of the pleasure which they yield. The fact that many people make a living from outdoor adventure activities and thus are inclined to take it very seriously in a wider sense is a contingent fact which does not invalidate the assumption that outdoor adventure activities are leisure activities. It was argued (Warnock, 1992) that education has a positive and serious duty to see pleasure as one of its aims. Reid (1996) regards this demand as 'extreme'. Nonetheless, the idea that hedonic value may in some context have educational significance can be defended, if the pleasure is separated from its familiar association with attitudes of self-indulgence and irresponsible or inappropriate frivolity.

Langford (1985) maintains that the values which are of educational concern are essentially public or social values, and the personal development and well being which education promotes is only intelligible with reference to social or cultural contexts within which the individual lives are located. The educationally significant forms of intellectual understanding, work, play, pleasure, creativity, expression, and the like are those which are embodied in the salient cultural institutions. One of the tasks assigned to education is to introduce the younger generation to the cultural resources and opportunities which it stands to inherit. Throughout the world, outdoor adventure education introduces the younger generation to cultural resources that tend to be forgotten, such as surviving within the natural environment. It introduces the younger generation to valuable cultural models of exploration or enterprise. It encourages the younger generation to understand, love and live close to the natural world, which is one of the main promoters of environmental awareness. It offers an alternative way, based on unmediated experience, of learning about self, society and civilisations.

Conclusions

This paper argues that a pluralistic account of value is required to capture the variety of ways in which outdoor education satisfies the value condition of education. The basis for such an account is found in the writings of philosophers working within the axiological tradition. Its most characteristic form is a system of heterogeneous values constitutive of the human well-being, which can be taken as a major concern for education.

From this perspective it can be argued that there are values which are logically or internally related to the various components of outdoor adventure education. Thus, insofar as the concepts of exploration, adventure and natural environment figure in outdoor education, we can conclude that hedonic value is principally at stake.

The cognitive value of outdoor adventure activities, which should not be ignored, consists in their capacity to provide another way of explaining the world than the 'instrumental rationalistic way' which uses texts, picture books, coloured films and virtual reality programmes. The intellectual and hence cognitive illumination provided by such experiences is, arguably, much richer in terms of humanistic values. This form of learning is frequently referred to as experiential learning.

It appears that the ethical value of outdoor education involves an ambiguity. It seems that the solution depends on whether we can establish some kind of ethical significance, positive or negative, with regard to the content of outdoor adventure education. What matters, more than the content of the outdoor adventure activities, is the nature of the relationship established between participants themselves and between participants and educators. From this perspective it would be wiser to say that outdoor adventure activities have a huge potential to promote ethical values.

If health is understood as physical and mental well-being, then, undoubtedly, most of the activities comprising familiar outdoor adventure education will have some positive contribution to make in relation to this value. Activities such as orienteering, mountaineering, kayaking, exploring and others can be considered equally from the health value perspective.

Although outdoor activities are mostly regarded as 'leisure' it seems reasonable to suppose that they encourage the acquisition of a large variety of team work related attitudes and abilities, and therefore should not be excluded from the domain of economic value.

It was the aim of this paper to develop a positive account of the educational value of outdoor adventure education. This account was constructed in terms of how it contributes specifically to educational values in general by adopting an axiological point of view according to which human life can be assessed in terms of quality fulfilment, worthiness, development, enhancement and well-being.

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