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Outdoor Education in the National Curriculum

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Thanks for the great time I had. There was plenty to do, so I wouldn't have a chance to get bored. I liked climbing and I thought abseiling was great. ... I wasn't too keen to come but when it came for the time to leave I didn't want to go home. I thought the staff were great. Like Brenda said, everything's magic! I am looking forward to coming again.(Kate)¹

With the overload of documentation and the frantic race to ensure that our subject and our values are not overlooked in the melee, with concern about 'delivering' the National Curriculum (NC) and inventing attainment targets, one wonders what has happened to the recipient of all this (cf. Brighouse, 1990). Has the pupil been lost somewhere? Perhaps she or he has disappeared into the 'bustle of the marketplace'! What about areas of the curriculum that attempt to place the pupil at the centre of the learning process—where are their allotted places in the National Curriculum?

One such curricular area, its advocates would argue, is outdoor education (OE). This aspect of the curriculum receives no mention in the National Curriculum document *From Policy to Practice* (Department of Education and Science [DES], 1989a). This is despite OE's past recognition as a valuable medium for personal, social and physical education in reports from Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI, 1983, 1989a, 1989b) and others (Inner London Education Authority [ILEA], 1988; Manpower Services Commission [MSC], 1981) and its particular contribution to the enhancement of subject areas concerned specifically with aspects associated with the outdoors and the environment, such as geography and biology (cf. DES, 1979; Schools Council Geography Committee, 1980; HMI, 1986, 1989c). However, OE is briefly mentioned under 'extracurricular activities' in the NC document *The Whole Curriculum*, where, in addition to its contribution to the areas described, it is seen as providing an opportunity for 'education for citizenship' (cf. NCC, 1990, p. 6).

Like dance (also absent from the NC document), outdoor education is 'betwixt and between'. Both have unique subject identities, yet many of their facets can be located in a variety of more strongly bounded curricular subjects—or rather,

in the United States have been defined as core and foundation subjects in the NC. OE and dance are concerned to empower and educate through the physical, and both are concerned to contribute to the development of pupils' knowledge and understanding of the physical as it concerns the pupils themselves and personal and social relationships.

The Development of Outdoor Education in School Curriculum

In order to consider OE and the dilemmas surrounding its place in the National Curriculum, it is necessary to take a brief look back at the ways in which OE entered school curricula and developed its diverse identity. The 1944 Education Act proposed that

a period of residence in a school camp or other boarding school in the country would contribute substantially to the health and width of outlook of any child from a town school, especially if care of livestock, the growing of crops, the study of the countryside and the pursuit of other outdoor activities formed the bulk of the educational provision and were handled by specially qualified staff. (Cited in Hunt, 1989, p. 24)

This proposal, a consequence of the government's concern for children's health, caused a considerable number of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to establish their own residential outdoor centres, many based on the Outward Bound concept.² OE provision during the 1960s and 1970s burgeoned rapidly. However, despite this expansion, OE was not officially recognized as an 'entitlement' of every pupil, and so not every LEA made OE experience available to all its pupils. Nevertheless, in the greater percentage of LEAs, through the official support and coordination of some of the officers and advisers, particular effort was made to ensure that OE opportunity was made available to the majority of pupils. A further consequence of the 1944 Act, under the aegis of the Central Council for Physical Recreation, was the development of a number of national outdoor residential centres. Use was made of these by various colleges of physical education (PE) in attempts to provide residential outdoor/adventure experience for trainee PE teachers.

An important development in, and a significant dimension of, OE, then, has been the provision of out-of-school and residential facilities. OE experience has been provided by residential or day centres, staffed by centre teachers with a variety of expertise and qualifications. (The clientele of many centres may not be limited to schools but also includes youth and adult groups). Teachers in secondary schools, with a variety of different subject backgrounds, have made use of these centres to provide OE experience for their pupils. Significantly, it seems that it has been PE teachers who have most frequently provided opportunities for pupils to experience outdoor/adventure education (O/AE) and who have

made the link between the school and centre-based work. In some cases, schools might not use staffed centres but utilize the expertise of teachers within their school to provide challenging activities. A number of colleges of education have offered O/AE as a main teaching subject. Many of the teachers qualified in OE have tended to move into residential or other centre work, and it has often been through the PE programmes that OE has found a niche in schools. Generally, schools have been reluctant to recognize the possibility of an OE department; rather, where a teacher has been responsible for OE, if not located within a PE department, he or she may frequently be responsible to a PE department.

A consequence of the numerous providers of OE was the development of many national bodies concerned to promote the sectional interests of their members. Until recently, the Department of Education and Science (DES) has played an important part in encouraging the development of OE provision. However, this support appears to be lessening. It is likely that the long-standing OE advisory committee of the DES, the successor of the camping committee (a product of the 1944 Education Act) that had representation from the various national bodies, is to be disbanded, despite considerable concern expressed to the DES by interested individuals and associations. Thus, we see not only the beginning of the rise of OE in the curriculum but also the seeds of its diversity.

What Constitutes Outdoor Education Curriculum Content?

Central to OE is the way in which outdoor/adventure education can provide a powerful medium for personal and social education and change. A qualitative research project undertaken by Roberts et al. in 1974 to investigate residential outdoor/adventure experience clearly showed that the OE providers' objectives to foster social and personal change were, for them, realized and reinforced in the day to day experience of their work:

Course organizers, often hoping to promote a Utopia social order, ... receive a feedback sufficient to secure their beliefs that the intended social changes are gradually being actualised in the world around. (Roberts, White, & Parker, 1974, p. 153)

Roberts, White and Parker (1974) found that the OE providers' ideals were largely based on the philosophy of Kurt Hahn, who had been critical of the educational provision of his time. Hahn believed that 'education fails to introduce activities into a boy's [sic] life [which are] likely to make him discover his powers of a man of action: that strong convictions must be built up in a boy [sic] concerning a democratic way of life through meaningful and purposeful experience' (Hahn, cited in Wood and Cheffer, 1978, p. 17) and 'Our claim is to lay the foundation of class peace and religious peace' (Hahn, cited in Roberts et al., 1974, p. 68). Interestingly, despite the considerable passage of time (and

change in terminology). OE providers of residential experiences still appear to be committed to similar underlying ideals and believe that these are realized in practice: 'The centre represented a small part of society as a whole. I wanted society to be characterised by the same set of values as the centre' (Nichols, 1989, p. 2).

A consensus view of what constitutes OE was determined and formalized by those present at the 1975 Dartington conference on OE sponsored by the DES. The subsequent report laid down much of the basis for OE: 'Education out-of-doors includes aspects of many disciplines such as geography, history, art, biology, fieldwork, environmental studies and physical education, depending on the context' and 'A means of approaching educational objectives through guided direct experience in the environment, using its resources as learning materials' (DES, 1975, cited in Royce, 1987, p. 12).

These definitions of OE reflect the considerable diversity of interests of those present, and perhaps, on the one hand, a desire on the part of many to make OE 'academically' more respectable and, on the other, a commitment to a holistic approach to education. Nevertheless, when OE is referred to as part of the school curriculum, it tends to be construed as concerned with the utilization of outdoor/adventure-type activities as media for a variety of educational aims, frequently in a residential setting.

The following statement from a recent DES *Safety in Outdoor Education* document captures the present-day practice of OE: 'Traditionally the term OE has been applied to activities which involve some degree of physical challenge and risk. . . . [It] provides opportunities for learning through experience' (DES, 1989b, p. 2).

During the last decade, there has been much published material by outdoor educators concerning the philosophy, values, potential and practice of OE (see, in particular, Royce, 1987). A major influence upon the thinking of outdoor educators is the work of Colin Mortlock, who, in his reflective and stimulating book *Adventure Alternative* (1984), sets out a philosophical framework for OE, based upon progressive adventure education. It is a holistic approach to education, within a framework of safety, in which the ideals of concern for, and awareness of, oneself, others and the environment are paramount. The ultimate educational experience, for Mortlock, is the preparation and execution of some sort of self-sufficient journey.

Unfortunately, as with much published material, equal opportunities and gender issues are not addressed in this work. There is obviously concern that OE should be available to girls, and attention is drawn to their successful participation. However, the philosophical discussions and language usage are male oriented. Interestingly, some of the values espoused might be considered to be traditionally 'feminine' and caring.⁴

Many LEA OE policies and school OE programmes reflect the particular philosophy of OE and its cross-curricular potential. Cumbria LEA's (1984) policy statement on OE in the curriculum describes a developmental programme in which the major emphasis is of 'the experience of the journey' of the learner to

further education. This programme, made up of three interconnected aspects—environmental education, residential experience and outdoor pursuits—provides pupils with considerable and varied educational opportunities with a coherent underlying base. The development, over recent years, of the Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI), Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) and General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in the curriculum has had implications for OE (cf. Keighley, 1988, 1989a, 1989b). All are concerned with experience-based and pupil-centred learning and have encompassed aspects such as decision making, problem solving, adventurous challenge, residential experiences and other aspects of OE. A high percentage of GCSE examinations place emphasis upon practical experience, frequently out of doors.

An excellent example of a school successfully utilizing outdoor/adventure residential experience to fulfill some of the aspects of TVEI, geography and biology fieldwork and GCSE English is a secondary school in Hampshire. The head of PE saw the potential, and took the opportunity, to utilize the county's large residential outdoor centre. For 1 week, the whole of the 4th year descends upon the centre to participate in challenging activities such as climbing, skiing, sailing and canoeing, whilst also using the experience to stimulate various forms of writing and using the surroundings for fieldwork. This is evidently seen as a success, not only by the pupils but also by the headteacher and the chair of the governors: 'Staff felt that not only did the experience satisfy the TVEI and TRIDENT objectives but that it was inspirational for pupils and teachers alike' (NCC, 1988, p. 10).

Despite differing views on the relative merits of examinations in OE, there have been a number of Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) Mode 3, and more recently GCSE Mode 3, syllabi in OE. The East London course required candidates to study and practice five aspects: rock climbing, campcraft, canoeing, mapwork and dinghy sailing. However, it appears likely that the NC will bring the demise of the Mode 3 examinations, because they may well be too costly for the examination boards to continue to administer (Hunt, 1989).

The Education Reform Act's Effect on the Future of Outdoor Education in the National Curriculum

The financial exigencies of recent years have affected OE centres as well as schools. The implications of the restriction on the funding of OE centres since about 1980 and the effects of Local Management of Schools (LMS) are considerable. Following the boom years of the 1960s, the cost of maintaining OE centres has increased, whilst funding from government sources has contracted. Over the last 10 years, some centres have shut or been threatened with closure, whilst monies for the general maintenance of others has been significantly cut, causing the fabric of many centres (like many schools) to degenerate.⁵

With LMS, educational establishments are put under pressure to operate within a competitive marketplace, because OE is not mentioned in the

considerable implications for its future in schools. The educational justifications for OE are strong, but they are underpinned by values, some would argue, that are antithetical to the values on which the philosophy of competitive market-led forces is based. As it is possible that most schools will find themselves largely underfunded even in relation to providing the basic requirement for the NC, it will be difficult for heads and governors to claim more monies from LEAs to support an area of work that requires a high teacher-pupil ratio and additional equipment and facilities.

Paradoxically, as schools will also be competing for clientele, a school brochure including outdoor/adventure residential experiences may well be an additional incentive for parents to send their child to that particular school! We can then envisage dangerous and damaging situations in which governors and headteachers, with little experience of OE, and unfamiliar with safety aspects, think it a good idea and support an enthusiastic but inexperienced teacher's request to organize an O/A experience, with the inevitable consequences. The considerable experience of LEA officers and advisers may well become underutilized and disregarded.

Ski trips have tended to receive bad press, not least in the 1988 Panorama documentary on PE. The bad practice of a minority of teachers leading ski trips, and media distortion and sensationalization of the activities of a few school parties in ski resorts, have given the impression that school ski trips are something of a 'jolly'. Skiing is perhaps one of the finest and least problematic ways of providing pupils with access to some of the most magnificent scenery, and most physically challenging activities and skills, around. But these residential experiences need to be made available by qualified and aware teachers, not by teachers who are unfamiliar with the demands placed on them when involved in residential situations or potentially hazardous environments. It is argued that being a member of a ski party can provide pupils with worthwhile, long-term physical interests that can enable them to develop 'healthy and active life-styles' (cf. Styles, 1989). How will skiing and other OE experiences fare in the decade following the Education Reform Act (ERA)?

Far from being despondent, some outdoor educators see ERA, and especially Local Management, as providing greater opportunities for OE experiences, especially through 'the whole-school curriculum'. Thus Styles (1989) views developments in OE hopefully: 'The future successes will not be laid on a plate but [will require] coherent and logical proposals for offsite/adventurous/residential experience to become part of the establishment's overall whole school curriculum' (p. 5). He argues that offsite, out-of-school work could be funded by the school in a number of ways: as part of the core and foundation curriculum, by parental voluntary contribution and by the business world. However, we can only speculate as to which schools will be able to make available OE, to which pupils, under these sorts of conditions. It is, I would suggest, highly unlikely that this type of funding will provide equal opportunities for all pupils to participate in OE.

Many education authorities, OE advisers and other OE interest groups have seen the need to make convincing and rapid responses to the NCC in attempts

to ensure that OE does not disappear but gains a more recognized place in the NC. Although much of the content of the post-ERA policy statements on OE reinforces previous statements and continues to be underpinned by original OE philosophy, it has been couched in the terminology of the National Curriculum.

Cumbria OE service, to provide a framework for implementing OE in the NC, is utilizing a 'thematic approach' and drawing upon the ways in which schools, using 'topic webs', are considering published subject attainment targets and how they might be reached through this approach. Activity webs are created linking the activity to core and foundation subjects. This is exemplified utilizing the activity of canoeing. Through a residential stay and canoe activity, it is shown, primary children could cover many of the attainment targets at the appropriate level in mathematics and science (Stansfield, 1989b).

The South West region OE advisers group has shown how OE can be interpreted in terms of the NC learning outcomes and linked with the science attainment targets (cf. Smith, 1989). Their paper, concerned with learning outcomes for outdoor education, was endorsed by the Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel and submitted to the NCC with the request that it be circulated to all subject working groups so that discussion would be initiated about cross-curricular themes. Similarly, other OE policy statements and documents have stressed the cross-curricular nature of OE and emphasized its contribution to personal and social education, TVEI, CPVE, extracurricular activities and community links (Hampshire County Council, 1989; Keighley, 1989b).

An interesting independent initiative undertaken by a group of prominent men, who have been involved for considerable time with the provision of a wide range of O/AE programmes and projects for young people, may have added further positive support for the future of OE in the NC. The group looked at attitudes to, and practices in, OE in Britain. The report of this survey, *In Search of Adventure* (Hunt, 1989), makes a strong proposal that by 1995, 'every young person in the United Kingdom has the opportunity to take part in adventurous outdoor activities' (p. 236). The report makes reference to the underparticipation of ethnic groups and young women. There are short sections concerned with the provision of OA for these groups. Significantly, although it was found that generally participation in OA activities is predominately by white males, over half those involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award adventure activities are female.

The importance for girls of successful participation in risk-taking, challenging physical activities cannot be underestimated (cf. Humberstone and Lynch, 1990). It is crucial that these types of opportunities are made available to both girls and boys through the school curriculum. This is especially so for girls, because school may well be one of the few opportunities girls have for developing positive self-images and confidence in decision-making and problem-solving situations.

Following the launching of the report, a deputation on behalf of the management team voiced concerns to the Minister of Education, in January 1990, over the exclusion of OE from the NC. Subsequently, a member of the management team, a professor of geography, was called upon to represent OE on the PE National Curriculum working group.

Surrounding OE is a dilemma that is clearly, if implicitly, highlighted by the Hunt report. This is embedded in the view of OE reflected in the following statement, which emphasizes that OE 'is not a subject, but an approach to education' (Hunt, 1989, p. 53). One can ask, if it is not a subject or owes some allegiance to a subject area (or subject areas), what constitutes its associated content, knowledge or skills? For surely OE has all of these, as well as many approaches.

What Is an Outdoor Education Approach?

It is pertinent to consider here what constitutes any particular OE approach. Interestingly, Roberts, White and Parker (1974) pointed out that the OE centre staff of their study were frequently professionals from teaching and youth work who were disaffected with traditional schooling and its inability 'to create the better world that many have expected education to foster' (pp. 152-153). Further, they proposed that encapsulated in all the residential experiences was a 'progressive' philosophy. Within each course, 'is enshrined an ideal that has become prominent in modern educational thought; of presenting to the individual situations of challenge that will enable him [sic] to develop and appreciate his [sic] own abilities' (Roberts et al., 1974, p. 16).

A significant aim of outdoor educators, it seems, has been to empower pupils to gain confidence to take responsibility for their own learning. Loynes (1984), working with secondary pupils with learning difficulties, implicitly draws attention to the way the social and interpersonal context of traditional schooling may inhibit learning:

It is our view that the only person that can undertake personal and spiritual development is the individual. Our intent is to provide the social and environmental stimuli to bring this about. The biggest step is to get individuals to take responsibility for their own learning. This is made even harder as we are fighting attitudes towards traditional schooling.... Through adventure activity and teamwork situations they [the pupils] are faced with situations they cannot ignore. (Loynes, 1984, p. 14)

Moreover, a recent report from a primary school that programmed an outdoor education week, in which all the lessons were focused upon environmental work and problem solving, in locations close to the school, reported its considerable success. Children who generally had problems working in the classroom achieved a great deal during the week, whilst inhibited pupils gained in confidence and became more involved in their work ('New Whittington Primary School', 1989).

Unlike mainstream schooling, where there has been much qualitative research that has explored teaching and learning, there has been little research of this nature within an OE context. However, one ethnographic study within a large OE centre does give an indication of the characteristic features that shaped

approaches through which these features were mediated (Humberstone, 1987). The findings, although exploratory, suggest that, in the OE context, the aims of the teachers were largely realized by the pupils in practice. The teachers' philosophy was underpinned by identifiable OE values and ideals that had much in common with a 'progressive', child-centred ideology. The different form and content of the overt and hidden curricula from that of school had significant and positive implications for pupils' learning and their confidence.⁶ An unintended consequence of the 'progressive' approaches realized at the centre was a shift in the construction of gender identities and relations. Girls and boys became more aware of each other's capabilities and sensitivities (Humberstone, 1986, 1990a, 1990b).

Why Is Outdoor Education Not Mentioned in the National Curriculum?

It is considered that the ERA and the NC are the most far-reaching pieces of reform since the 1944 Education Act and that the ERA has substantially curbed teachers' professional autonomy in relation to defining curricular needs (Maclure, 1988). Some argue that the aims of the NC are to reassert 'traditional' values and practice in education whilst shunning the contributions that have been made through progressive approaches: 'Progressive teaching methods, a holistic approach to the development of the individual, a focus on process rather than product, cross-curricular initiatives, democratic participation are all under attack, if not eliminated in the government plans for our schools' (Davies, Holland & Minhas, 1990, pp. 26-27).

I would suggest that OE in its present form did not feature substantially in the NC because it is ideologically incompatible with, and in practice incongruent within, a National Curriculum framework, where knowledge is more rigidly compartmentalized and teaching is likely to be led by tests rather than by the individual needs of pupils.

The NC does mention cross-curricular aspects, personal and social education and equal opportunity issues, and it is through the former two aspects that many physical and outdoor educators have promoted OE. Nevertheless, O/A/E opportunities have most frequently been made available through PE programmes. However, as a consequence of the perceived threat to PE in the National Curriculum and the diverse nature of OE, it was initially suggested that OE (along with dance) should not feature in the core of the future PE curriculum but be located somewhere else (cf. Almond, 1989). A number of concerns about the implications of the possible exclusion of OE from the PE curriculum were expressed from a variety of quarters and for a variety of reasons. Humberstone (1990c) argued that

the importance of OE, as an educational media, lies in the opportunities it provides for pupils to experience physical, emotional and intellectual

children in supportive social contexts and potentially hazardous environmental situations. . . . The very foundation and philosophy of OE . . . are firmly embedded within adventure education and upon the physical skills and decision-making potential which underpin the various expressions of adventure education. If OE does not maintain its physical roots and align itself with physical education, at time when both PE and OE are threatened, then OE's valuable potential may be in even greater danger of disappearing and PE will lose a powerful educational ally and resource. (p. 246)

Despite the reluctance of a minority of outdoor educators (largely based in residential centres rather than schools) who felt that OE would not benefit from joining with other professional bodies, many outdoor educators were concerned to collaborate more closely with groups with shared interests. Consequently, and fortunately, OE is now recognized as a valid element of PE by the PE profession and by outdoor educators and is recommended to be included as a dimension of the PE curriculum (cf. British Association of Advisers and Lecturers in Physical Education [BAALPE], 1989a, 1989b; Almond and Dickenson, 1990; DES 1991).

Conclusion

This chapter has sketched the development of OE in the school curriculum, discussed its nature and highlighted the dilemmas surrounding its diversity, particularly within the framework of the National Curriculum.

Generally underpinning the 'delivery' of OE, it has been shown, is a consensual, coherent and powerful ideology, the underlying values of which appear strongly democratic and child-centred. The associated pedagogic approach is concerned to empower pupils and to value individual needs and capabilities. Outdoor educators see the need for this approach, with its experiential and challenging style of learning, to permeate the whole of the school curriculum. But it is unlikely that the necessary material resources, such as higher teacher-pupil ratios and greater access to appropriate training for teachers, will be forthcoming, unless and until *education as a whole* is valued more highly, and financial support is made more readily and equitably available for all aspects of schooling.

Physical education's significant influence in enabling OE to be made available in schools and the physical foundations upon which OE is built have been emphasized. It has been argued that it is of vital importance to the interests of both physical and outdoor education that we maintain collective understanding, dialogue and action. Perhaps, in this way, we may be more effective in promoting our aims and philosophies: to provide challenging physical experiences and equal opportunities that can facilitate the fullest development of the potential of all our pupils within, and towards, a caring and balanced society.

Notes

1. A thank-you letter from an upper primary pupil sent to two staff after a 1-week adventure activity course at a large residential centre in Hampshire.

This centre provides the opportunity for pupils to learn skills related to a variety of adventurous activities, not only in the outdoors (canoeing, sailing and orienteering) but also within a more sheltered undercover environment (skiing and climbing). Overall, the term *outdoor education* can be problematical (there are also urban initiatives associated with OE; cf. McCarthy, 1984), but its concept is in general usage and is discussed in detail throughout this text.

2. The Outward Bound principle was initiated and developed by Kurt Hahn, who escaped from Nazi Germany before the Second World War.
3. The five main bodies that make up the standing committee for OE are the National Association for Outdoor Education (NAOE), Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres (AHOEC), National Association of Field Study Officers (NAFSO), Outdoor Education Advisers Panel (OEAP) and its Scottish counterpart (SOEAP). The NAOE has a wide-ranging membership with significant numbers from teachers and teacher educators.
4. Unlike other areas of PE, which have had a strong female tradition (Fletcher, 1984), there have been, and are, few women in decision-making positions in OE (Ball, 1986).
5. The long-term effects of the ERA and LMS on OE centres is still largely speculative, but many heads of centres feel it more beneficial if they could remain under central funding, whereas others are considering alternative options (cf. Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres, 1989).
6. The particular educational code (educational message system) realized through the pedagogic and evaluative process at the centre resembled in part the Bernsteinian concept of an integrated code (cf. Bernstein, 1977). Teachers' approaches were interpersonal rather than authoritarian.

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