

# **Residential Outdoor Education in Scotland**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements**

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# **Abstract**

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## **Abstract of a thesis entitled 'Residential Outdoor Education in Scotland'**

Throughout relevant literature and through the discourses attached to it outdoor education is often described in terms of its purposes. Among other things it is often said to be education out of doors, personal and social education, or education about self, others and the environment. While this reflects concerns among practitioners it has led to a relative scarcity of critical reviews of the field's practice. The research reported in this thesis brings a new perspective to the study of outdoor education. A Practice Model is proposed from research that takes

a social constructionist epistemology and an interpretive perspective in a study of outdoor education. Using ideas of a community of practice the research examined the literature and interviewed outdoor education practitioners in residential outdoor centres. The residential context served to provide access to discrete communities of practice in outdoor centres and to focus the research on general outdoor adventure education. Through this an understanding of the practice of outdoor education was developed. Three dimensions of outdoor education practice were identified as 'adventure', 'learning from experience' and 'new space'. These three dimensions of the Practice Model are proposed as a tool for analysis and critique of current practice and for re-thinking and developing practice.

**For Rosemary**

# Contents

| <b>Chapter</b> |  | <b>Page</b> |
|----------------|--|-------------|
|                | Abstract   | i           |
|                | Table of Contents  | iii         |
|                | List of Figures  | vi          |
|                | List of Tables   | vi          |
|                | Acknowledgements   | vii         |
| <b>1</b>       | <b>Introduction</b>  | <b>1</b>    |
|                | Themes within the Purpose Model                                | 12          |
|                | The Practice Model: an Alternative Model of Outdoor Education. | 15          |
|                | Summary  | 17          |
|                | Research Questions   | 17          |
|                | Organisation of the Thesis                                     | 19          |
| <b>2</b>       | <b>Origins of Outdoor Education</b>                            | <b>20</b>   |
|                | Outdoor Education in Context                                   | 30          |
|                | Cross Cultural Contexts  | 46          |
| <b>3</b>       | <b>Research</b>  | <b>47</b>   |
|                | Introduction   | 48          |
|                | A Social Constructionist Epistemology                          | 49          |
|                | Community of Practice  | 56          |
|                | Theoretical Perspective  | 65          |
|                | Methodology  | 70          |
|                | Research Method  | 75          |

| <b>Chapter</b> |  | <b>Page</b> |
|----------------|--|-------------|
| <b>4</b>       | <b>Outdoor Education in the Literature</b>                       | <b>77</b>   |
|                | Introduction   | 78          |
|                | Adventure  | 83          |
|                | Learning from Experience   | 109         |
|                | New Space  | 137         |
|                | Relationships between the three dimensions of the Practice Model | 176         |
| <b>5</b>       | <b>Field Research</b>  | <b>180</b>  |
|                | Introduction   | 181         |
|                | Field Research Method  | 183         |
|                | Interview Guide Design   | 189         |
|                | Research Subjects  | 192         |
|                | Conducting the Interview   | 199         |
|                | Data Analysis  | 205         |
|                | Reporting the Data   | 207         |
|                | Narrative reporting of data by Centre, questions 1-16            | 208         |
|                | Farragon   | 208         |
|                | Lowers   | 210         |
|                | Tarmachan  | 212         |
|                | Schiehallion   | 214         |

|                |   |            |
|----------------|---|------------|
| <b>Chapter</b> | <b>Field Research cont.</b>                 |            |
| <b>5 cont.</b> | Thematic reporting of data, questions 17-32 | 217        |
|                | Adventure                                   | 218        |
|                | Learning from Experience                    | 227        |
|                | New Space                                   | 234        |
|                | Impact of Outdoor Education                 | 239        |
| <b>6</b>       | <b>Discussion and Conclusions</b>           | <b>246</b> |
|                | Introduction                                | 247        |
|                | Research Questions Revisited                | 248        |
|                | Three Dimensions                            | 260        |
|                | The Practice Model in the Present Context   | 264        |
|                | Practice and Purpose                        | 272        |
|                | Further Research                            | 276        |
|                | <b>References</b>                           | <b>278</b> |
|                | <b>Appendix</b>                             | <b>304</b> |
|                | Interview guide                             | 305        |

## **List of Figures**

| <b>Figure</b> |   | <b>Page</b> |
|---------------|---|-------------|
| 1             | The Purpose Model of Outdoor Education  | 5           |
| 2             | The Practice Model showing dimensions and interrelationships of Outdoor Education | 16          |
| 3             | The DTAG model of experiential learning   | 122         |
| 4             | The Practice Model showing some purposes of outdoor education                     | 275         |

## **List of Tables**

| <b>Table</b> |  | <b>Page</b> |
|--------------|--|-------------|
| 1            | Interview subjects, their Centre's, job titles and formal qualifications | 197         |

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In writing this thesis my understanding has grown about a great deal more than outdoor education. We often hear of people gaining honours and awards who say that it is not for them, it is for their team. I now know the sense of such sentiments in a way that I did not appreciate before.

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The journey to this point started much earlier than my wondering what outdoor education was about. Early adventures in the Lake District were possible through the companionship of my twin brother Richard and the freedom our parents allowed that I only started to appreciate when it came to allowing similar freedoms to my own children. My children, Roger and Louise, were both at school when my thesis started. They have long since left school and might well have graduated before I finished. They have never stinted in their task of keeping me grounded and well aware of the things that are really important in life. I am very proud of them.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

## **Introduction**

The folklore of outdoor education has resonance in popular understandings with images of outdoor instructors coercing reluctant participants through some adversity (Yaffey, 1991). These perceptions may be founded in the reality of early outdoor programmes but in succeeding years there has been change and development. Nevertheless, this change and development may not have dispelled long-held popular ideas about outdoor education. It would seem that among those active in the field there remains a lack of clarity on some of the substantive issues surrounding outdoor education. Higgins and Loynes (1996) report that after 30 years of development there is still a need for further work on “underpinning philosophy, techniques and professional standards” (Higgins and Loynes, 1996:2). An indication of this need is found in the work of Gair (1997), who discusses “the concept of outdoor education as it relates to educationalists [...] and will offer a practical methodology” (Gair, 1997:ix). Gair briefly contextualises outdoor education before moving on to practical issues that include risk assessment and navigation. Such things may be tools for Outdoor Educators and thus possibly seen as ‘practical methodologies’. However, they do not prompt an understanding of a broader methodology that might encompass a rationale for the practice of outdoor education. This problem is acknowledged by Barnes and Sharp (2004), who suggest that “the time has come for a new debate on what is the nature and identity of outdoor education” (Barnes and Sharp, 2004:5). Barnes (2004) goes further in seeking to present a philosophy for outdoor education. He concludes that the field may have to look to other, more academically established philosophies, thereby suggesting a philosophy of outdoor education may not achieve coherence. The issue of how outdoor education is understood is problematic in the

context of its relationship with other sectors of the education service. Outdoor education is not a statutory provision and as a consequence is susceptible to pressures caused by changes in economic priorities or political will (Halls, 1997a). Although education authorities might make provision for outdoor education, they are not obliged to do so and outdoor education remains on the periphery of mainstream schooling. Part of the reason for this may be the difficulty of articulating what is understood as outdoor education, despite there being an upsurge of interest and perhaps goodwill towards it.

Outdoor education has recently been the subject of attention from the Scottish Executive (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006) as well as the Department for Education and Skills in England (House of Commons, 2005). A number of reports and projects (Nicol *et al.*, 2006; Dillon *et al.*, 2005; Rickinson *et al.*, 2004; Bell *et al.*, 2004) have focused on outdoor education or outdoor learning.<sup>1</sup> In Scotland, the Minister for Education and Young People initiated an outdoor education development programme, 2005-2007, sponsored by the Scottish Executive and managed by Learning and Teaching Scotland. The programme, *Outdoor Connections*, is intended to conduct research and report on the position of outdoor education in Scotland. *Outdoor Connections* (2005) draws on another initiative of Learning and Teaching Scotland, *A Curriculum for Excellence*. This policy initiative aims to provide more flexibility, breadth and balance and includes a progression of skills in order to prepare

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<sup>1</sup> Outdoor education terminology includes a variety of ways of referring to it, including 'outdoor learning', 'adventure education' and 'outdoor adventure'. I intend to predominantly use the term 'outdoor education' as a generic, commonly understood term. When helpful for clarification or emphasis, I will draw on other nomenclature.

students for lifelong learning. In addition, *A Curriculum for Excellence* seeks to enable all young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors (Curriculum Review Group, 2004). *Outdoor Connections* takes these four capacities and uses the work of Rickinson *et al.* (2004) to show how research into outdoor learning supports the development of each of the capacities. Furthermore, it seeks to bring together the notions of outdoor learning and the capacities of *A Curriculum for Excellence*. In order to do so, a commonly used model, originally developed at Moray House Institute of Education<sup>2</sup> and comprising three overlapping circles, has been used to organise the ideas. The circles represent personal and social development, outdoor activities, and environmental education, respectively; outdoor education is located at the overlap of the three circles, as shown in figure one. For reasons explained below, I will refer to it as the ‘Purpose Model’ of outdoor education.

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<sup>2</sup> Moray House School of Education is the School of Education of the University of Edinburgh. It offers a longstanding postgraduate certificate, diploma and taught MSc in Outdoor Education. In addition, there are a number of doctoral students. The roots of this outdoor education provision go back to the constituent institutions: Dunfermline College of Physical Education and Moray House College, both of which had a history of providing programmes in outdoor education.

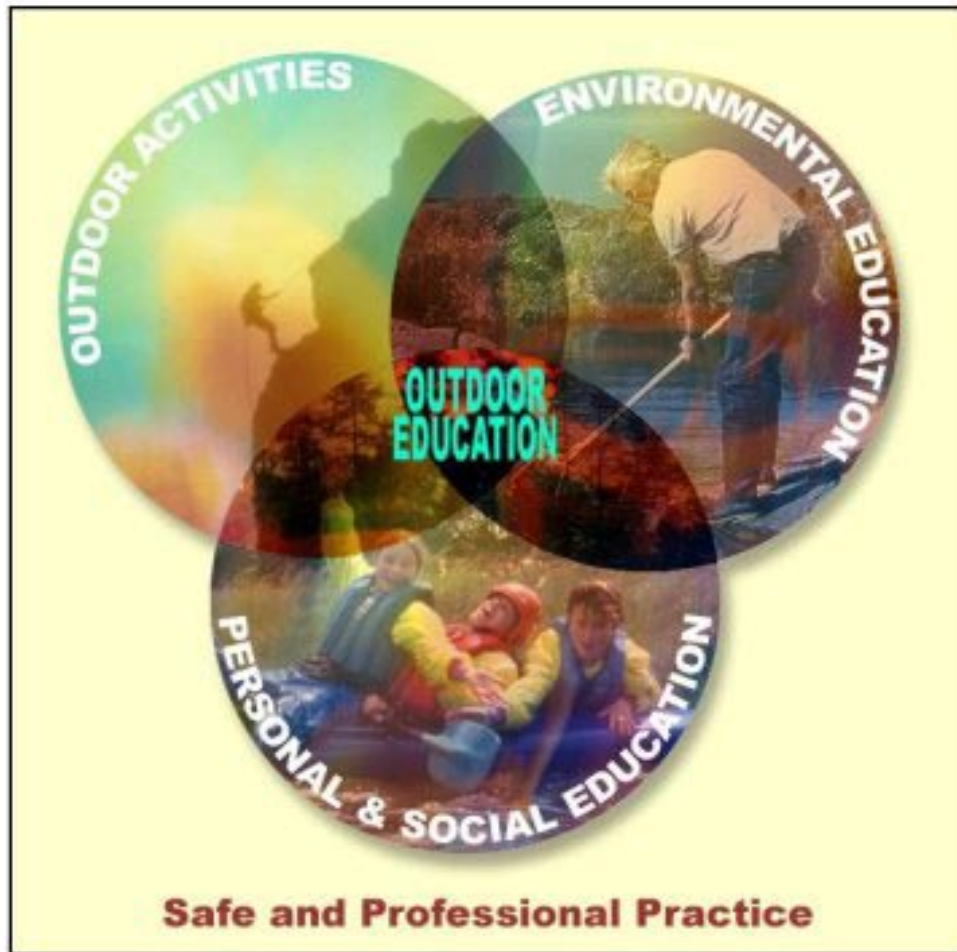


Figure 1: The Purpose Model of Outdoor Education<sup>3</sup>

Broadly, the Purpose Model defines outdoor education as what happens when outdoor activities, personal and social development and environmental education all take place at the same time. Any one or two of the components taking place without the other(s) is not represented as constituting outdoor education. The subject is recognised as involving an exposure to risk and requiring specialist skills to provide outdoor activities safely; accordingly, the three circles are set in a context of safe and professional practice. The model is widely referred to in the literature on outdoor

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/outdoored/philosophy.html>. Accessed 2 Feb 2002

education (Higgins, 1995:5; Higgins and Loynes, 1997:6; Higgins and Morgan, 1999:11; SAPOE, 1999; Barnes and Sharp, 2004:3; Nicol *et al.*, 2006:15). Higgins says of the Purpose Model that “it was developed at Moray House and is now in widespread use throughout the world” (Higgins, 2003:1). This influential model is widely accepted as defining the parameters of practice by Outdoor Educators. Ideas in the Purpose Model can be identified in one of the earliest attempts to articulate the notions of outdoor education practice by the Department of Education and Science (DES) at the Dartington Conference. Convened in 1975 this conference brought together a range of outdoor education practitioners, educationalists and government officers, and was one of the earliest attempts to reach a shared understanding of what was meant by outdoor education. The conference concluded that outdoor education heightened awareness and respect for:

Self - through the meeting of challenge

Others - through group experience and the sharing of decisions

The Natural Environment - through direct experience (DES, 1975:1-3)

This describes ways of achieving the personal and social development contained in the Purpose Model; personal being achieved through challenge, social through the shared experience presumably associated with the challenge, and environmental awareness achieved through doing it outdoors.

Variants of the Purpose Model can be found in the literature. For example, Hopkins and Putnam, who prefer the term ‘adventure education’, represent outdoor education as a triangle of outdoor, adventure and education (Hopkins and Putnam, 1993:6).

However, they do not ascribe anything special to the outdoors which they see as nothing more than the location where the adventurous activity takes place. Adventure is an experience that “involves uncertainty of outcome, [...] (and) normally involves us in doing something new, of moving beyond our experience in discovering the unknown or meeting the challenge of the unexpected”. They describe education in general as “a process of intellectual, moral and social growth that involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills and experience” (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993:6). This is perhaps a fuller description of personal and social development than in the Purpose Model, and the description from the Dartington Conference of self, others and the natural environment.

The Purpose Model appears elsewhere, if slightly altered, in professional and academic literature. The Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education (1999) summarises the content of the three circles as outdoor activities, people and place. Personal and social development (Higgins, 1995:5) is sometimes referred to as personal and social education (SAPOE, 1999) or development (Barnes & Sharp, 2004:3). The Outdoor Education Working Group, convened in 2000 by the Scottish Depute Minister for Children and Young People, considers outdoor education to have a focus on personal engagement and responsibility, and environmental education is referred to as environmental literacy (Orr, 1994) framing the notion in a slightly different way (Outdoor Education Working Group, 2001:1). Notions of environmental education suggest learning about the environment and interactions taking place in it. Environmental literacy (Orr, 1992; 1994) infers an individual’s understanding not only of the environment but also of their relationship with it.

*Outdoor Connections* (2005) describes the circles as outdoor and adventure activities, environmental discovery and understanding, and personal and social development.

In general, the Purpose Model represents a notion of outdoor education as being a means to an end; the end being personal and social development or environmental education. Outdoor activities might offer a purpose: to engage in and enjoy them, and they may provide a means to achieving the purposes in the other two circles. In this way, the 'purposes' for which outdoor education is deployed are used to describe what outdoor education is. However, I recognise that outdoor activities as a purpose is not as obvious a notion as personal and social development or environmental education. Yet outdoor activities are attractive and motivational for many people and often engaged in for no other apparent purpose than to enjoy them. There is little distinction between what, or how, it is delivered from its purpose, and there is little reference to what is involved in outdoor education, or what its nature or substance is. Thus, it might be said that outdoor education does not have a distinct body of knowledge. The Purpose Model draws on three other bodies of knowledge but does not posit anything at the overlap. Hence, it is easy to understand attempts to legitimise outdoor education through adopting purposes that can also be achieved in other ways.

An indicator of outdoor activities as a purpose is the effort that has been made to certificate ability in some of them: Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) are available in canoeing or orienteering, for example. However, outdoor activities are only part of outdoor education as represented in the Purpose Model. Certifying



personal and social development or environmental education has been attempted in a number of ways, such as SVQs in personal organisation, but none of these relate to the achievement of personal organisation through any understanding of outdoor education. Thus, outdoor education has tended to be described or justified in terms of its general purpose, rather than what it actually is. It may be that there is a perceived need to describe it in relation to general purposes because accreditation through exams is not generally available. Other educational activity is often examined, and purposes need to be stated in order to understand what to examine. The progress of *A Curriculum for Excellence* review of the curriculum suggests that if not now, then certainly in the future, testing will become less important (Curriculum Review Programme Board, 2006). *A Curriculum for Excellence* promotes a view of the curriculum “to embrace all experiences which promote effective learning” (Curriculum Review Programme Board, 2006). This is also illustrated by the Scottish Office Education Department (SOED) (1992:79) identifying that outdoor education can contribute to a pupil’s personal and social development and is also a means of delivering all of the outcomes of expressive arts education. When directly concerned with personal and social development, the SOED (1993) points to outdoor education as providing excellent contexts for these. Thus, outdoor education is a means to an already legitimated end. However, there is no indication of what is understood as outdoor education and how the contexts referred to might contribute to expressive arts education or personal and social development.

These examples illustrate the ambiguity surrounding a wider conception of outdoor education. On the one hand, a model such as the Purpose Model is in widespread use

and describes outdoor education largely in relation to its purposes. The SOED introduced guidelines for the curriculum of the 5-14 age groups in the early 1990's (SOED 1992, 1993). The guidelines were referred to as "5-14" and were developed in a number of curriculum areas. In the guidelines outdoor education was represented as a way of achieving other educational objectives such as those associated with Expressive Arts (SOED, 1992) or Personal and Social Development (SOED, 1993). Other than one of the three circles representing outdoor activities, there is little indication of what takes place or is understood, and this is what has prompted my research. As the director of a residential outdoor education centre owned and operated by a charitable trust, outdoor education has been at the centre of my professional practice for nearly twenty five years. The independent nature of the charitable trust brings overlapping roles to my professional practice as an outdoor education lead professional with responsibility for all aspects of the business including staff recruitment and retention, sales and marketing, as well as budgeting and accounts. Additional responsibilities include providing continuing professional development opportunities for staff, as well as marketing and selling courses and accommodation.

These roles include a continual need to help potential users to develop their appreciation of outdoor education and thus why they might include a component of outdoor education in the curriculum. This necessarily requires a clear understanding of the nature of outdoor education. If a school sends its pupils on an outdoor education course they often want to know what benefits they will derive. Typically, personal and social development, the raising of self esteem and fostering team work

are among the justifications for both school and centre. There is often little discussion about how these things might be achieved in the programme and efforts to devise a programme in partnership with a school have frequently fallen short of my aspirations. Earlier research for an MEd dissertation indicated that the perception of teachers who include outdoor education in the curriculum is that it is a “good thing” (Simpson, 1992:147). A similar position was observed by Christie (2004:66), who found that North Lanarkshire Council believed “it to be a “good thing” to raise levels of achievement” through outdoor education. An impression from the literature is that a simple notion of cause and effect will achieve the purposes for which outdoor education is deployed. There is a taken for granted understanding that if some things happen, benefits will accrue to participants. Less attention seems to be given to the content of outdoor education and how programmes might best be developed for meeting the needs of individuals. Outdoor education in practice, and often in the literature, is understood in a general, descriptive way. The practice of outdoor education is both under-theorised and under-analysed.

This lack of clarity about how the notion of outdoor education is understood is the impetus for this research; an inclination to explore beyond assertion and taken for grantedness to understand what Outdoor Educators do and how they understand what they do to be part of outdoor education provision. The focus of the thesis is on the construction of outdoor education in practice and in the relevant literature, and this entails the identification of prevalent discourses in outdoor education. The notion of discourse is helpful in considering the way in which outdoor education is understood. Discourses, as discussed in more depth later, are constellations of ideas, concepts,

values and practices that are subject to change. They become accepted knowledge and are embedded in social relationships. In contrast, the Purpose Model does not provide information about what Outdoor Educators understand and practice as outdoor education. I embarked on this research with a view to investigating the way in which the Purpose Model described outdoor education, intending to use each of the circles to structure my thesis. However, during my research, the idea for an alternative model emerged. I believe this alternative model reflects the themes contained in discourses about outdoor education and reveals more about the practice of outdoor education.

### **Themes within the Purpose Model**

Research identified a number of themes which may be mapped onto the three circles. While some themes may only occur in one circle, others overlap with those in other circles and indicate some of the ways each circle contributes to understandings of outdoor education.

The circle of outdoor activities includes elements that the literature gives emphasis to as adventure activities, whether of a traditional form such as climbing or canoeing, or whether they comprise general adventure in the way of examples such as gorge walking or coasteering. The latter are marked by a journey into a challenging location or environment where specialist skills are not required, and the idea of a journey is related to the notion of adventure. The uncertainty of outcome that is a feature of an adventurous journey is associated with risk and a degree of personal

challenge. Consideration of outdoor activities in outdoor education appears to relate primarily to outdoor adventure activities that allow a journey to be made. A journey, however construed, is the salient factor (Mortlock, 1984). It need not be in a natural environment but is more likely to be, and might thus be thought of as adding to a sense of adventure for the participants. Part of the challenge would be an unfamiliar environment: for participants who are familiar with a rural environment the location of the outdoor education might be in more of a wilderness area or it might be journeying by unfamiliar means within an otherwise familiar environment. For many young people the newness of adventure activities is motivating and engages their attention and participation.

Ideas identified in the circle of personal and social development draw from taking part in adventure activities or environmental education. Personal and social development is often held to arise from meeting and reflecting on the response to challenge. In this, the motivational factor of adventure activities overlap with the notion that students choose to be involved in their own learning. Furthermore, the significance of relationships emerged: doing things with other people, and with an instructor or facilitator who aids learning and participation in the adventure activities. The experience of nature helps to provide the physical challenge of the adventure and the natural environment provides a place for learning. The combination of the adventure, the natural environment and the relationships between participants provide what might be judged as a quality experience from which learning might be derived.

Environmental education as a distinct part of the Purpose Model does not necessarily reflect what might be thought of as a traditional understanding of environmental education. It is more to do with students being in a natural environment and interacting with it rather than learning about it in a traditional sense. This creates a clear overlap with the adventure of being in a new, unfamiliar environment. Despite an emerging interest (Cooper, 2004; Went *et al.*, 2006; Reynolds, 2006) in educating for the environment and education for sustainability, environmental education appears to reside more with the interests and skills of the Outdoor Educator and a hope that being in the natural environment will be enough to influence students. It is through being in the natural environment that students will identify with it and form attitudes that will safeguard it in the future. Thus, outdoor education as the area of overlap of the three circles can be shown to include a synergy of the elements from each of the separate circles. Adventurous journeys are made more so by taking participants into what is often a natural environment where environmental education takes place. Through taking part in outdoor activities and environmental education, personal and social development will take place.

## **The Practice Model: an alternative model of outdoor education**

The efficacy of the three circles as a model of outdoor education is challenged by the representation of a purpose by each circle. I have noted earlier a tendency to ignore the issue of content and practice in favour of a concern with outlining purpose and aims. This says little about how any combinations of the purposes in the three circles might lead to another. Representation of ideas within the three circles suggests bigger themes than those immediately associated with them. At the overlap of the three circles the themes (i) adventure/journey, (ii) direct personal activity or experience and (iii) being in a new or natural environment suggest these three as primary dimensions of outdoor education. In turn, they might more simply be described as (i) adventure, (ii) learning from experience and (iii) a new or alternative environment. My research on environmental education as part of outdoor education led to an understanding of student experience being of the natural environment and the location of that experience being a new location. From this and from literature that draws attention to the significance of space and place, I now want to describe the dimension of a new or alternative environment as 'new space'. To illustrate the three dimensions as a model of outdoor education I will represent them as scaffolding. The literal use of a diagram of scaffolding is intended to create capacity for developing understandings of outdoor education and to make the model accessible to a broad range of Outdoor Educators. The scaffolding provides an initial framework that may be a prompt for further development, it can be extended in all three planes and built upon. The Practice Model brings advantages to thinking about outdoor education. It

describes content and provides boundaries of practice without the obfuscation of multiple constructs of outdoor education for a variety of purposes.

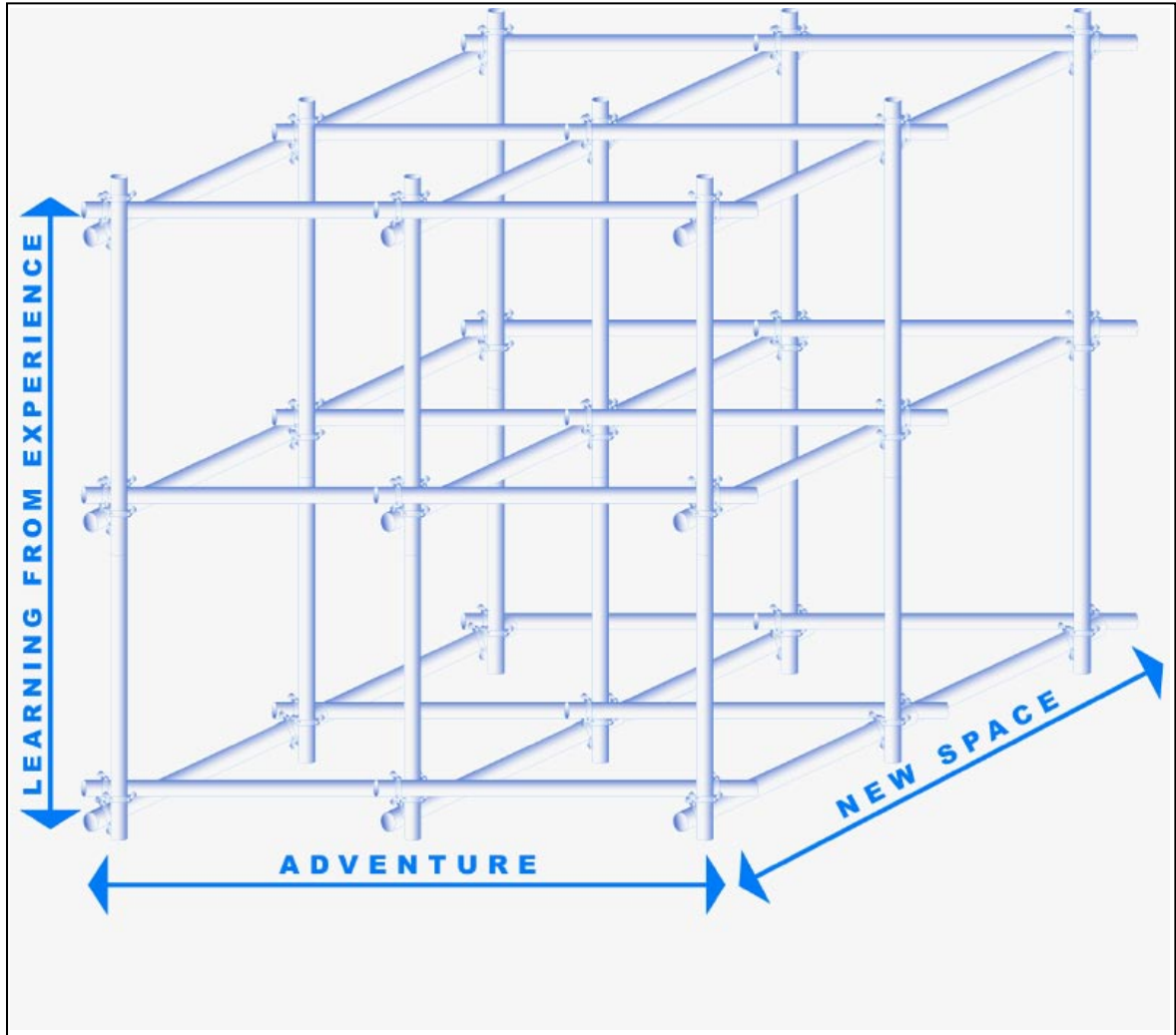


Figure 2: The Practice Model showing dimensions and interrelationships of outdoor education.



## **Summary**

Outdoor education has a popular understanding as being potentially beneficial, yet, despite recent interest, it remains a peripheral and optional part of education provision. Part of the reason for this may be the lack of a distinct body of knowledge. The ideas advanced about what constitutes outdoor education largely refer to what purpose might be held for undertaking an outdoor education programme. Many of the purposes contribute to goals that could be achieved in other ways: for example, personal and social development does not only take place through outdoor education. Yet Outdoor Educators make claims that outdoor education has a key role to play. The problem is that existing models and understandings do not underpin a philosophy or an insight into what is taking place as outdoor education because they are focused on purposes. The research for this thesis that has given rise to a Practice Model of outdoor education sought to answer the following research questions:

## **Research questions**

1. What are professionals in the field of residential outdoor education doing that they understand to be outdoor education?
2. How do their personal understandings resonate with those in the literature?

The focus is on residential outdoor education because that is the field of my professional practice. It also offers natural boundaries to the research precluding an inquiry into all learning that might take place out of doors. In undertaking inquiry

into residential outdoor education I am well aware of other aspects of both residential and outdoor education that merit systematic inquiry. They include among other things outdoor education for therapeutic purposes; as practical adjuncts to the school curriculum in, for example biology or geography; as learning out of doors for younger children; outdoor activity or learning on a day to day or sessional basis; residential education for drama or orchestral purposes. However common currency of residential outdoor education is of a residential outdoor centre broadly offering adventure activity programmes for one week or weekend to school and other groups. Furthermore such programmes are often offered to Primary 6 or 7 classes through to Secondary 3 or 4. This is the relatively narrow part of the outdoor learning / outdoor education field that I will refer to as outdoor education and which is the focus of my research: outdoor education that is predominantly offered as adventure activity programmes in residential centres to pupils in Primary 7 through to Secondary 4.

## **Organisation of the Thesis**

Early work on my thesis was conceived as ‘finding out what is going on and understood as outdoor education’. Through this I found the range and scope of outdoor education as described in the Purpose Model to be sufficiently widespread to offer possibilities as an organising concept for research and writing. Further research led to the development of the Practice Model, which I contend is more useful as a way of describing what it is that gives meaning to Outdoor Educators in their professional activity. The three dimensions more readily describe the understandings of Outdoor Educators. Broad links can be made between each of the Practice Model’s three dimensions and each of the three circles: outdoor activities resonate with adventure, personal and social development might draw on learning from experience, and environmental education can arise from being in and learning from the environment. However, other purposes, for example therapeutic ones, are not readily represented in the Purpose Model. It would ordinarily seem appropriate to introduce a new model as a finding of research activity organised around the three circles. Attempts to do so, suggesting an almost linear route from one model to another, belie the way in which research prompted ideas and suggested links between them. Therefore, I have chosen to introduce the new model at the outset, and use it as structure for organising the thesis.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Origins of Outdoor Education**

## **Origins of Outdoor Education**

Ideas of outdoor education can be traced historically. For example, Rousseau (1762), Baden-Powell (1908) and others viewed going outside and a return to nature as self-evidently good. Rousseau's *Emile* was not only returning to nature but his education was predicated on the experience of it. This concept was developed to the extent of not providing footwear or artificial light in the dark, or for teachers to do nothing more than help their pupils make discoveries. The overlap of experience of nature with matters of the personal and, perhaps, physical challenge has recurred often in what might be seen as outdoor education. The historian Barnard (1971:33) points out that Rousseau's attempt "to follow nature" would lead to many shortfalls in *Emile's* education as it "consists in what he can find out for himself; the teacher's work is merely to put the pupil on the way to make his discoveries and so to assist nature" (Barnard, 1971:35). The experiences so undergone were thought to be sufficient for an education, despite the full canon of learning not being available. Interestingly, this is an early example of the value placed on personal development and environmental education.

The Romantic movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been seen as a reaction against the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. The Romantics' privileged the notion of returning to the purity of nature, to beauty and to a dismissal of reason as a source of knowledge. The poetry of Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth and others reflected their ideas of the purity of nature and its antipathy to human 'progress'. For example, Blake writes of "England's pleasant pastures green" and

contrasts them with “dark Satanic mills”. These notions were not lost on later Outdoor Educators such as Mackenzie (1965), who quoted Browning to contrast traditional indoor education with the outdoors:

Shall I still sit beside,  
Their dry wells, with a white lip and filmed eye,  
While in the distance heaven is blue above,  
Mountains where deep the unsunned

Mackenzie continues: “Dry wells is a good description of schools in Britain and the pupils sitting around in them have parched mouths and filmed eyes”. Education out of doors and through direct experience was part of his compensation for what he saw as the poverty of traditional schooling.

An interest in ‘going back to nature’ among the antecedents of outdoor education included the Nature Study Movement of the late 1800s, and by 1873 the increasing awareness of natural history had led to the formation of 169 natural history societies and 104 field clubs across Britain, with an estimated membership of 50,000 (Hunt, 1989:21). Moreover, the study of nature for its own sake held the hope that something good would also be discovered that could not be found in industrialised society (Carlson, 2000:3). These antecedents of outdoor education were largely developed within a context of informal education. Of the formal education system, Ruskin (Barnard, 1971:149) was critical of it in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. His writing urged that schools must be located “in fresh country, amidst fresh air, and have great extents of land attached to them” (Barnard, 1971:149). For Ruskin, the notion of education was not as a means to an end but an end in itself. Barnard records that it is largely Ruskin’s influence that has led to the “development of...nature study, the

extension of playgrounds and playing fields” (Barnard, 1971:150). With this recognition, it can be seen that an extended notion of education was gaining currency beyond a narrow instrumentalism of learning the three ‘Rs’. This was part of the milieu that gave rise to the Scouts and later the Woodcraft Folk: that there was much to learn about and from nature that had been neglected.

Largely resulting from his experiences in the Boer War, Baden-Powell formed the view that adventurous outdoor experiences would better prepare boys for the uncertainties of life. In particular, among young scouts in the Boer War he noted their ability to cope with the rigours of war and ascribed it to the positive benefits of an outdoor life. In establishing the Boy Scouts in 1907, Baden-Powell set out to foster independence and leadership qualities. Part of the imperative was to develop a manliness that might help forestall the decline of Empire (Cooke, 1999:159). For the Scouts it seemed that an understanding of nature and the environment, gained through activities in the countryside, was an essential part of developing character. Integral to this were campcraft, hiking and nature study badges: all components of an outdoor life (Baden-Powell, 1908). Adventure was thus a key feature for the Boy Scouts. Their programmes included “adventure, challenge, a common purpose, comradeship and living together” (Loynes, 1990:45). For Baden-Powell (1908), a retreat from the activities of man would prepare Scouts to cope when they return to the artificial environment of man’s activities. In this sense, nature is seen as the educator: the provider of challenges to be overcome. For the Scouts, building rough-and-ready shelters and cooking on open fires were steps in a gaining experience of the natural environment. It also taught them to rely on fewer resources and cope without the

luxuries of modern society such that on returning from camp they could 'Be Prepared' (Scout motto) for the uncertainties of life. These sentiments were later echoed in the establishment of Camp Schools "where country life and environment have given children a new sense of well being" (Cooke, 1999:167). A different environment, especially when it is a natural or rural one, was invested with self-evident restorative and educative influences. An understanding of nature and the environment, through activities in the countryside, was an essential part of the programme to help boys to maturity. For the Scouts and the Woodcraft Folk, an element of the rationale behind the annual camp was that participants would be removed from their arguably less favourable surroundings to a more beneficial rural environment. There they would learn about themselves and their natural surroundings. The rural location offered fresh air and the opportunity for new healthy activities - a contrast to the human-made environment, which was by implication inferior and polluted mind and body. That both organisations held the natural environment in high regard is particularly interesting as they had different roots: the Scouts were and continue to be uniformed, while their organisation and badge system reflects their origins in a militaristic response by Baden-Powell to meet the demands of Empire. Conversely, the Woodcraft Folk were founded to be an anti-militaristic alternative to the Scouts, based on democratic principles, but engaging in outdoor activities. The significance of Scouts and Woodcraft Folk being founded on diverse principles, yet both finding the natural environment to be important, suggests it (the natural environment) to be central to a range of purposes only hinted at.



The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the state education sector aspire to make some provision for outdoor education. Thus, the 1918 Education Act permitted local authorities, councils whose responsibilities included provision of an education service, to provide, maintain or assist “holiday or school camps, especially for young persons attending continuation schools” (Barnard, 1971:232). Following this, the Board of Education promoted camping from at least 1920. The Chief Medical Officer at the Board credited Scouting with making a “triumphant contribution” to education and with being “the greatest demonstration in practical education that the world has seen, it trains men not for the classroom but for life” (Cooke, 1999:166). This practical education involved the direct experiences noted earlier and also the adventure of undertaking journeys in the countryside, of sleeping out in bivouacs and tents. Thus, an adventure element was embedded at an early stage in what was to become outdoor education. During the annual camp they would learn about themselves and their natural surroundings. The dissimilar environment of the rural location offered fresh air and the opportunity for new healthy activity. The Camps Act (1939) legislated for 50 permanent camps to be constructed, maintained and managed by a National Camps Corporation under the auspices of the Ministry of Health rather than the Board of Education. Lindsay (1944) referred to camp schools “where country life and environment have given children a new sense of well being” (in Cooke, 1999:167). After the war, a large number of camp schools were made available to local education authorities who used them to provide outdoor experiences that were intended to satisfy a variety of objectives, such as having time away from urban surroundings; modifying problem behaviour, or stimulating writing. These are similar ideas to those found in the Scouts and the Woodcraft Folk of going to the

country to experience a natural environment that seems to have been imbued with an ability to help pupils achieve things that they could not do in their familiar (urban, industrialised) environments. That such provision, hitherto only made by the voluntary sector, was being written into statute demonstrated either recognition of the shortfalls of the formal system of education or the added value that could be achieved through residential experience in a new space in the country. As Cooke states:

“The 1944 Education Act established a framework, by consolidating previous legislation and encouraging local education authorities to increase the use of the outdoors for educational purposes, that extended outdoor education within the statutory education system” (Cooke, 1999:157).

In doing so, the 1944 Act extended to the state sector that which was becoming established in the independent sector. The fact that provision for outdoor education in the state sector was enshrined in statute is indicative of how far the concept had been accepted for the mainstream.

Barker (1944) noted that the 1944 Act increased the powers of local education authorities already derived from the Acts of 1918 and 1921. The difference in the 1944 Act is that it became a duty for local education authorities to make provision for outdoor education (Cooke, 1999:161). However, as Halls (1997b) has pointed out, outdoor education is considered non-statutory and subject to political and economic pressures from local councils.

In 1950 Derbyshire local education authority opened the first year round residential outdoor centre, White Hall Centre for Open Country Pursuits, in the Peak District. Other developments were the establishment of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award

(1956) and growth in the Outward Bound movement. Cooke (1999:169) reports that even in the mainstream school curriculum “physical education lessons for boys increasingly included activities of a challenging nature”.

In Scotland, in 1959, the Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR) opened Glenmore Lodge on the edge of the Cairngorm Mountains. This became the national outdoor training centre administered by the CCPR (later the Scottish Council of Physical Recreation) on behalf of the Scottish Education Department. A number of local education authorities also established a residential provision for outdoor education during the 1960s and 1970s. Among these Edinburgh City Council established “perhaps the most comprehensive provision for outdoor education by any local education authority” (Hunt, 1989:33). The Council opened two residential outdoor centres in rural areas outside the Council’s area, established an urban outdoor education centre, and engaged a number of specialist staff to work in schools. Edinburgh schools also developed a ‘camp school’ tradition, in which classes spent a period of time with Edinburgh local authority employed camp school staff at residential centres in rural areas. Classes were linked to the curriculum and included elements of adventure as well as nature study and strategies to maximise the benefit of the residential experience. Among other education authorities, Strathclyde Regional Council (1981:4) directed that “Divisional education officers must designate persons who may be contacted for specialist advice”. These and other advisers organised themselves to form the Scottish Advisory Panel on Outdoor Education (SAPOE).

In 1971 the Scottish Education Department (SED) issued Circular no. 804 to “education authorities and other managers of schools” (SED, 1971:1). This circular acknowledges the growth of outdoor education at that stage and gives advice on “combining curricular, recreational and social experiences in a progressive programme of outdoor education” (SED, 1971:1). In addition, it recognised outdoor education provision was likely to continue to grow but was specific in not urging education authorities to commit resources to it at the expense of improving school education in other ways (SED, 1971:3).

Through this period a number of academic institutions made provisions for the formal study of outdoor education. Of particular note is the Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) at University College North Wales, where outdoor education eventually became a joint main subject; an Advanced Certificate in Outdoor Education at Charlotte Mason College, Ambleside; and a post graduate diploma in outdoor education at what has become Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh.

The effect of these developments was to stimulate discussion about the nature of outdoor education and its role in the curriculum. Strathclyde Regional Council (1976) directed that school visits during term time, albeit not necessarily for outdoor education, would not be permitted where they were to have a “major recreational content” (Strathclyde Regional Council, 1976:1). But in Standard Circular No. 505 (Strathclyde Regional Council, 1984) head teachers were informed that “for a trial period of 18 months, favourable consideration be given to applications for leave of

absence in respect of school ski groups for a period of up to one week during curriculum time”. Whether a ski trip is deemed to be outdoor education or not is not recorded. However, it is certainly an adventurous outdoor activity comparable with climbing or canoeing. This decision suggests recognition that at least some outdoor activities are educational and that engagement in skiing and other outdoor pursuits merit their being allocated school time.

For other exponents of outdoor education (for example, Hahn, 1938; the Dartington Conference - DES, 1975; Mortlock, 1984; Hunt, 1989; Hopkins & Putnam, 1993), the idea of going into nature - into rural environments and extending that idea to remote wilderness environments is a recurrent theme. Journeying, as it takes the student away from their immediate and familiar environments, can be the adventure.

## **Outdoor Education in Context**

Outdoor education might be thought of as a field of practice that includes extremes of purpose such as recreation and development training. Although ideas of outdoor education permeate the field it is nevertheless often considered distinct from that which may be thought of, for example, as recreation or development training (Rubens (1997: 10; Martin (1999)). . In some cases participation might be regarded as recreation (or entertainment) where further involvement in the activity is not expected. Alternatively initial participation might lead to recreation where an activity is taken up and pursued as a hobby. Elsewhere in the field outdoor education might engage students in an activity for possible future recreation but also for other purposes, such as enhancing self-esteem. A development training perspective engages students in an activity and, through a review process, might prompt the learning of lessons for life. An extreme version of development training might be seen as outdoor management development where a range of outdoor activities and team exercises are used in order that participants learn lessons that they can apply to their business. In suggesting this field of things that may constitute outdoor education, it seems that the intentionality of those delivering a programme is important in deciding whether that programme is considered as outdoor education. Throughout the field are entities that could be considered as outdoor education and, to some extent, exhibit the three dimensions of the Practice Model. Adventure, learning from experience and new space can all be identified. Specialist purposes of outdoor education are used to distinguish between what can be identified at different places in the field and are often thought of as different from outdoor education.

In Scotland, provision of opportunities throughout the field of outdoor education is made by independent commercial providers, the charitable sector and local authorities. The commercial sector is diverse and includes those engaged in ‘adventure tourism’ whereby, for example, a day’s activity of white water rafting or canyoning is available for all comers. This development is reflected in the promotion of tourist destinations for adventure and the appointment of a Professor of Adventure Tourism at Lochaber College University of the Highlands and Islands. Such an example puts adventure tourism in the recreational area of the field of outdoor education. However, depending on the intentions of the participants, the experience could be used for other purposes. Thus, the same activities might be used by a school group as part of the education provision made for them. Some commercial providers<sup>4</sup> focus most of their business on educational provision and, for example, run residential outdoor education programmes similar to those in the charitable or educational sectors.

The charitable sector includes a number of organisations that offer outdoor education programmes for a variety of purposes. Among others, ‘Fairbridge’ (Ruck, 1999) works with young people ‘at risk’ and, as part of a broader programme, includes expeditions using adventure activities. ‘Outward Bound’ operates a residential centre where a number of outdoor adventure programmes are offered, including those with the specific intention of supporting learning and raising achievement among

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<sup>4</sup> Examples are PGL, who operate the Dalguise Centre in Perthshire, and the independent Ardmay House in Argyll.

secondary school pupils (Christie, 2004). The Abernethy Trust has four residential centres, largely providing programmes that reflect those of the local authority sector and are used by schools and youth groups for a range of adventure activities ([www.abernethytrust.org.uk](http://www.abernethytrust.org.uk)).

Local authority outdoor education provision extends beyond the scope of residential centres and includes one-day activities and various outdoor learning opportunities that need not include adventure programmes. For outdoor adventure education, some local authorities maintain residential outdoor education centres that may or may not be staffed, day-centres, and countryside rangers; provision varies from local authority to local authority. Nevertheless, these facilities do not appear to have significance for the rest of the curriculum; they are merely available for schools to book should they choose. Provision also changes depending on the pressures the Council is facing at any given time. Halls (1997a), in reviewing outdoor education in the former Strathclyde Region, records the growth of residential centres run by both the education service and the community education service. The effect of local government re-organisation in 1996 led to the closure of a number of centres (Nicol, 1999). This reorganisation involved a change from two tiers of local government in which the top tier ran the education service. Broadly, the single-tier unitary authorities that were formed as a result of restructuring followed the boundaries and scale of the earlier second-tier district councils. Budgets of the new unitary authorities - the councils - were much smaller than the previous regional authorities from whom they took over education provision. Smaller budgets led to cost cutting, and a casualty of this was often the residential centre that was inherited from the



regional council. This led Halls to conclude that “for a service to survive, a local authority must be statutorily obliged to provide it” (Halls, 1997b:28). Nicol (1999) reported that up to a third of local authority residential outdoor education was lost as a consequence of local government reform. The current position is that staffed residential centres providing outdoor adventure programmes are now operated by Edinburgh Council at Benmore and Lagganlia; Glasgow Council at Blairvadach; Fife Council at Ardroy; and North Lanarkshire Council at Kilbowie. Between them, these local authority centres cannot provide for the demand from within their own council areas. Furthermore, as Halls (1997a) indicated was starting to happen in Strathclyde, financial support from councils has been much reduced so, generally, each centre has to charge more for its services, which in turn prompts users to consider options in the charitable and commercial sectors.

A number of communities of practice are fostered by variety of provision. Whereby a community of practice is characterised by a common interest in a field of activity or joint enterprise - but does not necessarily work towards a specific team-oriented task or is only part of a network of relationships, then even apparent competitors in a business sense can come together to participate in one or more overlapping communities of practice. In this way, each of the Scottish local authorities has nominated an individual who advises them on outdoor education matters and convenes with other nominated individuals to form the Scottish Advisory Panel on Outdoor Education (SAPOE). SAPOE also includes in its membership a number of retired individuals and others who they have seen fit to request to join them. The panel forms a particular community of practice who share good practice with each

other and are particularly concerned with providing advice, helping to safeguard health and safety in outdoor education, training staff and responding to consultative documents from government and elsewhere. SAPOE might be seen as a body of professionals. There is neither professional accreditation nor an identifiable body of knowledge that might be construed as outdoor education, so it is unlikely to be conceived as a professional body in the conventional sense. Nor does SAPOE have any statutory powers. As advisors in their authorities on outdoor education and safety standards SAPOE members approve out-of-council venues and providers of outdoor activities for 'their' schools. In this sense, they are buyers of outdoor education on behalf of schools and other users in their local authority, as well as being repositories of advice on good practice.

Despite the reduction in provision for Strathclyde since 1996, as reported by Halls (1997a), local government re-organisation was a growth opportunity for SAPOE. Instead of one member being nominated from each of the 12 regional councils, membership grew to exceed 32, one from each of the new unitary councils together with a number of retired members and other invited interested parties. While this would suggest that outdoor education could enter a growth phase, there is no evidence of it doing so. Smaller councils lack the economies of scale of the former regional councils. Some of the new members were drawn from council employees who already had other responsibilities. Hence, North Lanarkshire, Glasgow, and Edinburgh Councils appointed to SAPOE individuals who were heads of residential outdoor centres. Other councils appointed staff who might have an interest in

outdoor education but were primarily health and safety specialists or community education workers (Arrowsmith 2006).

The SAPOE community of practice illustrates Wenger's (1998) description of core and peripheral members, although he also describes membership as being informal and pervasive (Wenger, 1998:7). The Outdoor Educators with personal experience, who perhaps held jobs for that reason, became the core of the membership and the knowledge base of the community, while others joined at the periphery, bringing knowledge and understanding from other communities of practice that they were part of. This added to the knowledge base of the SAPOE community, as exemplified by understandings of risk assessment in a health and safety community of practice that could be brought into the outdoor education domain (Arrowsmith 2006).

A further example of overlapping communities of practice is illustrated by the presence of local authority representatives who are also heads of residential outdoor centres. Heads of centres have additional responsibility for maximising usage of their establishments, and in this role they could be seen as sellers of outdoor education and whose interests are not entirely the same as those of other SAPOE members who might be buyers. Heads of centres have their own membership organisation: the Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres (AHOEC). The interests of this community of practice overlap with SAPOE's interest in high quality outdoor education, but are also concerned with the management of an institution. The membership of these two groups illustrates Wenger's notion of the communities not necessarily working together on a particular project or task, but being drawn together

through a common interest and sharing of knowledge and understanding in order to improve their practice.

The Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL), a third community of practice, also illustrates this point. The IOL is a membership organisation open to all with an interest in outdoor learning, including members of SAPOE, AHOEC, and those Outdoor Educators who work for them. There are no distinctions in membership between those who work in adventure tourism or in local authority provisions. Membership may be scattered and overlap with other communities of practice, but the common area of interest bringing members together is outdoor learning. The IOL has embarked on efforts to professionalise the outdoor learning field by establishing a scheme to recognise competent providers of outdoor learning as Accredited Practitioners of the Institute of Outdoor Learning (APIOL). APIOL is intended for those in the field and is unlikely to replace academic or other qualifications; instead it recognises that holders deploy their knowledge and understanding appropriately to engender high quality outdoor learning. By this means, the IOL is positioning itself to become the professional body for those engaged in outdoor learning. Although it is not necessary for Outdoor Educators to gain APIOL, or to join IOL, as the status gains recognition it may become a standard for Outdoor Educators. The IOL is a charitable trust, it has no powers beyond its own affairs and it disseminates ideas and research through the publication of two journals: 'Horizons', which is intended to aid the professional development of practitioners, and the 'Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning', a peer reviewed journal aimed at proposing knowledge to the outdoor learning field (Allison and Richards, 2002:6).

Perhaps because of the preponderance of local authority advisers in SAPOE and AHOEC, but also because of an awareness that outdoor education is not a statutory provision and therefore needs to search for legitimacy, a number of efforts have been made to establish clear links with the school curriculum. The present context stems from a National Debate on Education in Scotland in 2002 (Curriculum Review Group, 2004), which resulted in the establishment of The Curriculum Review Group and their report *A Curriculum for Excellence*. Ministerial response to the report supported a focus on developing in young people four capacities: “to enable all young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors” (Curriculum Review Group, 2004). In order to do so, strategies include de-cluttering the curriculum - especially in primary schools; making learning active, challenging and enjoyable; and broadening the range of learning experiences for young people. The Curriculum Review Programme Board (2006) provides indications of the effects that this will have in schools. They include schools being able “to organise the outcomes and experiences differently” and “to give teachers more freedom to teach in innovative creative ways”. Although outdoor education is not mentioned specifically, sentiments such as these suggest schools will have more discretion and opportunity to include, or not to include, outdoor education, in their provision. The intention is to establish purposes and principles for the whole curriculum in Scotland throughout pre-school, primary and secondary schools.

*A Curriculum for Excellence (ACE)*, for which curriculum guidelines will be published in 2007, seeks to help pupils achieve on a broad front and acquire a full range of skills and abilities relevant to growing, living and working in the modern world. *ACE* has provided an opportunity for the *Outdoor Connections* development programme to draw clear links between outdoor education and the aims of education in Scotland. It uses the research reported by Rickinson *et al.*, (2004) to show how outdoor education can contribute to young people gaining all the capacities of *ACE*. The research programme sponsored by *Outdoor Connections* has prompted a growing understanding of the attitudes and approaches to outdoor education and of engagement with the natural heritage. The implication for outdoor education has yet to be seen, but there is an optimism that improved perceptions of the outdoor classroom will raise the standing of outdoor education. It will also increase awareness among educators of the provision available, especially through a Scottish Outdoor Education Festival in April 2007. *Outdoor Connections* (2005) states that *ACE* “... is concerned with meaningful progressive learning experiences... (and) requires a wide range of outdoor experiences”, thereby drawing an unequivocal link between *ACE* and outdoor education.

However, a lesson might also be learned from developments in England. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has published a manifesto, ‘Learning Outside the Classroom’ (DfES, 2006), intended to help raise achievement through an approach where learning outside is of prime importance. The manifesto invites support from organisations that sign up to it and undertake to implement seven actions in support of outdoor learning. The government has further supported the

manifesto with an allocation of £2 million: this is in distinct contrast to an earlier, similar, music manifesto, funded to £30 million. Perhaps this is an indication that despite some recognition of the value of outdoor education, its support remains muted. The manifesto considers outdoor learning as a way of developing the capacity to learn and advocates the value it adds to classroom learning. Outdoor Educators find agreement with statements such as these to the extent that AHOEC and IOL have pledged support for the manifesto

([www.teachernet.gov.uk/learningoutsidetheclassroom](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/learningoutsidetheclassroom) accessed 3rd February 2007).

However the manifesto broadens the understanding of outdoor learning to include the use of school grounds for “learning about energy and waste for example” (DfES, 2006:5). The local environment and places further afield, including residential centres, are also used to show how learning outside the classroom can be readily accessible.

Although the context is that learning outdoors may expand, it also seems that Outdoor Educators, in the sense of those engaged in outdoor adventure education, could find their provision challenged. Difficulties could arise from a lack of funding as well as from claims that there are more accessible and equally satisfactory alternatives, such as games and contrived team tasks on the school playing field. The manifesto draws attention to the value of residential experiences for learning outside the classroom and it may be this that provides a fillip for outdoor education. However, attention might be paid to the inclusion of Outdoor and Adventurous Activities (OAA) in the National Curriculum for Physical Education (NCPE) in England and Wales in the early 1990s. Mitchell (1992) welcomed the inclusion of OAA in the National

Curriculum as a way of safeguarding outdoor education. Among the reasons he advances for OAA's inclusion in the PE national curriculum are the opportunities for physical interaction with the environment, undertaking activity in a potentially hazardous environment and potential activity in the urban environment if facilitated by "plastic ski slopes, artificial climbing walls, inland water and locally-developed orienteering courses" (Mitchell, 1992:20). These reasons suggest a foundation for the way in which OAA was understood in the subsequent 14 years, by which time Stidder (2006) says it has been re-conceptualised as something using string, maps, blindfolds, adventure, challenges and "group problem-solving exercises in the gym or playing field" (Stidder, 2006). Mitchell's suggestion that the artificial environment is suitable for outdoor activities also demonstrates how they can be likened to physical activity in a gym. Given the identification of contact with the environment as part of a rationale for OAA, it might seem that the urban environment and the artificiality of the plastic ski slope and climbing wall would be a departure from outdoor education and not taken up in a significant way. Stidder (2006) also points out that OAA has been subject to continued marginalisation in the PE curriculum. This is indicative, perhaps, that apparently securing the place of outdoor education in a formal way has done little to enhance its provision. In contrast to Mitchell's (1992) view Rubens (1997: 57) found 'experts' in the field of outdoor education to be unhappy that Outdoor and Adventurous Activities were ensconced within the PE curriculum. Yet Outdoor Educators have been inadvertently complicit in contributing to an alignment of the two. Beedie, for example, has published widely in outdoor education journals and also in physical education journals, including writing about the benefits of urban outdoor education (Beedie, 1998; 2000). In the same way, Sharp (1994), Higgins



(1995) and Halls (1997a, b) might have contributed to an apparent association between outdoor education and physical education.

These things are problematic in shifting a focus from outdoor education conceived as incorporating adventure in a natural environment, to a goal that can be achieved in urban areas. Whether these things are incidental or not, outdoor and adventurous activities are now part of the national curriculum in England and Wales; however, teachers report a lack of confidence in teaching them (Stidder, 2006). It is noted, nevertheless, that the authors mentioned above have increasingly published in outdoor education journals as they have become available in more recent years. I made an informal survey of seven heads of residential outdoor education centres and found a preponderance of biologists and no physical education specialists. The significance of this in considering the context of outdoor education is that it gives rise to confusion in understandings of outdoor education and that making a link with physical education is too simplistic. Rather it suggests a lack of clarity in policy and thence in provision from there was a dearth of suitable means of dissemination of knowledge and ideas.

Halls (1997a) states that prior to local government reorganisation in 1996, the clientele of outdoor centres in Strathclyde was changing. When they were established, many residential outdoor education centres were providing programmes for secondary school pupils who would typically undertake courses that developed skills in outdoor activities. By 1989, almost all of Strathclyde's outdoor centres were being predominantly used by primary schools. Halls, appointed Strathclyde Regional

Outdoor Education Adviser in 1990, notes a change in the late 1980s and early 1990s from instruction of skills to personal and social development of primary pupils who found the “problem-solving games entertaining” (Halls, 1997b:23). This position continues to the present day when residential outdoor centres mainly run courses for primary schools (AHOEC Scotland, 2005). However, Halls’ comment also reflects a change in approach from an earlier view of outdoor education as learning and taking part in activities to learn the skills of the activity, to that which prevails today as having other purposes.

The broad spread of outdoor education interests, lack of consensus over time, and a number of communities of practice with slightly different perspectives contribute to a low profile of outdoor education. Hence, centres are closed because they are seen as non-essential to a council’s services.

While the added value of outdoor education is difficult to measure, Christie (2004:227) found that outdoor experiential learning raised a desire and commitment to learn among young people from North Lanarkshire. Outdoor experiential learning in this context is understood as using ideas of experiential learning, which I discuss on page 109, as a means of drawing learning from outdoor education. Christie (2004) reports on a policy of intervention in order to raise achievement in a council area. Pupils were selected to attend the programme based on a number of factors, including those who “they determine as underachievers” (Christie, 2004:66). The North Lanarkshire programme is one of a number proposed or introduced when it has been perceived that ‘something must be done’. Faced with failures in the education or

youth justice system, outdoor education is drawn on from time to time to be the ‘something’ that must be done. Thus ‘summer activities for 16-year-olds’ were introduced in England and Wales to help the transition from school to adulthood (DfEE, 2000). The low profile of outdoor education has thus been reinforced by it being utilised for particular purposes rather than being seen and incorporated as part of general education.

Despite an apparent interest in promoting outdoor education on the part of policy-makers, the decision to include an outdoor adventure experience in the curriculum lies with interested head teachers or their staff. My own professional experience in working with schools leads me to conclude that the schools’ practice of offering outdoor adventure experiences is dependent on whether the school staff want to do so and whether they are willing to attend with their pupils. This anecdotal experience is not prevalent everywhere. North Lanarkshire Council, for example, have a policy of all their primary age pupils attending Kilbowie Outdoor and Residential Education Centre at least once during their school career (Batchelor, 2005).

The acceptance of risk as part of the understanding of adventure means that health and safety issues have always been to the fore. Health and safety in outdoor education is represented in the Purpose Model as the backdrop of safe and professional practice. A high profile event in 1993, involving loss of life in Lyme Bay, England, led to the Young Person’s Safety (Activity Centres) Act (1995), which in turn led to the Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations (1996) and the establishment of the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) (Bailie,

2004). The regulations and the work of AALA are UK-wide, and health and safety is not a matter devolved to the Scottish parliament. The regulations require that providers of a defined range of adventure activities to young people in exchange for payment are inspected and licensed by AALA. Meeting the standards required for a licence is the responsibility of the provider, who then chooses how to demonstrate to the AALA inspector that standards are met. Many providers choose to use the coaching awards offered by the national governing bodies (NGB) of the activities with which they are concerned (Telfer, 2006). Coaching awards are often primarily concerned with teaching the skills of the activity. Inevitably, it is incumbent on the NGB and the instructor to ensure the safety of their students. Thus a route to employment in the field of outdoor education can be found through the gaining of NGB awards, unless employed in a local authority centre where there may be a requirement for academic or teaching qualifications. Conversely, those with an academic qualification may not find it easy to gain employment unless they hold the necessary NGB awards.

Introduction of a licensing regime for adventure activities, under the guidance of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), brought with it other things implemented by the HSE. Of these, the establishment by HSE of an Adventure Activities Industry Advisory Committee (AAIAC) gave those in the field of outdoor education an opportunity to offer expert advice and scrutiny to the AALA through the HSE. In due course, the HSE wound up the AAIAC but it was re-established under the sponsorship of SkillsActive and CCPR (Central Council for Physical Recreation) to continue as a source of specialist advice and comment for health and safety matters in

the outdoor 'industry'. However, it has no statutory powers. The AAIAC has a UK-wide perspective but, in order to provide a source of Scottish comment, a Scottish Adventure Activities Forum (SAAF) came into being. The safety framework so constructed is important in the provision of outdoor education because it reassures users that they do not need to rely on the assertions of Outdoor Educators that activities are 'safe': monitoring is in place. Part of the effect on providers of outdoor education is a suspicion that adventure activities are becoming less adventurous as Outdoor Educators not only reduce the perception of risk but also reduce the actual level of risk. This suspicion shows how risk is socially constructed in different ways. Among Outdoor Educators, as I will discuss, risk is seen as an essential part of adventure. In society at large, according to Furedi (1997), there is an ever-expanding preoccupation with risk and its corollary a "worship of safety" (Furedi, 1997:8). Furedi argues that part of the cause of increased risk aversion in society is the media attention given to a 'rare hazard' because it is thought more newsworthy than a common one. Similar things can be said of outdoor education. Although accidents are rare, they are nevertheless tragic for all concerned. The Lyme Bay incident that gave rise to licensing of adventure activities brought them into line with the few other 'industries' subject to government licensing, including the nuclear and explosives industries. The HSE's own survey of adventure activities post Lyme Bay found no cause for licensing. Bailie's (2007) figures support this by showing injuries and death through participation in adventure activities to be very small. However, the government decided otherwise, reflecting society's concern that safety was paramount: in Furedi's terms it is because of "the fear of taking risks and the transformation of safety into one of the main virtues of society" (Furedi, 1997:147).

Within these discourses of safety and risk in society, Outdoor Educators deliver programmes of adventure, enter into new spaces and seek to learn from the experience. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is some suspicion that notions of adventure have changed and perhaps become less adventurous. Bailie (2004) suggests adventure activities are part of the solution to the perceived problem of risk. Participation in adventure activities helps people to learn about risk and to manage it.

### **Cross Cultural Contexts**

Outdoor education in Scotland resonates with ideas of outdoor education in cultures that can trace roots to Hahn's work that gave rise to Outward Bound. For example "Australian outdoor education parallels ... developments in the UK or USA" (Brookes, 2002:413). However, other literature (Lugg and Martin, 2000; Lugg, 2001; Lugg and Slattery, 2003; Polley and Pickett, 2003; Stewart, 2004) suggests the development of an identifiably Australian approach to outdoor education. Cultural specific identities of outdoor education are developing in Canada (Potter and Henderson, 2004) and possibly Hong Kong (Beames and Brown, 2005). In researching outdoor environmental education Takano (2004) found clear distinctions between North American and UK programmes and concluded education needs to be culturally and locally appropriate therefore duplicating models from elsewhere was unlikely to be a sound approach. Further investigation of cross cultural manifestations of outdoor education is beyond the scope of this thesis and the indications described above suggest other research.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research**

## **Introduction**

The motivation behind this thesis is to deepen my own understanding of the significance and practice of outdoor education for my own professional practice as the director of a residential outdoor centre. The Outdoor Connections Research Programme (Nicol *et al.*, 2006) suggests that 200,000 to 300,000 outdoor learning days a year are undertaken in Scotland. Of these, Spence (2006) found residential providers of outdoor learning offered over 114,000 outdoor learning days in 2004-2005. A large proportion, nearly 50%, of outdoor learning is provided through residential centres. As a residential centre is the basis of my own professional practice, this leads me to research outdoor education as it is practiced in residential centres. The research seeks to reveal how Outdoor Educators' construct outdoor education in residential centres in Scotland.



## **A Social Constructionist Epistemology**

Outdoor education carries a range of meanings and taken-for-granted assumptions about its purpose and efficacy. These are often stated succinctly as being a concern with outdoor activities, personal and social development and environmental education. Outdoor education is an idea that has emerged and changed over time; the notion being constructed from the experiences, practices and negotiated or changing meanings of something that has been given the label or had a meaning of outdoor education attached to it. Historically, those who went outside for purposes linked with education may not have called nor constructed it as 'outdoor education'. Nevertheless, some of the values and meanings of these activities have attached themselves to contemporary outdoor education, at least in popular understandings and perhaps in professional practice. Thus, historical antecedents have relevance in understanding contemporary practice. For example, it appears that Baden-Powell's Scouts went outside in order to get closer to or to learn from the outdoor experience, and perhaps even to learn from nature (Baden-Powell, 1908).

Kurt Hahn (Miner, 1990), in founding 'Outward Bound', made provision for rich experiences in order that boys might be more able to survive the rigours of war. Clearly, ways of talking about what they were doing and why have changed over time. Whilst for the purposes of this thesis the term 'outdoor education' has been adopted as a common currency, concepts are contested and historically and socially situated. They change over time and over different fields of practice. My research starts from recognition that outdoor education is socially constructed and the

meanings and ideas attached to outdoor education are continually re-negotiated and re-constructed. So while 'character building' will tend not to be part of the construct of outdoor education in the present day, it was in the early days of Outward Bound.

The notion of character building is part of a wider discourse of outdoor education: such discourses as those surrounding personal and social development, the natural environment and of the nature of risk arguably play an important part in the overall social construction of outdoor education and are important in understanding the knowledge and ideas within the community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Also of relevance here are changing theories and changing discourses in the broader educational community and society at large about what counts as education and how the curriculum should be formulated. The relevance of changing social discourses and the renegotiation and reforming of ideas in the community of practice is indicative of the social construction of knowledge. Social construction "is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practice, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998:42).

A social constructionist approach builds on the work of Berger and Luckman (1966), who state in advancing their case for the social construction of reality, point out that "theoretical formulations of reality" do not include all that individuals will think or know of as real (Berger and Luckman, 1966:27). It follows that the common-sense knowledge of people's day to day lives is where their reality will be found, from

which understandings and meanings are made. Such knowledge is created through interactions between individual knowers, it is social and arises from the sharing and modifying of individual's knowledge, which will also be modified through social interaction. Schwandt (1994) argues that if we think the mind is active, then it follows that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. The emphasis is not on "the meaning-making activity of the individual mind but on the collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes" (Schwandt, 1994:127).

This resonates with Guba and Lincoln (1994:114), who say that "knowledge accumulates as varying constructions are brought into juxtaposition". In order for a juxtaposition to come about for understanding, and knowledge to be derived from it, the collective meaning-making will be brought to bear. The interactions and interplay of ideas by which people make meanings and construct knowledge might be said to be through discourse.

For MacLure (2003:5) "the discursive nature of reality is pretty much an open secret": there is an entanglement of discursive and real. The entanglement of socially constructed reality and the flow of ideas and ways of being that are legitimated through discourse contribute to changing social constructions of reality. MacLure describes discursive literacy as a way of 'reading' events and social situations as though they were a text containing understandings in addition to words, which contribute to knowledge and reality. In this way, the social construction of the nature of knowledge and of reality lends itself to thinking about communities of practice

socially constructing outdoor education. This supports the appropriateness of a social constructionist epistemology for researching outdoor education.

Berger and Luckmann (1966:74) use the interaction of two people to show how shared understandings become their shared constructs of the reality they inhabit. When there are only two individuals with a shared reality, their construction of knowledge can readily be changed through an agreement that may not be verbal. As more individuals enter the shared construct of reality, then an institutionalisation takes place, shared agreements take longer to change and the social construction of knowledge is more likely to have contested boundaries. The practice and therefore social construction of, for example, outdoor education has changed, but it has taken longer for it to become part of mainstream discourse. It has only done so through the social interaction and consequent changing perspectives that have led to outdoor education being constructed in the way it currently is.

The potential for social constructions to change leads to an adjustment in what is constructed as outdoor education. An example can be drawn from Mortlock (1984:47), who talks of introducing gorge-walking to outdoor education programmes. This was a new initiative in the 1970s and has become part of the staple of such programmes. The significance of this development was that it was a move to 'general adventure'. According to Mortlock, some said it was a move to "messaging about" (Mortlock, 1984:47). The activities offered by a residential outdoor education centre run by Mortlock had previously been consistent with other outdoor centres and included rock-climbing, mountain-walking, canoeing or caving. These might be

thought of as traditional outdoor pursuits, outdoor activities or adventure activities.

They arose through enthusiasts for those activities determining that they had learned and enjoyed a lot from the activities and that youngsters would benefit from similar opportunities. A move to something that was a general adventure, that did not necessarily require the development of practical skills in order to enter an exciting and challenging environment, was a change in perspective about what counted as outdoor education.

This was initially contested by parts of the community of practice (Mortlock, 1984) until the interplay of ideas forming discourses in the community of practice recognised it as an alternative to traditional outdoor pursuits. Thus the changing practice also modified ideas of what outdoor education was concerned with. The shift was from a focus on activities in the expectation that students would derive benefit to a student-centred approach that looked for an activity suited to the students. The significant change in practice is that gorge-walking requires participants to enter a challenging physical environment where the factors that help them in the activity are not knowledge and skills of the activity derived through practice under the tutelage of skilled exponents. More important is the assessing of danger, the determination to undertake the walk, and to help each other in doing so. This illustrates something of the importance attached to ideas of going outside and learning from nature.

However it is also a reflection of changing expectations among students attending a course and the apparent desire for a quick result. The adventure of a gorge walk does

not require a long and physically tiring walk to the top of a hill. Similarly, white-water rafting down rapids does not require a proficiency that can only be acquired through sustained effort were the journey undertaken by canoe. The stand-alone abseil from an artificial structure or small crag does not require the persistence and skill of rock climbing for which abseiling is a particular technique. Popular ideas have thus influenced discourse in the community of practice where changes are taking place in response to ideas beyond the community of practice.

A final clarification for the purposes of this research is a distinction in terminology between constructionism and constructivism. While Denzin and Lincoln (2005) use constructivism, Crotty (1998) prefers constructionism. The latter offers the distinction that constructivism relates to meaning-making by an individual, and whatever meanings they make is their sense of the world, or the object. Thus, it is beyond criticism as it is as valid as the meaning made by another individual. On the other hand, constructionism has its focus on “the collective generation of meaning as shaped by the conventions of language and other social processes” (Schwandt, 1994:127). The constructivism described by Piaget (1954) suggests knowledge of the world comes from the interaction of environment and subject. This takes no account of knowledge and meaning-making by other actors in the environment. Thus, what is true for one person constructing their meaning of the world remains true for them until they interpret their ongoing interactions with their environment in another way. In contrast, a socially-constructed reality derives from knowledge through constructivism changing as individual meanings change through being validated or challenged, and thence agreed through social interaction. This leads Gergen (1985)

to use the term ‘social constructionism’ to indicate that meanings are made through the interactions of people engaged in understanding their social environment. As neither other people nor the precursors to present day practice can be taken out of the outdoor education *milieu*, the notion of social constructionism is the epistemological stance taken in this thesis.

## **Community of Practice**

The work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) on the notion of a community of practice points to three characteristics of a community of practice, an informal network of practitioners. The network involves mutual engagement, a jointly negotiated enterprise and a shared repertoire. A feature of a community of practice is that it is loosely constituted: membership comprises those who are practicing in the field. Their networking is sufficiently intensive to allow the interplay of ideas and informally agreed changes to their knowledge-base and practice. Typically, the network will be used for workplace learning (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999:174). Integration with peers has been identified as the main source of informal and useful learning about how to 'do the job' (Wenger, 1998). It is concerned with practice related to the job and how to be somebody who does the job. Learning from peers was also found to be preferred to learning from supervisors or others in an organisation whose role might be expected to include teaching or training of others in the workforce (Boud and Middleton, 2003). Research using the concept of learning through informal networks "rendered learning visible" (Boud and Middleton, 2003:195) and suggested it as the principal way that workers found out what they needed to perform effectively.

Boud and Middleton's research was conducted among four disparate groups of workers and found similarities among them in using the community of practice for their workplace learning. It was this that was most useful in dealing with unusual, atypical events at work. The subjects drew on "knowledge embedded in the



workplace, drawing on both theoretical knowledge and direct experience of the work at hand” (Boud and Middleton, 2003:199). Thus, interaction with others leads to a better understanding of practice in the shared field of interest. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1999:186) said “the development of shared practices emerges as the participants make meaning of their joint enterprise and of themselves in relation to it”. Thus, knowledge, understanding and practice are all embedded in the community of practice. This has proved useful for my research in seeking to understand outdoor education because it identifies the participants in informal networks, the community of practice, as a source of knowledge about outdoor education. Not only will there be a flow of ideas into and out of the community of practice as well as within it, but also popular and theoretical discourses will influence and contribute to understandings held by the community of practice.

This interplay means that knowledge does not lie with the individual, although individuals share in the knowledge and are part of the interplay of ideas in the community. If an individual leaves the community of practice, the community continues and retains its knowledge and understanding. The focus on practice means a community of practice is distinguishable from teams established to complete a task or other networks, the focuses of which are likely to be a particular task or relationships. Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999:180) distinguish social networks that require quantity of interactions from a community of practice requiring quality of interactions. Quality relates to the detailed character of the contact, it is about practice. The quality leads to shared and re-negotiated understandings of practice. Wenger (1998:47) describes practice as social practice, and practice in a historical

and social context that gives structure and meaning to what is done. Engagement in this social practice comes about intentionally, or accidentally and casually, as practitioners find they are doing similar things and have shared interests. In many cases, the geographical proximity of individuals who find themselves networking with others who share similar interests helps in the formation and understanding of a community of practice. Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999:179) conceive the community of practice requiring “regular and mutually defining interaction”. Nevertheless, Boud and Middleton (2003) found dispersed communities of practice using the internet and other means of networking for informal learning.

Among Outdoor Educators, the community of practice can be seen as having a number of loci that are geographically close. A locus could be identified as a group of instructors working in a residential outdoor centre and forming their own community of practice. Other residential centres form their own loci. According to Wenger (1998), these will develop as more active communities whereas the dispersed nature of more remote communities will render them less active but still alive as a force and centre of knowledge. Networking from centre to centre is often aided through attendance at training courses, meetings of special interest groups and the relocation of staff as they pursue their careers. Among employers, this distribution of the network that might be viewed as a community of practice illustrates that it is not a team engaged in a particular task: it is an informal network engaged in similar practices.

The community of practice can be thought of as having a centre or core and a periphery (Wenger, 1998:100). Recent arrivals - those learning about the field - join on the periphery. As they become familiar with the community and the practice, they learn the behaviours and the language and acquire the knowledge and understanding to become more central in the community of practice. The centre is likely to be occupied by practitioners with longer service and, perhaps, deeper understandings of practice.

An alternative understanding of the nature of peripherality does not relate to relative positions of members in the community. Instead, it emphasises the peripherality of every member's role (Lee & Roth, 2003). If the body of knowledge does not lie with an individual, then all of the members participate with the circulating of knowledge and ideas. All are peripheral to knowledge in the community such that when any member leaves then the community of practice continues. In this sense 'core participants' are those with increasing levels of intensity and participation in the affairs of the community as opposed to being bastions of knowledge, skills and understanding. According to Lee and Roth, this "de-centres mastery and domination of others or situations in favour of a description that focuses on an increasing entanglement in the relations that constitute a community of practice" (Lee & Roth, 2003:4).

Whichever sense of core or periphery is more privileged, both point to conducting my research within a community of practice. If the first notion is held to be more valid then the meanings of experienced, more knowledgeable individuals at the core are

needed in order to deepen understanding. In that notion, peripheral, more recent members who are learning about outdoor education are an interface with other influences and will bring new ideas and skills that can be expected to contribute to changing discourses in the community. If the second notion is held to be more valid, and all members are peripheral, then representatives from across the membership should be sought. The informal nature of it means whoever participates in the community is part of it and their understandings are also part of it. Through their interaction, they develop understandings about what it means to be an Outdoor Educator and how to act in different circumstances. Thus, the community of practice constructs meanings and understandings of outdoor education. In the construction of meanings and understandings, the notion of social constructionism emerges as a way to understand how knowledge forms and reforms in the community. The constant interplay of ideas and practice, contributing to and potentially leading to changing understandings and practice, constitutes a circulation of ideas and understandings described as discourse. It is through discourses that a community of practice socially constructs knowledge and develops meanings and understandings. Ideas are also subsumed in the community of practice from outside the community. Discourses change as practitioners adopt new practices and the new practice and associated ideas become part of the discourses of the community. Learning can thus be understood as social and situated in the field of interest to the community of practice. The notion of a community of practice draws on a social constructionist epistemology and according to Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999) it offers a means of linking micro-level and macro-level analyses. The micro level characterises the process of negotiating shared goals and describes the practices that identify the community of practice. The

macro level describes a wider context that gives it meaning and distinctiveness. Therefore understandings and meanings of outdoor education arise within the community of practice and the opportunities it offers to investigate the research questions, lead to conducting the research in the community of practice.

My own role as part of the community of practice of residential Outdoor Educators in Scotland means that I have been, and continue to be, part of the social practice that constitutes residential outdoor education. In seeking to understand the meanings that Outdoor Educators hold of outdoor education, there is a tension in my contributing to the knowledge, understanding and meaning-making and the intention of seeking to understand the perspectives of others. I will address this issue when discussing the research methodology.

Researching within a community of practice prompts consideration of the notions of theory and practice, which have been discussed by a number of authors (Jarvis, 1999; Usher & Bryant, 1989; Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

Jarvis (1999) offers several explanations of the way in which theory might be understood:

1. Personal theory of practice (theory as knowledge): A practical knowledge including process and content
2. Theory of practice (theory as information): A combination of both integrated knowledge of the process and content knowledge - both become integrated into personal theory when they have been tried and found to work in practice.

3. Theory about practice (metatheory as information): Based in academic disciplines and making few claims of practicality
4. Theory of and about practice (knowledge learned but not tried out in practice): Learned cognitively from both forms of information (Jarvis, 1999:145)

These definitions are predicated upon an understanding of knowledge as something that can be learned, be found useful by a practitioner, and be deployed in practice.

While explanation three makes no claim to practicality, it nevertheless forms parts of discourse of outdoor education and has a capacity for permeating through literature, attendance at courses, and conversation into discourses of a community of practice.

While individuals may then use that knowledge to develop their own personal theories, each of those theories and the learning it represents is not in the sole charge of an individual: it is in the community and has been learned socially. The personal theory is 'personal' to the community, if an individual leaves the community the theory does not leave with them, it is retained by the community whence it was formed.

For Jarvis, theory is legitimated through being tested and adapted in practice. In a community of practice, notions of theory and practice could all be conceived of as circulating and contributing to the constantly changing body of knowledge and behaviours around which the community of practice coalesces. In so doing, the understandings and meanings as well as the body of knowledge held by the community of practice change and may alter the notion of what it is they are about: outdoor education for example. In developing arguments about theory and practice,

Carr & Kemmis (1986) articulate three views of the relationship between theory and practice:

1. theory is a course of principles to be applied to practice
2. practice is a matter of “professional judgement which can be developed as the wisdom of practitioners and policy makers is developed”.
3. theory and practice inform each other. Theory is developed and tested through practice. Practice is a risk enterprise that can never be completely justified through theoretical principles (Carr & Kemmis, 1986:45)

These views of theory and practice resonate with Jarvis’s (1999:149) argument that, “the old idea that theory should be applied to practice is barely tenable now”. For Jarvis, the idea of applying theory to practice indicated that scientific knowledge had become dominant in the west since the Enlightenment. This is the positivism dismissed by Carr & Kemmis (1986). If theory defined practice then the theoretician became the legitimator of the correct knowledge and had a much higher status than the practitioner who merely applied it (Baumann, 1987). In this understanding practitioners would be the interpreters rather than the legislators of knowledge. What practitioners do with their knowledge is an important part of the process. They must gain experience, but experience without critical analysis might be thought of as little more than anecdotal reminiscence: “interesting but unconnected traveller’s tales from the front line of experience” (Usher & Bryant, 1989 in Brookfield, 2001:75). Within a community of practice there is no determiner of legitimacy, no theoretician who offers a theoretical basis, no ‘mere’ practitioners who are guided by outside notions. In the centre of the community are likely to be more experienced, knowledgeable

members of the community. A porous periphery allows new entrants to the community. All of them are practitioners who are seeking to be more competent members of the community of practice, developing theory through interaction and practice.

Among the dichotomies of theory and practice might be an understanding that theory is to be sought after and understood for its own sake; that it is something more than an organised body of knowledge. Practice, in contrast, might be seen as habitual and self-evident. Within the complexities of both there is an opportunity to reach beyond the dichotomy (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Some theory will not withstand being used as a guide to practice; it will be modified, deepened and improved through analysis and active testing. A community of practice provides the opportunity to develop theory in practice through analysis and active testing. Learning that takes place within a community of practice is socially situated and can only be understood with reference to the knowledge, discourses and practices which reflect the interests of the particular community. Scott (2001:32) points out that “learning can be understood as social practice in which both the learner and the practice are transformed”. Theory and practice will thus be modified, deepened and improved as they inform each other. In this understanding, social meanings and ideas - discourses - are more influential than attempts to isolate theory and practice as conventionally understood, and apply one to another.



## **Theoretical Perspective**

Social constructionism in making meanings as well as developing knowledge and understanding between individuals, necessarily requires criticism of others' ideas and the remaking of meanings through discourse, which itself is part of the interplay of constructionism. Espousing this epistemological position, this way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know, leads me to a theoretical perspective that the social world, in fact all the ways in which we know the world, requires interpretation. The meanings that are constructed cannot be expected to be clear, transparent and freestanding to be examined and understood. The construction that arises from an interaction between people and an object is likely to have a number of facets, not all of which are visible at the same time.

As the researcher circles and engages with the construction from different angles, s/he too becomes part of the interplay that socially constructs the view of the object, possibly altering its socially constructed meanings. It follows that the meanings of the social construct can be subject to interpretation in order to understand what they mean and, in fact, what the construction is that has been given, say, a label of outdoor education. As an outdoor education practitioner, my own practice is a part of the discourse that influences the interpretation. The notion of the invisible researcher that might be aspired to is not a possibility, as my long involvement has brought me into contact with large parts of the social network of outdoor education in Scotland. The visibility of the researcher and act of research will alter the social construction of outdoor education practitioners. Thus, the social construction that is a finding of the

research could potentially be different from the social construction before the research.

Taking an interpretivist theoretical perspective means seeking to understand:

“... the meaning of experience, actions and events as they are interpreted through the eyes of particular participants, researchers ... and for a sensitivity to the complexities of behaviour and meaning in the contexts where they typically or naturally occur” (Henwood, 1996:27).

This interpretivist perspective draws on Weber’s (Schwandt, 1994:121) notion of *verstehen* - seeking understanding through interpretation in social science, which he contrasts with *erklären* - explaining. The latter seeks causal factors, whereas understanding would be more descriptive of research seeking to understand the social construction of outdoor education.

According to Schwandt (1994:118), an interpretivist theoretical stance has a particular meaning shaped by the intent of the user. In this case, the meaning is to interpret and to understand the meaning of what is socially constructed as outdoor education. The interpretivist position is particularly helpful because, as Schwandt goes on to say, it is a sensitising concept suggesting “directions along which to look” rather than “providing descriptions of what to see”. Interpretivist approaches are best seen not as models of what to do but rather as understandings that frame the research methodology (Schwandt, 1994:132). In this sense, an interpretivist approach is itself socially constructed as it arises from the interaction of human beings in creating understandings of how social constructions might be understood.

As a practitioner in the field, other practitioners among whom I might research would reasonably expect me to have my own interpretation of the meaning of outdoor education. Ordinarily, when a community of practice comes together, their interaction may lead to changing ideas and practices. All parties will interpret their meanings in various ways according to their engagement in dialogue. This brings some difficulty to an interpretive perspective in that the research will seek to interpret meanings of outdoor education as well as interpreting the effect of a practitioner researcher with known experience interacting with the field. Depending on the experience and confidence of Outdoor Educators in the field, they might try to say the 'right things' and to convey a positive image of themselves as professionals. This potential problem is compounded by my gaining access for research through personal contact with their line managers. This, together with my own role as the director of an outdoor centre, produces an imbalance of power that could affect what practitioners are prepared to contribute to the research and whether they feel they can sustain their own interpretations when they might not agree with what they might consider to be my perspective.

Schwandt uses Weber's notion of *verstehen* to point out that an interpretivist approach will seek to grasp, to understand the meaning of the actor's construction of their world (Schwandt, 1994:118) and is concerned with matters of knowing rather than the adoption of particular methods. Inquiry into an actor's shared ongoing flow of experience is helpful in this because it reinforces the social and changing experiences that an individual uses to construct their meaning of their life, which an interpretivist approach might be interested in. The interpretivist approach is therefore

rooted in the intention of the researcher in their interpretivist approach and cannot be explained through an examination of the methods used in the research.

The methods used for the research are not as important as the direction in which the research is looking. In adopting an interpretivist perspective, it follows that the meanings and understandings of the researcher and those taking part in the research are being interpreted. This continues to pose the problem identified above: that the researcher is present in both the research and the discourses of outdoor education and seeks to interpret the research subject's social construction of outdoor education without influencing this unduly, but to some extent it is inevitable. A constructionist epistemology posits that "knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind" and there is an emphasis on "the pluralistic and plastic character of reality – pluralistic in the sense that reality is expressible in a variety of symbol and language systems; plastic in the sense that reality is stretched and shaped to fit purposeful acts of intentional human agents" (Schwandt, 1994:125). Thus, an interpretivist perspective will seek to understand the knowledge that has been created and the variety of meanings - meanings that change.

The intentions of the researched Outdoor Educators are held to be relevant: "the intentions and the behaviour itself are socially, temporally, and culturally situated and constituted" (Schwandt, 1994:133); the behaviour or actions signal the intentions, so in interpreting the life world, both the intentions and the action(s) they give rise to are 'directions along which to look'. This resonates with a social constructionist

epistemology, where the whole of the construction of reality is through the meanings made through the interaction with the subject (outdoor education) and other people.

In adopting an interpretivist theoretical perspective, I am assuming the imperative of the interpretivist to achieve the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. In this case, it is the complex world that has been socially constructed as outdoor education, and the aim in answering the research questions using an interpretive perspective is not to locate the 'essence' of outdoor education in any absolute sense but to identify influential ideas, theories and practices in contemporary outdoor education (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:111). Although considered an approach rather than a method, interpretive researchers, "watch, listen, ask, record and examine" (Schwandt, 1994:119), and this will inform the strategy of enquiry.

## **Methodology**

In adopting a social constructionist epistemological position that knowledge and understanding have been constructed, the premise is also adopted that the elements that make up the construction can be identified; the knowledge and understanding can be brought into the open, and examined in order to understand them.

In order to expose elements of the social construction, the discourses of outdoor education will be explored. Notions of discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992; 1995; Gee, 1996, 1999) are found in linguistic studies. However Fairclough (2007, 2) has written of critical discourse analysis to include “the place of language in social relations of power and ideology”. Fairclough notes among claims for discourse analysis “that discourse has in many ways become a more salient and potent element of social life in the contemporary world, and that more general processes of current social change often seem to be initiated and driven by changes in discourse” (Fairclough, 2007: 2). According to MacLure (2003:20), the notion of discourse is difficult to define, but across different disciplines there is “a trace, a scent of a notion” as to what it is. Discourse constitutes the things that are said, written, understood and practiced about something. Discourse analysis of outdoor education will attempt to understand the socially-constructed meanings of outdoor education. The thesis will follow Gee (1999) in distinguishing between ‘Discourse’ (upper case ‘D’) and ‘discourse’ (lower case ‘d’). The former includes broader sociological conceptualisations. The latter owes its lineage to “more localised meanings...within linguistic approaches, where it is often synonymous with text, communication or

‘language in use’”. Undoubtedly ‘discourse’ analysis could be undertaken of outdoor education practitioners’ talk and written language to unearth the role of language in shaping the making of meaning in outdoor education. Such an approach draws on the work of Saussure (Marshall, 1998:514; MacLure, 2003:175) and the premise that language is potent in shaping thought and bringing order to reality. Social constructions of reality are revealed through the language used to describe and interpret them. Language is the means by which shared meanings are arrived at and interpretive understandings agreed.

For Foucault (1972:49), discursive construction in language not only indicates what is occurring, but also describes by the language in use, the “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972:49). According to Foucault, discourses do more than use language as signs to designate things. It is the ‘more’ that must be revealed and described. In ‘The Birth of the Clinic’ (1973), Foucault writes of the ‘gaze’ of the medical practitioner. The gaze has the ability to “hear a language as soon as it perceives a spectacle” (Foucault, 1973:108). This is indicative of an understanding of what is being said, or about to be said through the things that are visible, making the invisible visible. The notion of subjecting discourse to a ‘gaze’ is to look for meanings in what is said and done as part of outdoor education. The ‘gaze’ seeks to understand without making modifications. Thus, the discursive constructions which are in the different activities in both formal and informal approaches, and other features of the community of practice, will be the source of understanding of outdoor education. Discourses are constructed along a number of dimensions, in practice(s) as well as in language use. It is not enough to interrogate

the language of Outdoor Educators: what they do as outdoor education is integral to it and thus will be part of the research.

Foucault's contribution to thinking about discourse includes notions of power and its relationship with knowledge. For Foucault, knowledge is permeated with power and one is implied by the other (Zink and Burrows, 2006). Discourses hold knowledge about particular subjects or institutions, such as outdoor education. They create loosely bounded fields of how meanings and understandings of the field are constructed by those engaged in and constituting part of a discourse. Discourse, in referring to more than just language, is "saying (writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations" (Gee, 1996:127). This knowledge both frees participants in their practice arising from knowledge and limits their practice within the confines of the discourse.

MacLure (2003:176) says:

"discourses not only circumscribe what it is possible to say, know and do, but also establish what kind of person one is entitled/obliged to 'be'. It is impossible ... to speak without speaking as the kind of person who is invoked by one discourse or another."

The participant as part of the discourse is empowered within the discourse, but is also restricted by it. For Outdoor Educators as a community of practice, discourse could describe what they wear, their norms and expectations of behaviour, thereby conferring on them an identity as Outdoor Educators. It opens up possibilities of how they can behave and practise their profession at the same time as restricting them from, for example, behaving and dressing as gamekeepers. They could also be part of



a gamekeeping community of practice, enjoin a different discourse and be free to 'be', different from an Outdoor Educator, but restricted from being both at the same time, even though there might be overlaps in respective discourses. Those at the core are sometimes thought of as holding power and knowledge, reflecting their experience of the field and their influence over the prevalent discourses.

However, for Foucault, power exists only when it is put into action (Foucault, 1982). Foucault describes power as circulating at a micro level rather than being possessed, "its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning process and everyday lives" (Foucault, 1980:39). Power or knowledge so conceived does not necessarily reside with individuals holding responsible positions in a hierarchy. New entrants to the community of practice and to the outdoor education field are more likely to be leading adventure activities themselves and doing something they understand as outdoor education that might be different from notions held at the core.

In this, the notion of disciplinary power developed by Foucault offers a helpful understanding. Drawing on changes in disciplinary regimes in prison that sought to impose changes on prisoners' behaviour, to discipline them into new (socially acceptable) ways of behaving, Foucault notes a change of approach from one of imposition by force and authority to one of surveillance. The "codified power to punish turns into a disciplinary power to observe" (Foucault, 1984:213). Surveillance is said to have the effect of changing prisoners' behaviour because they are, or may

be, being watched. Changes of behaviour are no longer brought about through external imposition but by the self-disciplining of those under surveillance. It is no longer coercive but persuasive. The relevance of this is that the same ideas are said to be found in other social contexts. Power/knowledge as something that circulates in minute ways influences all the actors or participants in a setting and tends to discipline behaviours and understandings through the mechanism of discourse. New participants in a discourse will be disciplined into it through the power/knowledge circulating within it. The shared discourse of a community of practice will include power/knowledge circulating within it, including the core and the periphery. Shared discourse will allow 'membership' of the community, but will also manifest a resistance, prompted by the power/knowledge existing in the community of practice, as new entrants to the community are disciplined to the norms of the community. They will meet resistance from the core as they bring in new ideas and propose changes in discourse. Practitioners have power/knowledge to determine what is practised as outdoor education; the formal and informal actions of outdoor practitioners reveal their social construction of outdoor education discourse. The permeation of knowledge and power throughout discourse illustrates how interpretive understandings of outdoor education in the community of practice are an appropriate intention of this research.

While I do not intend to take a Foucauldian approach to my research, the insights offered by Foucault will be drawn on in helping to understand how the community of practice understands outdoor education.

## Research Method

The research inquires into the way that outdoor education is socially constructed by a community of practice. There are therefore two lines of investigation. The first is into how the community of practice socially constructs outdoor education and expresses it in the literature. This includes discourses that are popular and academic: those of outdoor education practitioners, and those of interested parties who might influence outdoor education. The second line of inquiry comprises field research in order to investigate the social construction in practice. The research is designed to answer the research questions repeated here:

1. What are professionals in the field of residential outdoor education doing that they understand as outdoor education?
2. How do their personal understandings resonate with those in the literature?

The first part, a review of the literature was undertaken to search for discursive themes that contribute to a social construction of outdoor education. In doing this the intention is not to undertake a literature review in the form of a “terminally boring recital or catalogue of previous studies (particularly dissertations) that reads like a ‘litany to the ancestors’” (Schwandt 1998:410). The literature review is intended as part of the research and adoption of an interpretive perspective. To this end, the literature was searched beyond academic sources to consider the contribution made to the social construction by authors writing from experience, to grey literature from overlapping parts of the community of practice and influential texts identified informally from within the community of practice. In this way, what practitioners

reveal about their practice and something about the theories that are attached to it will provide insights into discourses of outdoor education. Identified themes running through outdoor education literature would suggest a starting point for the series of semi-structured interviews and interview schedule that will comprise the field research.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Outdoor Education in the Literature**

## **Introduction**

The literature search was intended to elucidate how outdoor education is socially constructed in the literature. The literature investigated included academic texts, other books written by Outdoor Educators recounting their tales of outdoor education and exploring their own and others' ideas. Peer reviewed journals in the field, primarily the *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, but links to the *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education* were also perused. The main professional magazine, *Horizons*, formerly the *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership*, was delved into from 1990 onwards and earlier references to it were followed up. A grey literature of pamphlets and occasional publications from interested bodies, such as the *National Association of Headteachers* and the *Educational Institute of Scotland*, including some of their historical policy statements, were gathered and investigated, while the British Education Index and ERIC databases were searched electronically. Policy documents from the former Strathclyde Region, Edinburgh City Council and its predecessors and the Scottish Executive Education Department and its predecessors were also examined. The search of grey literature was not exhaustive as its purpose was to identify the main discourses: once similar themes were found to be recurring, they were deemed part of the main discourse and that line of inquiry stopped.

Outdoor education is simply educational activity in the outdoors. However, it is more than generic educational activity in the outdoors that might include outings for geographical or biological fieldwork. Indeed, it has traditionally been thought of as

engagement in outdoor activities that involve some degree of physical challenge and risk (Gair, 1997:2), and it includes environmental education. While this view is the predominant one, Parkin (1998) found 56% of respondents among Outdoor Educators whom he researched disagreed or strongly disagreed with the notion that outdoor education can only be implemented 'out-of-doors'. Examples of outdoor education occurring indoors included teaching skills such as map and compass work in readiness for activities outside. Outdoor education has often been conceptualised as an educational approach designed to meet educational objectives, without placing an emphasis on formal curricular objectives. This is underpinned by some of the statements made by interested bodies.

The National Association of Outdoor Education offered the following definition of outdoor education: "Outdoor education is a means of approaching educational objectives through guided direct experience in the environment using its resources as learning materials" (NAOE, 1970).

During the development of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)<sup>5</sup> in outdoor education, the consultancy body, Mainframe, defined the following central rationale: "The key purpose of outdoor education is to support individual development through the safe management of outdoor experiences which enable self-discovery, personal enrichment and an awareness of the outdoor environment" (Mainframe, 1990).

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<sup>5</sup> National Vocational Qualifications are so called in England and Wales, where they were developed before the equivalent awards were introduced in Scotland and called Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)

SAPOE (1999) say that outdoor education develops awareness of, and respect for, self, others and the environment which draws on the report of Dartington Conference (DES, 1975) I refer to on page 96. In order to formulate this summary, SAPOE use the Purpose Model to describe outdoor education.

Cumbria Local Education Authority defined outdoor education as:

“...the term to describe all learning, social development and the acquisition of skills associated with living and journeying in the outdoors. In addition to physical endeavour, it embraces environmental and ecological understanding. Outdoor education is not a subject but an integrated approach to learning; to decision making and the solution of problems ... (it) stimulates the development of self reliance, self discipline, judgement, responsibility, relationships and the capacity for sustained practical endeavours” (Cumbria Education Department, 1984).

Recurrent throughout these descriptions is a tendency to focus on the purpose for which outdoor education might be used, a feature noted by Higgins and Loynes (1996), that as part of the common ground “the educational intention is to stimulate personal and social development” (Higgins and Loynes, 1996:2). This is also the premise of Barrett and Greenaway (1995) in presenting a review of research to seek to understand how outdoor adventure could contribute to personal and social development. Hattie, Marsh, Neill and Richards (1997: 46) found that “enhancement of self-concept became the primary aim” during the 1970’s. The statement from NAOE leaves open a potentially wide range of purposes through guided experiences in the environment that in turn could include almost anything outdoors. Mainframe were concerned with a key purpose but indicated its achievement through outdoor experiences. SAPOE only illuminates the Purpose Model to the extent of saying what each of the headings in the three circles means. For SAPOE outdoor activities



include camping, cycling and similar pursuits; environmental education consists of learning about the natural world; while personal and social education arises from taking part in small groups. Of the sources cited, only Cumbria gave an indication of the practice by which the purposes might be achieved: "...associated with living and journeying in the outdoors" (Cumbria Education Department, 1984:1). These descriptions support a view that the practice of outdoor education is obscured by an imperative to say what it might achieve. The means of living and journeying in the outdoors included in Cumbria's statement resonates with an understanding of outdoor activities as a means of undertaking journeys. Adventurous outdoor activities lead to adventurous journeys. It seems that undertaking an adventurous journey in the natural environment is thought to lead to environmental education.

The Practice Model, however, posits environmental education as deriving from the experience of new space. Access to the new space is gained through undertaking an adventurous journey. If personal and social development is a purpose of outdoor education, then the purpose relies on experiences of outdoor activities and the outdoor environment. There is nothing else in descriptions or models of outdoor education that offers an understanding of what leads to personal and social development.

Therefore, the Practice Model posits 'learning from experience' as the third dimension of outdoor education.

The three dimensions of the Practice Model: adventure, learning from experience and new space, are considered separately in researching the literature of outdoor education. This separation is a heuristic device employed to illustrate the complexity

of the social construction of outdoor education. It will become clear in consideration of the three dimensions that their interrelationship prevents clear distinctions of all the issues surrounding them. However, it is also the case that sufficient separation is possible to inquire into the meanings and understandings attached to each dimension.

## **Adventure**

Barrett and Greenaway (1995) conducted a review of research into outdoor adventure with the intention of clarifying how outdoor adventure could contribute to personal and social development for young people. It was noted that “the claims of those working with young people in the outdoors can often sound overrated and nebulous due in part to the lack of clear evidence with which to persuade and convince” (Willis, 1995:1). The review would therefore help to fulfil the “need for well articulated and demonstrable arguments for such activities” (Willis, 1995:1). That the review was concerned with young people’s personal and social development reveals assumptions about the purposes that inform understandings of outdoor education/adventure. In writing this in the introduction to Barrett and Greenaway’s work, Willis reveals a continuing pre-occupation with justifying outdoor education through attempts to show how it fulfils possible purposes. The aim of this thesis is to understand the social construction of outdoor education in the community of practice of Outdoor Educators. In so doing, the inquiry concerns the nature of outdoor education before its ideas and practices are deployed for particular purposes.

Barrett and Greenaway state that their review is about research rather than practice. Despite this, they cite a number of accounts of practice in order to include “young people’s voices in research” (Barrett and Greenaway, 1995:15). The inclusion of accounts of practices leads to the inclusion of accounts of opinions expressed (for example Udall, 1991:18), theoretical works (for example Mortlock, 1984:3), and the conclusions Barrett and Greenaway draw from them. Interspersed with these are

accounts of systematic enquiry, many drawn from psychological studies, the findings of which are used to enhance understanding of the role of outdoor adventure in young people's development. Barrett and Greenaway's work is widely cited<sup>6</sup> and is seen as one of the few readily available collections of research in the field and accepted as a comprehensive review of the subject. It is significant that their work is so focussed on how personal and social development might be achieved and whether outdoor adventure could make a contribution to it. It is therefore misleading to think of their work as a review of *research* into outdoor adventure/education. They do include some indication of a research effort that might be construed as a systematic review of outdoor education. Moreover, they find weaknesses in UK research, which they say tends to be "isolated, inconclusive, over-ambitious, uncritical, not of a high standard and difficult to locate" (Barrett and Greenaway, 1995:53). Similar doubts about quality of research are expressed by Hattie, Marsh, Neill and Richards (1997). In conducting a meta-analysis of outdoor education research they found claims being made that were not supported by the research. They give the example of Ewert (1982) whose quantitative research "found no significant difference...but still claimed...positive change in self concept" (Hattie *et al.*, 1997: 62) and "the emphasis on positive findings and ignoring negative ones is disturbingly common" (page 49). This is ironic as in a separate paper Ewert (1987) says "the research literature ... in adventure education is weak" (page 3). Hattie *et al.*'s own paper seems to have adopted an objectivist epistemology. As a meta-analysis intended "to synthesize the findings across many studies", and their statistical analysis necessitating the collection data from quantitative studies supports this interpretation. In itself this

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<sup>6</sup>e.g. Cooper, 2004; Nichols, 2004; Collins, 1998; Stähler, 1998

might be contested as it may not be agreed that leadership, personality, 'adventuresomeness' and other 'qualities' lend themselves to measurement. Nonetheless Hattie *et al.* (1997) make some helpful observations about the nature of outdoor education as reported above and the quality of research. For example they pose a question about which parts of an adventure programme might lead to the claimed outcomes, if not the total experience and they identify claims that physical and mental effort on behalf of participants is a significant feature.

Barrett and Greenaway (1995) also found research from outwith the UK to be weakened by the little consideration paid to participants' own accounts and perspectives; the one-off nature of enquiries; assumptions that outcomes are brought about by the adventure content of outdoor education; a lack of being able to generalise from the findings; lack of research into failure of particular outdoor adventure experiences; and a gap between practice and research. Many studies are flawed by low questionnaire return rates, small sample sizes or an absence of suitable control groups (Barrett and Greenaway, 1995:53). In making these criticisms, Barrett and Greenaway reveal their own leanings towards a positivist research epistemology rather than valuing a growing understanding that an interpretivist perspective might bring. In conducting a review of the research and being critical of what they find, Barrett and Greenaway repeat many of the flaws they find elsewhere. While their review includes authors such as Dewey (1938) and Delamont (1980), from whose writings they find support for personal and social development through outdoor education, they hardly contribute to a review of research into outdoor education. Similar criticisms of published research were made by Hattie *et al* (1997: 49) who

found an “emphasis on positive findings and ignoring of negative evidence” to be disturbing and the research literature is in much need of improvement (Hattie *et al* 1997: 57).

Such approaches prompted Keighley to urge that Outdoor Educators use the existing research base to support claims for outdoor education that he saw as hitherto being founded “on spurious statements of belief, or on anecdotal evidence and aspirations” (Keighley, 1997:27). In making this statement, Keighley suggests practice ought to arise from theory and theory from research. This positivist approach adopted by Keighley had already been dismissed by Carr and Kemmis (1986), referred to earlier, and later described as “untenable” by Jarvis (1999:149). Representation of the theory-practice relationship as offered by Keighley is simplistic and does not allow for an understanding of practice giving rise to theory or for personal theories being tested in practice. A change that has taken place since Keighley’s article is that there are more qualitative studies being undertaken than were then available to him, or indeed to Barrett and Greenaway (1995). Qualitative studies may offer more insight into the beliefs of Outdoor Educators, anecdotes and assertions in contributing to the knowledge base of the community of practice. More research is now being reported in scholarly journals. Yet, the hopes and aspirations that continue to be reported in the literature do not withstand close scrutiny, as I will review later. Keighley used three categories of outdoor education to structure his comments on research: (a) personal development, (b) personal and social development and (c) environmental awareness. He acknowledges the Dartington Conference (DES, 1975), referred to in my introduction, in formulating the categories. But the categories lack clarity

because personal development is a stand-alone entity as well as being closely linked with social development in a way that suggests neither 'personal' nor 'social' can be independent of each other. Unfortunately, Keighley (1997) described and quoted from research but a reference list was not published. All of the accounts described by Keighley were focussed on changes displayed by students that were ascribed to their having taken part in an outdoor education programme. He cites Strutt (1964), Tosswill (1972) and Jickling (1977), among others, as examples of researchers seeking to measure changes in self-confidence or the influence of an Outward Bound course on personality. These and other reports of quantitative research have attempted to quantify the influence of outdoor education on the personal and social development of young people.

Many of the conclusions drawn from the early studies refer to measurement of parameters that might now be contested. For example, Keighley reports without comment Tosswill's (1964) research into the development of personality. There was an assumption that behaviours such as self-confidence, maturity and tolerance could be quantified and measured as indicators of personality change. Similarly, in Strutt's (1965) research it is reported that personality tests among girls found them to be, among other things, "more lively" as a result of outdoor education. Some course members became more "easy going". Keighley used these examples to urge Outdoor Educators to engage in more research in order to support their assertions with empirical research. However, the report of the above studies does not explain how such qualities were measured and assumes personality is a measurable concept. Much of the early work on outdoor education cited by Keighley was of its time, and

is unfortunately based on the spurious statements of belief, or on anecdotal evidence and aspirations that Keighley railed against.

Research has been reported that investigates the outcomes of outdoor education or the evaluation of outdoor education programmes. Some of this has involved the measuring of outcomes and changes engendered in participants. Clifford and Clifford (1967) found changes in self-concept before and after survival training. Yaffey (1992:32) explored “the proposition that outdoor pursuits are psychologically healthier than others”. Using a ‘Personal Orientation Inventory’ in the form of a commercially available self-administered questionnaire, he measured among his research subjects a number of characteristics said to be indicators of self-actualising tendencies. The research findings support the hypothesis that outdoor activity programmes serve as facilitators of personal growth in that the experience of outdoor adventure activities fosters and enhances self-actualisation. Yaffey (1992:34) went on to recognise that much of what is said of outdoor education was based on ‘gut-feelings’ and beliefs of practitioners: his research would help to provide an empirical basis for general assertions.

A later paper by Boniface (2000) seeks to provide insights as to how outdoor adventure activities provide opportunities for significant positive experiences. Boniface refers to anecdotal evidence that peak experiences can lead to new interests and change attitudes. Such experiences are described as “special moments of pure perception, uncontaminated thought and freedom to ‘Be’ that provide intense feelings of aliveness and occur spontaneously” (Boniface, 2000:55). She related these



experiences so described to Maslow's (1971) description of a peak experience as a moment of highest happiness and fulfilment (Boniface, 2000:58). Peak experiences can be achieved through peak adventure, which is one of the notions in Martin and Priest's 'Adventure Experience Paradigm' (Priest, 1990b). The paradigm is a conceptual model to view and explain ideas of adventure, and re-works the ideas of Mortlock (1984) in balancing competence in an activity with the risk arising from taking part in the activity. Peak adventure is identified as occurring mid-way between exploration and experimentation, and devastation and disaster.

Using the work of Csikszentmihalyi, Boniface draws links between the state of 'flow' and the Adventure Experience Paradigm. Flow is a state of experience that is engrossing and intrinsically rewarding (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), when people find feelings of enjoyment, well-being and personal competence. Boniface suggests flow can be attained through a balance between competence and perceived challenges of a situation when participating in adventure activities. She goes on to suggest that "it is through involvement in such activities that individuals can learn about themselves and develop in ways that have implications for their experience of everyday life" (Boniface, 2000:61). This assertion is drawn from flow being a motivational factor in participation in adventure activities. Although some participants may never experience flow, which is not acknowledged in Boniface's paper, so it is hard to see how it can generally be understood as motivating. There is no suggestion that as a result of experiencing flow, the aforementioned learning will necessarily take place. Boniface posits that for outdoor education it is peak adventure that provides opportunities for flow and personal growth. However, Priest (1990b:157-162), in

writing about his Adventure Experience Paradigm, does not refer to personal growth as being a goal. In linking flow with personal growth, Boniface continues the received wisdom of outdoor education: that it is, among other things, about personal growth. It may be that personal growth can be achieved through outdoor education, but making an assertion that it does so as a consequence of flow or peak adventure does little to examine the claim. Priest's point (1990b:159) is that participants may grow in astuteness about their own abilities in a situation. Astute individuals will correctly perceive the situational risks and their personal competence, and it is from increasing astuteness that Priest detects improvements in self-concept and socialisation. I make this point about the received wisdom and Boniface's move to assertion, apparently drawing on Priest's work, because an examination of the references she cites does not support the position that personal growth follows from flow. Yet, the paper suggests otherwise, adding support to Barrett and Greenaway's criticism of research on outdoor education.

In an effort to understand boys' experiences of outdoor education Davidson (2001) conducted qualitative research of their outdoor education out of school. In embarking on the research she pointed out that "increasing numbers of outdoor education programmes base the justification of their activities on their ability to increase elements of self concept" (Davidson, 2001:11). Davidson refers to research (Park, 1996; Anderson, 1988; Hill, 1978) that is for the most part unpublished. Published research, such as Davidson's (2001), which includes a description of methodology and reflexive observation about her role as a participant observer, is relatively scarce compared to other published works of ideas, descriptions, philosophies and

assertions. In conclusion, Davidson suggested that “The enhancement of self-concept is an admirable outcome of outdoor education, but technically its isolation and measurement is a dubious undertaking. Laying claim to it boxes us into the corner of having to prove it” (Davidson, 2001:18). In making this statement, Davidson goes on to suggest that the depth of understanding gained through qualitative research is more valuable than a positivistic approach to measuring outcomes. For her, the use of the idea of self-concept is less valuable than a notion of positive freedom propounded by Fromm (1942). Positive freedom is understood as whether or not an individual is actively participant in determining his or her life and that of society. This is an alternative articulation of ‘personal and social education’. Challenging adventure activities help individuals learn about “what it means to determine their lives and the lives of others” (Davidson, 2001:19). I identify later that willing participation in learning from experience is an important prerequisite for effective learning to be derived from the experience. Davidson’s work provides links here that where positive freedom in the sense of self determination can develop through adventure experiences, so an element of self-determination can lead to that adventurous educative experience in the first place.

Other researchers are interested in the effects of an outdoor education programme on participants. Neill & Dias (2001) report empirical research into the contribution an Outward Bound programme can make to the ‘psychological resilience’ of young adults. Of interest in their report is the identification of what they call a philosophy of ‘development-by-challenge’ that “provides an underlying justification for adventure education” (Neill and Dias, 2001:35). Having acknowledged that to be the

case, they accept, as does Davidson (2001), that outdoor education, outward bound<sup>7</sup>, and adventure education are virtually synonymous terms. A brief review of literature on psychological resilience led Neill and Dias to hypothesise that a challenging adventure education programme would enhance psychological resilience, and that growth in psychological resilience would be positively related to perceived social support during the programme. They then describe a quantitative psychological methodology used to determine changes in psychological resilience as a product of (i) an outdoor education programme and (ii) group support during the course of the programme. The research instruments used were a previously published psychometric resilience scale described in the paper and a social support measure developed and described by the authors. The research design included a control group and administration of the research instruments before (the resilience scale) and after (both instruments). The methodology appears to have been described fully and describes a piece of positivistic research. The results showed that psychological resilience was enhanced and that group support was an important element of the process. Thus the hypotheses of the research were found to be supported by the quantitative evidence gathered.

The discussion of the findings elaborates this and draws out ways in which the findings might inform practice among Outdoor Educators. They particularly point to the need for Outdoor Educators not only to be aware of the effect of negative

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<sup>7</sup> Outward Bound is a trade name of the Outward Bound Trust, an organisation that is a direct successor to Hahn's first Outward Bound School in Aberdovey, Wales. The term 'outward bound' is often used to describe programmes that include outdoor adventure activities, illustrating the hegemony accrued to ideas associated with one of the early proponents of outdoor education.

participants on the group but also how individuals are affected by negativity. While the discussion conveys a satisfaction with the findings and suggests a number of areas for further research, there is nevertheless a certain ambiguity. Perceived social support was found to have a positive effect on gain in resilience. Yet Neill and Dias point out that “the perceived support from the *least* supportive group member was the best predictor of growth in psychological resilience” (Neill and Dias, 2001:40, original emphasis). The particular finding that the support from the least supportive group member is a predictor of growth in resilience might lead to an alternative conclusion that little support is necessary for such growth.

Neill and Dias use the quoted statement to advance the view that Outdoor Educators need to be aware of the detrimental effects of negativity in order to enhance psychological resilience in participants. However, a contrary view could be that negativity in some participants brings more benefit to others, hence the ambiguity. Neither are the authors very clear about their finding of a lower resilience score among the 14 participants who did not complete the adventure programme for medical or personal reasons. Neill and Dias use this to suggest that resilience measures would be useful for screening participants who are at risk of dropping out due to a high level of challenge. They fail to relate the low scores to the medical or personal issues that prompted the dropping out. Dropping out might be due to personal circumstances as opposed to a score on a resilience measure, in which case simply advising new recruits to a programme of all that it entails might be sufficient. The terminology of psychological enhancement and group support suggest links with personal and social development to be a recurrent theme either explicitly, as in Neill

and Dias' work, or taken for granted, as shown earlier by Boniface. In contrast to positivist work seeking to measure outcomes of outdoor education programmes, other researchers report on interpretive approaches seeking understanding of the adventure experience.

Little (2002) conducted a research project among women to attempt to understand why they engaged in adventure activity. The research used in-depth interviews supported and extended by journal-keeping by the subjects. Little's sample interview questions included "What is adventure for you? What defines it? Are adventure and adventure recreation the same thing? Is adventure found in other elements of your life?" (2002:59). These questions bear some comparison with my own semi-structured interview questions about outdoor education. For the women interviewed, adventure was "pushing their skills in a new situation...To learn, to explore and to surprise themselves" (2002:61). Whilst risk was involved, it was managed through the learning of new skills or altering the adventure activity to match their ability. For those who "sought risk and adrenaline ... it was the uncertainty and testing nature of the activity that made it an adventure. Little found the women's comments a reminder that adventure is dynamic and linked to people's skills (2002:63). The women created and reshaped their own approach to adventure and its meanings to fit with their changing circumstances. The research showed that the notion of adventure for the women concerned was different from what they perceived as discourses that brought overtones of competitiveness, an expectation of physical challenge and elements of personal risk.

The significance of this for outdoor adventure education includes recognition that adventure is not the same for all people. If there are identifiable differences between adventure in Little's work and much of it in the literature, then one might expect identifiable differences between other groups of people or even between individuals within a group. This will make demands on Outdoor Educators seeking to provide adventure experiences. Offering a variety of provision will also be constrained by Loynes' (1996) notion of 'Adventure in a Bun', drawing on the work of Ritzer (1993). Loynes caricatures adventure as being safe and pre-packaged, ready for all comers. In the context of what Loynes identifies as a safety agenda and a climate of risk aversion, to endorse understandings of adventure that do not include elements of risk and still provide participants with a sense of adventure and perhaps the learning opportunities that arise from them, might be a positive development for Outdoor Educators. The sense of adventure may be understood as arising from an uncertainty of outcome and includes a degree of physical challenge. I have already discussed whether all outdoor activities merit consideration as adventure activities, or whether a natural environment is essential as Mortlock (1984) would claim. That adventure is not the same for everybody is articulated by Priest (1990b), who says adventures are personally specific (based on personal competence) and situationally specific (based on situational risks). Thus an adventure for one person at a given location and time might not be an adventure for another. For one person it might be sufficient to go for a walk in the country in order to understand it as an adventure experience. For another they may have to climb a mountain.

Little's findings are supported in research by Boniface (2006), who used in-depth interviews to explore the meanings of adventure for women who participated in adventure activities over a long period of time. Largely, Little's paper is about women's motivations for maintaining a high level of involvement in adventure education. The themes that emerged were the perceived value, importance and benefits of adventurous activities, experiences of fear, feelings of freedom, adventure insiders, the self, and relationships with others. Although Boniface cites Little (2002) as an example of growing interest in women's experiences of adventure, she does not use Little's findings to illuminate her own discussion. Boniface found that women emphasised the significance of adventure as affecting every part of their lives, while Little found that women defined adventure in broad terms that changed according to their circumstances. The former established that adventure gave a satisfaction of achievement from completing a mental or physical challenge, while the latter claimed that that adventure was not confined to a place but could include a state of mind – a mental challenge.

In this, both researchers are in agreement with Mortlock (1984) and Priest (1990b). Little was reminded from her research that adventure is dynamic and linked to people's skills, quoting one of her respondents "I train and I improve so that my skills reduce the actual risk of adventure" (Little, 2002:62). Boniface reported that several of the women identified feelings of fear when faced with challenges they were not sure they could overcome, which contradicts Little's finding that women adventurers would operate within their skills base. Boniface notes that her finding contrasts with



Lyng's (1990), that fear recedes as skills increase. This finding from Lyng is more closely associated with Little, who found women adventurers have ways of being in control of fear, such as by improving their skills. However, Boniface goes on to comment on apparently contradictory findings when she says "Decisions about whether to attempt a particular challenge appeared to relate to the degree of control predicted...They enjoyed working at the edge of their abilities, but their stories support the findings of Celsi *et al.*, (1993:17), that high risk adventurers: 'rarely go beyond the limits of their control, preferring to back down to jump or climb another day'" (Boniface, 2006:15). This appears to mean that the women adventurers retain control by either operating within their skills base or not undertaking an adventure.

An early response to fear seems to be avoidance or further practice and training. Boniface's earlier examples (Boniface, 2006:14) quote two participants who get scared and seek to control their fear but embark on the adventure anyway. The reported research has unearthed but not answered the question of whether women control risk through operating within their skill base (Little, 2002; Lyng, 1990), or whether they control their fear when operating at the limit of or beyond their known skill base (Celsi *et al.*, 1993). There is no suggestion that men behave any differently from women, only that the research focussed on women.

The significance of these observations for my thesis is that they support the view of Barrett and Greenaway (1995:53), that UK research relating to outdoor adventure is weak. Part of the problem is the blurring of distinction between professional and

academic publications. Prior to 2000 and the launch of the peer reviewed *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* there were no UK journals in the field. Practitioners and academic publishing was largely confined to a professional magazine or physical education publications. Conclusions arising from the research are helpful and can inform the field but must be critically considered before being used as the basis for future research. Part of the issue is that the research, as shown above, is not always evaluated carefully enough to resolve questions inherent in discussion of the outcomes.

So far as details of methodology are given in research reports, they would seem to pose few questions about validity. It is problematic for the field that new concepts are introduced without discussion. Thus, the outdoor education literature is replete with claims for personal and social development which are variously described. What is meant by personal and social development and which parts of it can be provided for through outdoor education, or which parts of outdoor education can address it, are seldom critically examined. Personal and social development is part of the contemporary lexicon of outdoor education and its taken-for-grantedness is shown by the many studies that focus on participant outcomes (Stott & Hall, 2003; Hattie, Marsh, Neill & Richards, 1997; Barrett and Greenaway, 1995). Thus, a discourse of personal and social development permeates both the research base as well as practice.

The Dartington Conference (DES, 1975) aims of outdoor education, repeated here, were heightening awareness of and foster respect for:

- Self: through the meeting of challenge;
- Others: through group experience and the sharing of decisions;
- The natural environment: through direct experience.

They reflect an apparent sense at the time that merely engaging in outdoor activities would achieve these and there is an underlying assumption that students will rise successfully to the challenge provided through outdoor activities and not fail to achieve an objective relating to their understanding of themselves, others or the environment. In fact, they could heighten self-awareness in a negative way and fail to engender self-respect. Furthermore, if that challenge has been encountered as part of a small group, it is conceivable that self-esteem will be further eroded as others achieve greater success. The heightened awareness and the fostering of respect for others that was stated as an aim of outdoor education may be realised if the group meets the challenge, performing successfully and working effectively as a group. At each of these junctures there is potential for failure to meet the aims but it is clear outdoor activities are seen as having a key role in fulfilling the purposes. The key role of outdoor adventure activities is a theme continued to the present day, evidenced in the establishment of the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) in 1995 and in papers such as Martin's (2004). Martin urges Outdoor Educators to continue to programme adventure activities but at the same time acknowledges there is a body of opinion among some environmentalists not to use wilderness locations for outdoor activity programmes.

The central role of adventure is a theme continued by various writers who refer to the adventure of taking part in outdoor activities as being a key part of outdoor education. Arising from a consultation at St George's House, Windsor Castle, the Hunt Report (1989), entitled 'In Search of Adventure', uses the term 'outdoor adventure' to coalesce many of the variations on the theme of outdoor education, indicating that the notion of adventure is integral to outdoor education. Of the range of outdoor activities that might be a part of outdoor education it is those that provide a physical challenge and that have uncertain outcomes that are typical. Hunt (1989:18) regards adventure as being associated with challenge:

“Uncertainty of outcome and a degree of hazard, and most importantly, the outcome should not be pre-determined; it should depend on the efforts, the judgement and the commitment of the participants themselves. All human activity is, in some sense, adventurous for the young, particularly when practised for the first time.”

Hopkins and Putnam (1993:7) in using the term adventure education as a catch-all for what is referred to in this thesis as 'outdoor education' describe adventure as:

“... an experience that involves uncertainty of outcome. An adventure can be of mind and spirit as much as a physical challenge. It normally involves us in adding something new, of moving beyond old experience in discovering the unknown and meeting the challenge of the unexpected” (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993:6).

They acknowledge these things can take place in a variety of creative activities or social situations but focus on classic adventure activities, such as rock-climbing. For them, adventure “focuses on the nature of the experience, it implies challenge coupled to uncertainty of outcome” (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993:7). Adventure education is a synthesis of the outdoors, adventure and education. Education is the

understanding articulated by R. S. Peters that involves taking part in a worthwhile activity and that the worthwhile activity “constantly throws light on, widens, and deepens one’s view of countless other things” (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993:7). They assert that this educational aspiration can readily be fulfilled through adventurous outdoor activities.

According to Mortlock:

“To adventure in the natural environment is consciously to take up a challenge that will demand the best of our capabilities – physically, mentally and emotionally. It is a state of mind that will initially accept unpleasant feelings of fear, uncertainty and discomfort, and the need for luck, because we instinctively know that, if we are successful, these will be counterbalanced by opposite feelings of exhilaration and joy. This journey with a degree of uncertainty in the ‘University of the Wilderness’ may be of any length in terms of distance or time; in any dimension – above, on or below ground or water” (Mortlock, 1984:19)

An instinct for adventure is identified by Mortlock as being inherent in human nature, a view supported by the National Children’s Bureau, who observe in children and young people “a fundamental need for new experiences” (Mortlock, 1984:51). The adventure need not be marked as an obviously high risk adventure, such as kayaking, but can include a variety of activities with simplicity of equipment, such as coastal traversing or gorge-walking, where there is an adventurous journey bringing the participant to new unusual places with the uncertainty of what is ahead. This adventurous instinct may be satisfied in some people by a low risk activity, such as walking or backpacking. If adventure is a state of mind, the walking journey can often include the fear and apprehension of whether a challenge can be overcome or the journey completed.

Mortlock draws a distinction between outdoor adventurous activity and the 'adventure' of a ride on a roller-coaster or similar. This type of adventure is "artificial as the performer takes no responsibility for their actions. The experience is virtually totally safe and reduces adventure to a cheap thrill" (Mortlock, 1984:50). He finds adventure such as backpacking, though less immediately exciting, to be more deserving of respect because it is "at least in the natural environment" (Mortlock, 1984:50). So, according to Mortlock, it is possible to have the wrong kind of adventure. Typically, in outdoor education the right sort of adventure includes outdoor activities that require some physical challenge and application of personal effort that is not thought to be found in something created by humans.

Discourses of adventure can thus be thought of as including personal physical challenge; a perception of risk - whether from the physical challenge or from uncertainty of outcome of the adventure activity; and being in a natural environment that might be so different from an urban environment and relatively untouched by human activity as to be a wilderness. Adventure requires a personal effort on behalf of the participant (Mortlock, 1984; Higgins and Loynes 1996; Hattie *et al.*, 1997). In locating adventure in a natural environment it is removed from many artefacts of human activity and their polluting tendency recognised by the Romantics and other antecedents of outdoor education.

Similar discourses can be found in North American ideas of adventure. Firstly, it is entered into voluntarily and of free choice; secondly, it must be an intrinsically motivating activity in and of its own merit; and thirdly, the outcome must be uncertain. The unpredictable nature of the adventure arises from the risk of loss that threatens the adventurer: “From moment to moment, no one can be fully sure that a loss will actually occur, hence the uncertainty creating adventure” (Priest, 1990:115). It is the presence of uncertainty in the experience that creates a challenge for the participant and changes a leisure experience to an adventure. The experienced kayaker on a pond is likely to be at leisure knowing he will not capsize. The novice kayaker in the same situation is not at leisure, they are having an adventure because they know they might capsize. These descriptions of outdoor education concur with Mortlock (1984), for whom a journey, however conceived, can lead to the ‘maturity’, personal and social, that is an objective of education. The journey itself is adventurous and is in a natural environment, illustrating overlap with other dimensions in the Practice Model of outdoor education. The journey is also a metaphor for other learning. If life can be seen as a journey with challenges to be overcome through planning, learning skills and personal effort, then lessons for life might be drawn from the short, challenging experiences of an adventurous journey.

The cluster of ideas linked with adventure identified in the outdoor education literature prompts consideration of what activities might be regarded as adventurous and included in an outdoor education programme. Personal physical challenge possibly linked to a perception of risk; uncertainty of outcome; being in a natural or similar environment that is different from a student’s normal environment; personal

effort; possibly doing something new in going beyond previous experience; are all notions associated with adventure. They inform a consideration of what counts as adventure for outdoor education purposes and what does not. The role of outdoor activities is to provide experiences from which students may derive personal and social development and environmental education. This has led Outdoor Educators to look to ideas about experiential education / learning to help them understand and enhance the learning opportunities for their students. This is predicated on the student being the focus of the learning activity; the intention is not usually to teach a body of knowledge. As Jarvis (2006:32) points out, it is “people who learn”. The Outdoor Educator selects appropriate experiences to allow the student to achieve the hoped for learning. I will discuss later the way in which experiential notions have been appropriated by Outdoor Educators. The experiences programmed will usually include ideas identified above as part of a discourse of adventure. This distinguishes some activities from others, demonstrating why it is more appropriate for the Practice Model to include the dimension of adventure rather than a circle of ‘outdoor activities’.

An example may be taken from golf, which is an outdoor activity. It is certainly outdoors and could be seen as experiential learning because people play their shot and then reflect on why it was or was not a good one. But both the experiential and adventure dimension include a sense of risk and personal challenge. It might be construed that there is risk in golf. There is a risk that the ball might not go on the green, or into the hole, giving rise to personal challenge and a risk of failure. However, risk and personal challenge construed in this sense do not include risk to



the person that is an element of adventure. Golf would not therefore be understood as adventure in a classic outdoor education sense and typically does not appear on outdoor education programmes. Experiential learning discourse includes an element of risk. Golf provides an experience that can be learned from, but the nature of the risk associated with adventure is different from the risk associated with golf. In a similar way, the nature of the experiential learning may also be different. In golf the purpose of experiential learning would be to refine the skills of golf. In adventure the purpose of the experiential learning would be to engage further with the uncertainty of outcome of the adventure, which contrasts with the learning of skills in order to reduce a golf score. Thus, experiential learning in golf and the nature of the risk associated with it, and the purpose for which that learning might be used, demonstrate what distinguishes some outdoor activities from other, adventurous outdoor pursuits that form part of outdoor education

Although golf would not normally be part of a discourse of outdoor adventure activities, the selection of activities for an outdoor education programme would be those that would fit into the understandings of the community of practice. The ideas attached to the notion of adventure are embedded in a journey which in itself is a metaphor for a journey through life or a learning journey (Gass & Priest, 1993). If adventure is about uncertainty of outcome, then a journey is about travelling without being sure of arrival.

Teaching skills in outdoor adventure activities is necessary to make the journey possible, the uncertainty of outcome as to where the journey will end, across a loch or down a river, is more uncertain because of the nature of the journey. The journey involves personal physical challenge and risk, and takes the student into a new environment. The skills also allow the student to assess risk and exercise informed choice, choosing their own challenge. If the journey is a canoe trip across a loch, students need to have the skills of paddling to make that journey and they have the adventure of small journeys round the bay to develop skills in order to embark on a bigger journey.

For those adventures where skills are not needed for the journey, then, as in the case of gorge-walking, the environment through which the journey goes is selected for its uniqueness and potential for personal challenge. Smaller journeys become of relatively small consequence, because the outcome is no longer uncertain: for an adventure experience, bigger journeys and other new environments are necessary. As skills develop, an awareness of one's personal ability develops; the destination of the journey, the end point, and the uncertainty of outcome need to be pushed further away in order for uncertainties to take place. Or the route to the destination needs to be made more difficult in order for the uncertainty of the outcome of the destination to take place. Hence, people start on easy ski runs and progress to harder ski runs then to moguls and off-piste; in the same way, people start paddling on a mill pond, progress to a loch and move on to an easy river, then a hard river and then to waterfalls.

At the Rocky Mountain Expeditionary Learning School<sup>8</sup>, the journey was educational in that all the planning was for the purpose of undertaking a journey. For the younger children, the uncertainty of outcome was going round the corner to the shops: the adventurous part might have been doing it by themselves and therefore the question could be asked whether they actually get to the shops at all and whether anything could happen en route that might cause an uncertainty of outcome of arriving at the journey's end.

In some senses the uncertainty of outcome revolves around the difficulty of the journey for the participant and whether or not they will complete that journey.

Adventure is therefore always in the journey as once the outcome has been arrived and destination achieved, then it is no longer an adventure. This thinking among Outdoor Educators draws on the view of early exponents of adventure activities. "It is the climbing, not the getting up that matters most in mountaineering" (Smyth, 1942:148). Thus, it follows that traditional outdoor activities such as hillwalking, canoeing and climbing, already discourses in a community of practice, conform to ideas of adventure.

The literature often associates the concept of wilderness<sup>9</sup> with adventure and with the issue of going into a new environment. Wilderness may constitute an aspect of the contribution that outdoor adventure activities can make to environmental education,

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<sup>8</sup> I visited the school in Denver, Colorado during a study tour in 1995.

<sup>9</sup> The idea of wilderness is contested, however it seems to be related to the perceived influence of human activity on a particular environment. The less human impact the greater the wilderness. However the notion can also be relative. To an urban dweller their environment has the impact of much human activity and in contrast a rural area, although often still the product of human activity, might appear to be a wilderness.

or a way of demonstrating how different and natural the environment should be for outdoor education, or be exploited for the purposes for which an outdoor education programme is being used. There may be a limit as to how much wilderness would be appropriate in outdoor education. In different outdoor education locations in Scotland there are those on the west coast that are more wild and remote than, say, Dumfries and Galloway: one may have more 'new environment value' than the other. Some outdoor education programmes run in urban areas and, although the concept of an adventurous journey may be realised, in such a place the concept of wilderness or of an experience of nature is less obvious. Thus different dimensions in the Practice Model of outdoor education have greater or less emphasis at different times.

The literature draws attention to changing meanings of adventure among those undertaking such experiences. While it reveals a broad consensus of understanding of what adventure is, the suggestion in Little's (2002:67) work is that adventure is dynamic "and can be created and reshaped to fit with their changing circumstances". If adventure experienced through outdoor activities is found to be dynamic, then in turn it could inform a dynamic view of outdoor education.

## **Learning from Experience**

In embracing the concepts of experiential education in the development of outdoor education the two have often been seen as synonymous. “...we learn from direct experience in the outdoors. It is this that has attracted outdoor education to that field of theoretical literature that falls under the banner of experiential education” (McWilliam, 2004:134).

Experiential learning is “learning by doing or experience” (Ford, 1980 in Adkins and Simmons, 2002:1). This sentiment recurs in Neill’s (2004) findings, that in experiential education the educator probably values direct experience more highly than abstract knowledge. Included amongst 40 statements that Neill reports from an internet search of experiential education are:

- Experiential education is a process through which a learner constructs knowledge
- Experiential education is learning by doing
- Experiential education is the process of actively engaging students in an experience that will have real consequences
- Experiential education is more involving – the learners are invited to participate
- Experiential education is a holistic approach, which incorporates physical activity while also providing social and emotional challenges

It has been noted that the first-hand experience afforded to participants through outdoor education is one of the more obvious features of the field (Wurdinger, 1997:1). Other authors (Adkins & Simmons, 2002:1) use the concept of

experience(s) in defining outdoor education as: “a means of curriculum extension and enrichment through outdoor experiences”; “an experiential process of learning by doing, which takes place primarily through exposure to the out-of-doors”.

Understanding engagement in outdoor adventure activities as a way of providing significant experiences led Outdoor Educators to embrace tenets of experiential learning as their approach to learning in the outdoors. Outdoor adventure activities are intended to achieve other purposes derived from the experience. It follows that Outdoor Educators look to notions of experiential learning to inform and develop the effectiveness of their practice.

Drawing on a number of sources, Wurdinger (1997:1) shows that an experiential approach to learning can be traced from Socrates: “experience is vital when it comes to claiming knowledge”; Plato, who “put forward the idea of young men learning virtue from taking part in risky activities” (Barnes, 2004:9), and Aristotle, who wrote “in our transactions with other men it is by acting in the face of danger and by developing the habit of feeling fear or confidence that some become brave men and others cowards” (Wurdinger, 1997:5). Action and risk-taking rather than ideas and abstract theorising were seen as being the route to education. Wurdinger goes further as he draws on the Greek philosophers, and states that “knowledge based on experience, the aim of moral education, and the importance of taking risks are at the heart of adventure education”, and these things “differentiate adventure education from other pedagogical methods” (Wurdinger, 1997:5). Examples such as these link

learning from experience to personal and social development and suggest experience as the main source of personal and social development.

According to Wurdinger (1997:xi), outdoor education's "learning process relies on Dewey's (1916, 1938) theory of experiential education". Dewey said "the belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely educative" (Dewey, 1938:25).

Approaches where learning was to be engendered through provision of experiences can be seen in the model for outdoor education derived from the ideas of Kurt Hahn the founder of Gordonstoun School in 1934 and subsequently Outward Bound Schools (1941), the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (1956) and the United World Colleges (1960) (Miner, 1990; Hopkins and Putnam, 1993). His statement that it is "culpable neglect not to impel every youngster into health-giving experiences", quoted in Hopkins & Putnam (1993:25), is a key to Hahn's philosophy, which was to compensate for what he saw as social declines: "the decline of fitness, the decline of initiative, the decline of memory, the decline of skill, the decline of self-discipline, the decline of compassion" (Richards, 1990:69). Compensation for these declines would be achieved through impelling young people into experience - experiences involving challenging outdoor expeditions. Thomas James (cited in Hopkins & Putnam, 1993:25) writes of this and says, "Hahn believed education should cultivate a passion for life and that this can be accomplished only through experience, a shared sense of moment in the journey towards an exciting goal". Hahn's approach was a directive one. Shortcomings in the education of young people were too important to

be left to the chance of young people discovering for themselves the things he thought they needed to know. The outdoor education programmes developed by Hahn did little to allow an exercise of choice; he determined his students would have challenging experiences. The articulation of this idea by his colleague Lawrence Holt as “less a training *for* the sea than *through* the sea, and so benefit all walks of life” (Miner, 1990:59 original emphases) described Hahn’s approach.

Brookes (2003) writes of neo-Hahnian (NH) ideas, by which he appears to mean ideas derived from Hahn, possibly adapted to take account of changing times, but still recognisable as having their roots in Hahn’s work. Neo-Hahnian approaches to adventure education are “exceptional for their persistence, seeming coherence and wide acceptance”. Brookes goes on to critique the notion of character building as a NH purpose of outdoor education. Using social psychological texts he points out that character as a concept often used in outdoor education is entirely illusory. Brookes suggests that terms such as ‘personal development’ might be used instead of ‘character building’ and where adventure is associated with outdoor education then the idea of character building is likely to persist (Brookes 2003:51).

Zweig (1981) is referred to as representing a view that adventure leads to personal transformation in the course of a testing journey, this may be what is understood as character building. For Brookes, if the argument for character building was sustainable, it would have to be based on an acceptance that personal traits (character) can be developed in an adventure situation and that those traits will persist in other, different situations. Brookes convincingly challenges these assumptions by showing



that character building is vague, appealing rather than convincing, and driven solely by a belief in its effectiveness. The character building approach does not have to work; it only has to be thought of as working for it to be popular. In suggesting a number of alternatives to character building as an underlying premise of outdoor education, Brookes includes the urge to “pay more attention to how outdoor experiences construct meaning and shape knowledge” (Brookes, 2003:60). In this closing statement, Brookes points to both the strength and weakness inherent in his argument. The strength is that ideas of character building, although anecdotally rejected by the outdoor education field, are rejected because it has gone out of popular fashion but it nevertheless has a lasting resonance primarily because, with the exception of Brookes (2003), the idea of character building has not been systematically challenged. Thus, character building principles can be identified in discourses of outdoor education, although they may be partially hidden by alternative rhetoric and programme variations. For example, the dominance of personal and social development and an inclination towards shorter periods of outdoor activity in a programme tend away from early notions of character building where perseverance was important. This was Hahn’s point about expeditions (Hahn, 1938:11). For Brookes, character building is concerned with personality traits such as determination, honesty, or willingness to accept a challenge. In contrast, personal growth or personal development is concerned with ideas of self-concept and personal effectiveness. If this is a goal of modern outdoor education, then Brookes’ case, though well made, is weakened because it has been superseded by changing discourse.

The wide variety of educational activities considered experiential illustrates the breadth of the experiential learning field and has been grouped by Weill and McGill (1989) into four 'villages'. Each of these 'villages' is a grouping of notions of experiential learning that have themes more in common with each other than those in adjacent 'villages'. Adjacent villages, while still said to be experiential, do not have such strong links between them. One village resonates with outdoor education: "It is concerned with personal growth and development and experiential learning approaches that increase self-awareness and group effectiveness" (Weill & McGill, 1989:3).

Weill and McGill show experiential learning to be diverse and, as a concept, to be somewhat open-ended. The same may be said of outdoor education: that its association with experiential learning does not clarify the practices and boundaries of outdoor education as much as one would like. The descriptions of experiential learning highlight a difficulty that also exists in outdoor education. The purposes ascribed to experiential learning are not unique to it. All education might be thought of as being about personal growth and development. That such a purpose is cited for experiential learning tells us nothing of experiential learning. Similarly, stating personal and social education as a purpose of outdoor education tells us little about outdoor education except, for example, when used as part of the Purpose Model which includes outdoor activities. Those things that are elements of outdoor education or that might be attached to the concept of outdoor education do not necessarily constitute outdoor education. Those things that might attach to experiential learning, such as assessing and accrediting learning from life and work,

do not give any insights into experiential learning; but they do serve to make the ‘invisible visible’, that is, they help participants to know what they have learned. The literature review was therefore focussed in order to identify something of the process of experiential learning that might aid an understanding of personal and social development through the experiences of outdoor adventure activities.

Saddington (2000) uses three philosophical roots of adult education (progressive, humanist and radical) from which to draw key values of each, and finds support for outdoor education within all three traditions, each of which place a high value on experience. In the first two, experience is seen as the source of knowledge, whereas in the third, experience is seen as a strategy for learning. In all three traditions their primary distinguishing feature is “the nature and purpose of reflection in the experiential learning process” (Saddington, 2000:5).

Although Saddington distinguishes between three perspectives, the three together resonate with practice in outdoor education, where knowledge need not be seen as ‘knowledge about’ so much as ‘knowledge of’. Knowledge gained through experience might be perceived as gaining knowledge of the environment the student is experiencing and knowledge of themselves and others with whom they share the experience. If knowledge can be gained through experience in this way, then the process of gaining the knowledge becomes the strategy for learning that Saddington finds in the progressive tradition. For Outdoor Educators, this becomes part of a discourse of learning from experience. Outdoor adventure activities provide an opportunity for experiences with clear outcomes from which things about the activity

may be learned. In doing so the student may learn from the means of learning and potentially apply it to future learning. Thus, while it can be argued that Saddington's distinctions form a useful starting point to think about experiential learning, their overlapping nature renders a simpler description of the theme more useful: experience as a source of learning. The source of learning are experiences from which knowledge can be constructed as well as a way of learning or constructing knowledge.

Personal growth through adventure (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993) is a commonly held perception of outdoor education and is in accordance with one of Weill and McGill's villages of experiential learning. Drawing from Saddington's analysis, the nature of experiential education, through problem solving, personal growth and empowerment (metaphors for the education process respectively from each of his three traditions, progressive, humanist and radical), (Saddington, 2000:3) can lend an understanding to the practice of outdoor education. Saddington's descriptions from his three traditions, of how an educated person is described as responsible, integrated and liberated, point to Weill and McGill's perspective of personal growth and development and experiential learning approaches that increase self-awareness and group effectiveness, from which an understanding of experiential learning may be used to inform an understanding of outdoor education. These three sets of authors, Weill and McGill, Hopkins and Putnam, and Saddington, facilitate a coalescence of support for learning from experience of outdoor adventure activities for personal and social development. This recurrent idea that experience leads to personal (and social) development is a fundamental part of the notions of experiential learning for Outdoor

Educators. The consensus among Outdoor Educators, (for example Hopkins and Putnam, 1993; Luckner and Nadler, 1997; McWilliam, 2004) is that experiential education is used as a means to achieve particular objectives, such as personal growth. This has led to the obfuscation of the distinction between objectives and methods. For example, undertaking an activity such as canoeing provides an experience and therefore might be thought of as personal and social development because it has provided an experiential learning opportunity through the pursuit of an outdoor adventure activity. However, it might not correlate with theoretical understandings of experiential learning, as I will show through discussion of the BCU (British Canoe Union) method. Despite the methods and objectives apparently being present, the purposes might not be achieved.

In leading an outdoor activity session, an Outdoor Educator is more inclined to use a traditional approach to education than an experiential one, despite the session being rich in new experiences. The British Canoe Union (BCU) in their coaching scheme support a traditional approach. The mnemonic 'IDEAS' is published to remind coaches that a lesson should comprise introduction, demonstration, explanation, activity, summary (BCU, 1989). Similarly, a traditional approach is espoused when it comes to the matter of safety. High-risk adventure activities are one of the main manifestations of outdoor education. In order to manage the risk and ensure safety, an Outdoor Educator will inevitably use a traditional educational approach to teaching adventure activities rather than allow students to find out by experience what is safe and what is dangerous. Typically, in an outdoor education programme, Outdoor Educators teach students skills such as how to tie a knot or how to paddle a

canoe in a straight line. They direct students to wear or use buoyancy aids. The focus of the session or programme can easily be that students learn the skills of adventure activities.

In outdoor education experience the outcomes of personal growth and environmental education might be understood as an outcome of outdoor adventure activities. All three are illustrated in the Purpose Model as constituents of outdoor education. But if, for example, learning about the environment or personal and social development has not occurred, the implication would be that outdoor education has not taken place. Nevertheless students will have been outside engaging in something thought to be outdoor education. Higgins and Sharp (2003:581) point out that outdoor educators will shift emphasis throughout the three circles as opportunities arise, but as with experiential education, the methods and objectives appear to have become so closely linked that they are thought of as being the same thing. However, a common idea in all notions of learning from experience is that its facilitation helps students to learn.

Examination of experiential learning will show the contribution learning from experience makes as a dimension of outdoor education beyond having an experience, and the achievement of objectives being expected as a logical consequence. A significant theme in experiential education discourse that is useful to Outdoor Educators includes the students being actively engaged. This may not be experiential learning whereby students might be expected to make original discoveries for themselves and therefore rediscover human knowledge. But it implies that through the activity they will learn something apposite to their education. The presence of a

facilitator and, typically, other group members with whom they share the experience leads to the social construction of their knowledge.

This resonates with Hahn's approach of structured courses and of a close involvement of staff and students (Miner, 1990). In traditional educational settings the pedagogic role of the teacher is instrumental in students' education. Experiential learning benefits from a facilitator in order that experiences from which useful learning can be derived are not lost. Wichman (not dated) points out that experience can also be 'non-educative' or even 'mis-educative'. The first does not promote the growth of further experience, the second limits the growth of further experience. Therefore, the Outdoor Educator must decide carefully what to include or, more importantly, omit from the programme. Thus Mortlock's (1984) misadventure has no place for educational as well as safety reasons.

The presence of a facilitator during the experience and in guiding the reflection and learning process arising from it conveys to the student the additional message that what they are engaged in is 'serious work' (Papert, 2001:85). Varied outdoor experiences may be thought of as a cluster that includes recreation and education: conveying a message about serious work as something from which learning can be derived facilitates the students' control of their own learning. Furthermore, play might constitute a learning experience. To distinguish play from something privileged as education is one of the intentions of the educator: the educator's purposes will guide the structure of the play and what is done during and after it. By guiding a student to an understanding of their own learning through an experiential

approach, the facilitator is helping the student to assume control of their own learning. This is expected to extend to other occasions and through different experiences. This continues part of the process noted by Paechter (2001a) of changing the understanding of what counts as learning. Paechter believes that we learn throughout our lives and in a variety of contexts, and argues that learning can be a “means of personal, even spiritual, fulfilment and social inclusion” (Paechter, 2001a:1). As such, it is no longer tied to certain locations and through specific methods. Experiential learning is a way of embracing such extended notions of learning.

The role of an Outdoor Educator is to facilitate learning from experience and to guide or constrain the first-hand experience to ensure that the experience and new environment are safe ones. Kolb’s (1984) work on reviewing and reflection is often cited by Outdoor Educators as a standard model of facilitation for helping students learn from their experiences and to make their own progression through Mortlock’s (1984) stages of adventure and to avoid stage four. Stage one being play, stage two: adventure, stage three: frontier adventure and stage four misadventure.

Hopkins and Putnam (1993:79) describe reflective learning cycles as the process by which experiential learning takes place and is practised in outdoor education.

Reference to and use of these learning cycles by Outdoor Educators helps them to claim educational legitimacy by adopting the theoretical underpinning of experiential education to describe what they do. The version of the model used by the Development Training Advisory Group (DTAG) (see below) summarises and



simplifies those of other writers. The review and learn components give cognisance to Dewey's view that if reflection does not take place, then it is a blind experience (cited in Wurdinger, 1997:11). This version of the model is used because it suggests the 'Do' phase of the cycle is an application of learning to a different activity, not merely the same 'Do' revisited. However DTAG do not include 'plan' as part of their cycle suggesting the learning that has taken place allows for the new knowledge, skills or understanding to be applied to new situations.

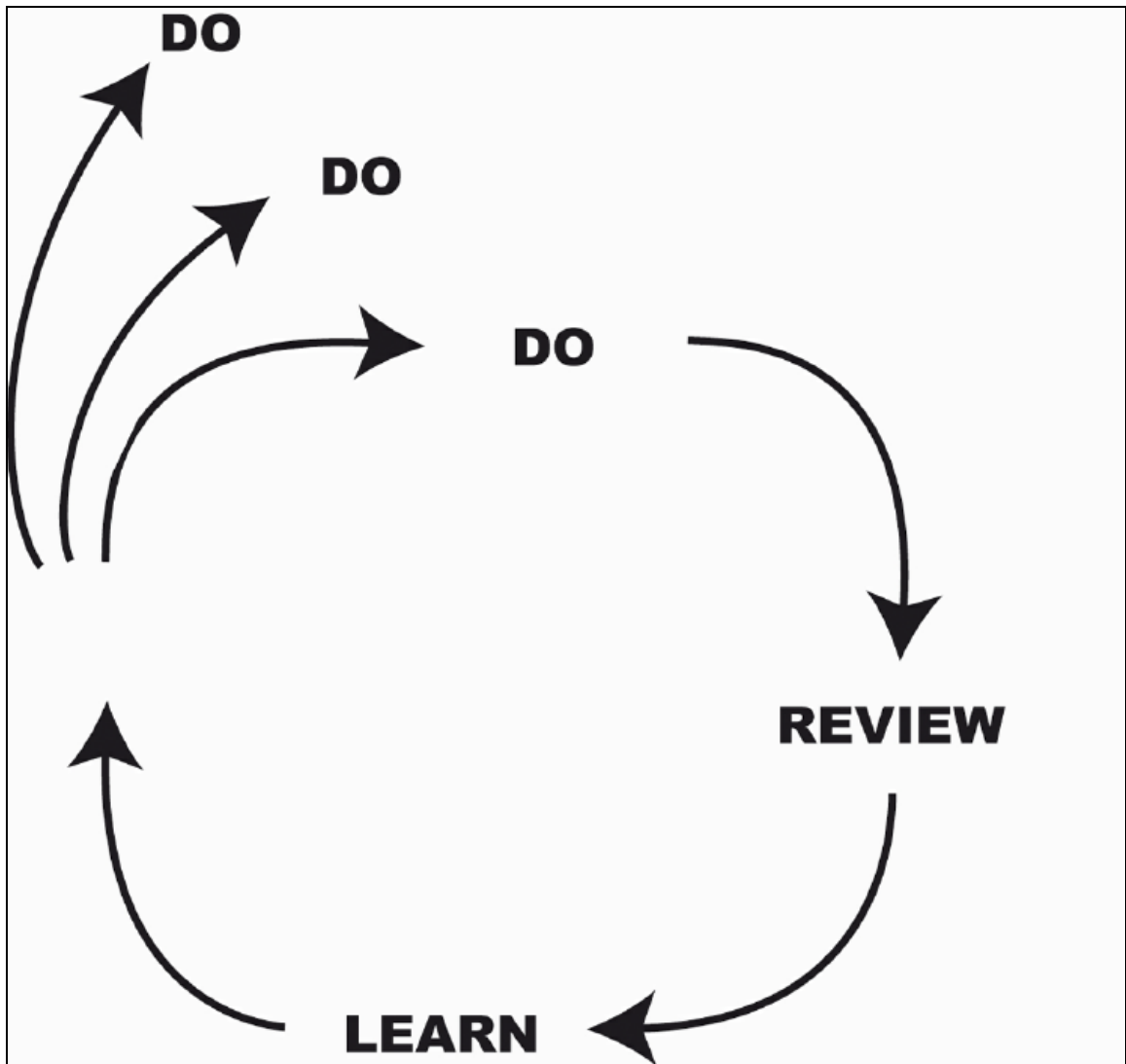


Figure 3: The DTAG model of experiential learning  
(Everard 1987)

McWilliam (2004) also refers to Kolb and develops his learning cycle to the double-loop learning described by Argyris - as tools used by Outdoor Educators in their efforts to provide genuinely educative experiences. Each of these experiential learning cycles have in common a period of reflection on an experience from which learning is drawn and then translated to a new situation or experience where the

learning is applied, from which the cycle continues. These cycles lean heavily on Dewey's (1916) suggestion, "that once we learn by doing we are also able to make connections between one learning experience and the next" (cited in Wurdinger, 1997:39). Luckner and Nadler (1992:3) support and develop this by saying that what experiential learning does best is to instil a sense of ownership over what is learned. This makes intuitive sense as the learning is drawn from a dramatic adventure experience undertaken by a student. The intention is that learning is guided by an instructor who does not tell the students anything but may report what they saw; as well as ask pertinent questions about what was happening and how the students were responding to it. Thus, any learning comes from within the student: it is theirs and owned by them as opposed to being given to them and, perhaps, treated more lightly.

The Association for Experiential Education (AEE) in the USA defines experiential education as "a process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill and value from direct experiences" (AEE, 2002:5). This definition is followed by 12 principles, including these three related to learning:

- Experiential learning occurs when carefully chosen experiences are supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis.
- The results of the learning are personal and form the basis for future experience and learning.
- Opportunities are nurtured for learners and educators to explore and examine their own values. (AEE, 2002:5)

This definition is similar to the statements listed by Neill (2004). The issue of personal growth is embedded in experiential learning, if that is the same thing or

close to the same thing as the learning being personal, and that it is a process or method of learning. This has implications for understanding the experiential learning context of outdoor education, which is rich in new experiences, such as rock-climbing, kayaking and so on, and can be understood as a field in which the tenets of experiential education are practised as a learning process for students.

However, there are undoubtedly elements of outdoor education practice that, while purporting to be under the broad umbrella of experiential learning, do not manifest elements understood to be features of experiential education, and it is not inevitable that provision of experience leads directly to learning. Wurdinger (1997) points out that many Outdoor Educators are concerned with teaching content - a feature of traditional education, and it is expected that the content will be assimilated and 'learned' as it is applied through action. Experiential learning propounds the contrary approach: an action or experience from which the effects are noted and reflected upon from which general concepts and principles are then elicited to generate a theory that may be applied to a new experience.

There is, however, a dichotomy within outdoor education. On the one hand, outdoor education is experiential learning; on the other, experiences are provided but the pedagogy is traditional. This relates to the purpose for which outdoor education is being deployed. If it is to teach skills, then there are times when learning by doing and experimenting might be appropriate, but there are other times when a didactic approach will be necessary. If the purpose is personal and social development, then the context of learning canoeing in a small group, whether or not through a didactic

approach, will provide experiential learning opportunities in personal and social development.

Other facets of experiential learning are significant at this juncture, together with the educational objectives of the outdoor education programme or session. The educational objectives of outdoor education are in the control of the Outdoor Educators or the teachers who arrange for students to attend the programme. From personal experience, these objectives may not be clearly articulated or necessarily agreed between the instructor and the visiting teacher. However, educational objectives, such as those promulgated by Higgins and Morgan (1999) relating to positive relationships between individuals and the environment, are unlikely to be fulfilled within the context of an outdoor education programme where the focus is on teaching content such as the skills of canoeing and climbing. Since personal growth, amongst other claimed purposes for outdoor education, would seem to come as a result of individual or group learning, then an experiential approach might lead to that taking place. A traditional approach would seem unlikely to do so because of the focus on skill development rather than on individual student needs. Teaching skills nevertheless has its place. The educational objectives are more likely to be achieved through the learning that takes place as the student acquires skills, i.e., the process of personal and social growth, or perhaps the self-actualisation described by Maslow (1962). In order for this to take place the explicit implementation of a learning cycle described earlier, perhaps facilitated by the Outdoor Educator, will be an essential part of the process. Experiential methods would be superimposed onto a traditional approach.

Wurdinger (1997:6; 1997:12) reports that Aristotle, Rousseau and Dewey propound the view that the student must choose to be engaged in experiential education: the motivation should come from within and the student willing to learn. It is easy to see outdoor adventure activities as being attractive to many young people and their choosing to participate. The motivation to learn a new enjoyable skill, albeit through a traditional pedagogy, could lead to the student achieving objectives such as gaining skills or doing something new and seemingly exciting. This provides part of a rationale for teaching such skills as they are often attractive and motivating. If the student has objectives, such as growth in self-confidence and development of social skills, even though their goals may not be articulated in that way or be very explicit, it is difficult to imagine them freely volunteering to take part in a personal and social development programme. However, they might participate if it were an adjunct to taking part in adventure activities. In some ways, personal and social development might partially comprise the hidden curriculum (Eisner, 1985) of the Outdoor Educator. If so, how that curriculum is delivered and how students engage in it experientially through the exercise of choice will rely on careful facilitation. Alternatively, they may not choose to engage in, for example, personal and social development, so may not, theoretically, be engaged in learning as part of an experiential education process.

The matter of whether the student has a genuine choice to participate needs to be examined at different levels. A number of outdoor education providers have adopted the notion 'challenge by choice' (Mason, 2004). In applying the concept of challenge

by choice to students engaged in adventure activities, the invitation to choose whether to participate is often at the point where they are most nervous or the danger seems greatest. This ability to choose is freely offered but does not take account of peer pressure or perhaps the undue encouragement of an instructor, or the threat to the student's self-esteem if they choose not to take part.

Writing in a different context, about Records of Achievement, Harrison (2001:158) posits that "Individuals are presented with a set of techniques which offer the promise of empowerment through choice". The notion of empowering individuals by giving them control over their own lives in the present and in the future is familiar to Outdoor Educators. Students discover through outdoor education that they can achieve things they previously thought impossible. Empowerment arises through the exercise of choice to undertake an adventure or not. Making a choice to engage experientially is a precursor to experiential learning: tacitly, it seems the learning will be enhanced and students empowered before, during and after the experience.

However, Harrison (2001:155) points out that the choice offered to students that would lead to their empowerment through holding a Record of Achievement is seen as a false choice that the (then) DfEE would like to impose in the guise that it would lead individuals to take charge of their own learning. Conversely, students view the process as being "less concerned with their own development and more with the bureaucratic" (Harrison, 2001:155) tendencies of those in power. The choices have to be genuine and the students genuinely able to exercise self-determination as the route to empowerment. Mason (2004) asks whether the choices a student might make are circumscribed by the needs of the organisation, the general aims of the

programme or the goals a teacher or Outdoor Educator may have for their students. Practical and organisational considerations can often eclipse the reality or even the perception that choice exists. In developing the Practice Model of outdoor education, this illuminated what it means to 'learn from experience'. Discourses in the literature predicate students' exercise of choice in participation. The choice may be to take part in an activity or it may be to take part in reflecting on the experience of the activity.

Lenartowicz (2004) recognises the tension between the two points of view, 'challenge by choice' and 'impelling into experience'. In at least partially overcoming this tension, Lenartowicz urges the development of good relationships between peers in a group and the Outdoor Educator facilitating or instructing the group, pointing out that relationships are at the centre of outdoor work (Lenartowicz, 2004:46). The conundrum for an Outdoor Educator is how those relationships are established in the first place, as this can have consequences for the planning of outdoor education programmes. Experiences may be offered early in a programme in order to build relationships through informed choice and shared experiences, before progressing to more challenging activities where the choice to participate can be more freely made. Philosophically, even this approach could be seen as a manipulation of an individual's power to genuinely choose, but it is a pragmatic solution to the tension. Where outdoor education is combined with a residential situation the detachment and continuity arising from being residential together with outdoor education experiences provide for the quality shared experience, as described below, that can give rise to good relationships. Detachment from the familiarity of daily life, as well as the continuity of experience during the period of residence, were found by Fleming



(1998) to be important benefits of residential learning. This is significant when a traditional view of outdoor education is that it often takes place at a residential centre (Higgins and Sharp, 2003:581).

For Wurdinger (1997:12), the imperative of learning from experience points to the need for a 'quality experience', from which learning can be applied to other areas of life. Adventure activities can provide quality experiences when carefully led. It has been noted earlier that of Mortlock's (1984) four stages of adventure, misadventure is a stage that ought not to be part of outdoor education. From misadventure learning may take place, but not necessarily of the order one would expect for personal and social development. It can be more readily imagined that a student would learn not to take a part in that adventure activity again.

How one understands a good quality experience involves a value judgement.

Outdoor Educators would understand that it involves outdoor adventure activities (Higgins & Morgan, 1999) where self-reliance is required (DES, 1975); a physical journey however constructed (Mortlock, 1984); close contact with the environment (Cooper 1998); and adventure – uncertainty of outcome (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993:6). The adventure is likely to involve personal challenge or risk (Miles & Priest, 1990). For some, the quality experience may include art and drama (Barnes & Sharp, 2004:3). The quality of the experience is important both in building relationships and in inviting a student to make a choice to participate in the experience. An outdoor education student enters a process of actively engaging in what they are doing and this engagement will manifest in all three dimensions of the

Practice Model of outdoor education. The skill of the Outdoor Educator is to share the experience and facilitate the process so that the active engagement extends beyond a traditional approach of teaching adventure skills and towards a reflective process to consider what the student is learning through the outdoor education programme. For an experiential learner to be engaged, they must exercise a choice to participate in this way. In this sense the experiential nature of outdoor education complements not only the traditional educational approach in schools but also the traditional approach to teaching skills of adventure activities.

The social construction of the new space in which the students find themselves requires some social participation in the construction. Through adventure activities, real consequences are part of the outcome of the experiential learning process, whether it is canoeing in a straight line or falling in the water. The active involvement of the student in the outdoor education experience is inevitable; they cannot be uninvolved when they are in the new environment of a canoe. Whether they are involved in the personal and social development that may arise from the experience cannot be taken for granted; the knowledge the learner constructs through outdoor education may or may not correspond to the aims of the programme, but they will construct some knowledge, even if it is negative towards outdoor education programmes.

In critically analysing outdoor experiential learning as it is largely practiced in the UK, Loynes (2002) contrasts an algorithmic paradigm with a generative paradigm. Loynes' contrast between his two proposed paradigms is helpful in formulating the

dimensions of the Practice Model of outdoor education. The algorithmic paradigm is typified by words used to describe it that may include: “programming, processing, framing, funnelling, front loading, sequencing, cycles, outcomes, task, leader and team” (Loynes, 2002:114). The suggestion is that adoption of the algorithmic approach for outdoor experiential learning follows a positivist viewpoint in that a prescribed input will naturally lead to an expected output; hence, the use of the descriptor ‘algorithm’ to suggest a step-by-step procedure to solve a problem, or to construct a new variable from a set of other variables. Loynes argues that this approach brings with it a number of problems that challenge the use of experiential learning approaches. Conversely, a generative paradigm is fundamentally different in that it does “not treat people as predictable phenomena” (Loynes, 2002:116), nor is the experience an ‘off the shelf’ package that can deliver predetermined benefits to the customer. Loynes goes so far as to say “that an “off-the-shelf approach to outdoor experiential learning cannot be properly described as experiential” (Loynes, 2002:117).

Loynes identifies the role of the facilitator as important but different in each of the paradigms. In the generative paradigm the role is one of journeying with the student, suggesting subjective metaphors from which new ideas or ways of thinking may derive, rather than being ahead of the student and leading along predetermined paths. The contrast this suggests in the facilitator’s role appears to distinguish between contemporary and traditional approaches but is really a commentary on the skill of the facilitator. In outdoor experiential programmes for management development particular objectives are held and the facilitator will behave accordingly. In outdoor

education where the programme will often include purposes associated with personal and social development the facilitator will also behave accordingly but differently. In both examples, a skilled facilitator will shift their approach in response to the situation, influenced by the student's relationship with their objectives and their intra- and inter-personal relationships. The skill and role of the facilitator lies in the appropriateness of their facilitation and might require them to change paradigms according to their students' needs.

Published research also points to the importance of the role of the facilitator in helping students learn from experience. Hovelynck (2001b) examined the largely tacit knowledge that is used by facilitators in their professional practice. This is described as the facilitation of experiential learning and, while the reported issues relate to experiential learning in general, the inquiry was carried out with Outward Bound workers and the understanding gained was applied to outdoor programmes. Primarily, this acknowledged that the relationships that foster learning through outdoor education are of more importance than the experiential learning mode or paradigm, if it is understood as the application of a series of "'tools' and 'techniques'" (Hovelynck 2001b:56). To regard learning from experience as the application of an experiential learning cycle and to focus on what methods to apply misses, according to Hovelynck, the key part of facilitating experiential learning. The essential part of the process is largely a matter of noticing events. It is a truism in learning from experience through outdoor adventure education that the experience can dominate the senses of the student to the extent that they need the help of a facilitator in deriving meanings from the experience. The experiences involve

perceptions of risk and the uncertainty of adventure. Therefore, helping the students to mentally and emotionally stand back from the experiences in order to derive learning for, for example, personal and social development can require the involvement of the facilitator in the adventure experience and in sharing it with the student. The quality of the relationship that derives from the shared experience is something that can be nurtured by a skilled facilitator, thereby giving rise to opportunities to discuss responses to the experience and the learning that can be derived from it. It is this relationship that Hovelynck's research suggests is part of the tacit understanding of Outward Bound workers in guiding learning through the experience of outdoor adventure activities. The relationship is also more important than a facilitator apparently having knowledge of experiential learning and applying techniques in the expectation they will produce predetermined outcomes. This is an important finding and resonates with Loynes' (2002) paper in suggesting a positivistic approach no longer has the legitimacy of what he calls a generative paradigm.

The matter of the significance of relationships over techniques is a valuable insight. However, while Loynes ascribed it to a paradigm shift, I ascribe the substantive change to quality and sensitivity in facilitation: a concomitant corollary of the facilitator's experience of facilitation. Others say that learning derives from a shared experience (Simpson, 1992:146). In establishing sound relationships between facilitator and student, both parties can engage in learning, according to Hovelynck (2001b), that is more effective than might be expected from experience that is not shared or is not facilitated by somebody who has shared it. Experience by itself is not

found to be enough for learning. In a separate paper Hovelynck (2001a) says of experience that it “cannot be understood in terms of knowledge, skill or attitude, but necessarily comprises all of those simultaneously, and is embedded in relationships” (Hovelynck, 2001a:6). This understanding supports Dewey’s (1938) view that experience needs to be examined in order for it to be educative. Hovelynck’s (2001b) research is also notable for enquiry into the theories in practice of the Outward Bound workers. A clearer articulation of theory emerged from practice in contrast to understandings that posit theory as a basis for practice.

A further criticism of Loynes’ paper is the purpose for which outdoor experiential learning is being used. A rational positivist approach (algorithmic) would be adopted to achieve a predictable objective, if in fact that is possible and measurable. A generative approach would be used in learning for its own sake - to take a step on a learning journey. However, to say that generative learning is goal-free is disingenuous. Its goals are more loosely defined and reflect a world view of community and mutual trust. A looser definition of objectives as goals does not obscure the fact that they are there nevertheless. So, although Loynes paper is helpful, it is so in the analysis of the what, why and how of experiential learning rather than polarising ideas and calling for a paradigm shift.

Loynes’ description of a new paradigm may be a reflection of attempts to understand dimensions of modern life and to include issues of sustainability and being at one with nature. It may be that these notions constitute discourses of outdoor education. Outdoor education provides an alternative to target setting and a perception that all

educational activity is instrumental. The suggested generative paradigm gives permission for participants to engage in something for its own sake and for purposes that are not easy to quantify. Issues of sustainability and being at one with nature, in the sense of experiencing it first hand with as little human impact as possible, might be indicative of both things being part of the same issue. If there is a concern with being at one with nature, then it seems reasonable to behave in a sustainable way. Alternatively, behaving in a sustainable way may arise from awareness that not doing so will limit opportunities in the future rather than ascribe anything special to nature.

Being at one with nature also reflects an understanding that nature is a privileged, 'better', environment than a participant's usual one. What is seen as the essential goodness of nature makes it something to engage with and in turn an experience to learn from. This suggests interlinked discourses privileging nature and a move towards sustainable behaviour within understandings of experiential learning.

Although Loynes does not make it explicit, there is a clear link between these and earlier discourses. Being at one with nature has historical roots that stretch back to include school camps, Baden-Powell's ethos and the simple lifestyle offered by camping, Rousseau's Emile learning from nature, and others. In particular, it echoes notions of the Romantics that natural beauty and turning from human artefacts of the industrial revolution can constitute a source of knowledge and understanding.

Despite the variations on the theme of experiential learning introduced by Loynes, the idea remains that something has to be done with the experience in order for learning to take place or be acknowledged. That 'something' is typically the provision of a

facilitator, whose role and effectiveness seem likely to be rooted in their own experience and their reflections on it; what has been their inward or outward experience of the journey, or of learning, to learn through experience themselves.

Edwards (1994) points out that “experiential learning is part of the canon of the theory and practice of adult learning” (Edwards, 1994:423). Widespread notions of experiential learning within outdoor education lead similarly to it being part of a canon, albeit in a different area of interest. Outdoor education has a number of parallels with adult education and the ‘borrowing’ of ideas from adult education might be perceived, whether or not they were blatantly borrowed. The location of outdoor education outside of statutory provision, its largely informal nature, the absence of targets or standards to be met and, to some extent, the absence of a distinct body of knowledge reflect comparisons with adult education. Similarly, parallels can readily be drawn between the roles of experiential learning in adult education and in outdoor education, respectively. A focus in adult education has been to value “the learning that takes place outside formally structured education/training opportunities” (Edwards, 1994:423). As outdoor education locates outside the formal structures of the school, it is natural that it should lean on experiential discourse in order to find legitimacy and possible routes to effectiveness. This can include an eclectic mix of experiences, traditional and student-centred pedagogies.



## **New Space**

The generative paradigm shows another characteristic that might be markedly different from the algorithmic paradigm (Loynes 2002). This is the restoration of 'place' as a critical dimension for learning. Loynes uses his argument to link 'place' with features of sustainability and Gaian ecology (Lovelock 1982; 2000). Gaian ecology is the idea that all life on Earth is sufficiently interdependent that it can be understood as a single living organism. When one part of the organism is damaged, there are implications for other parts. This understanding gives emphasis to a perceived need to behave in a sustainable way. The role of place is developed to suggest a natural environment as the most suitable location for outdoor experiential learning. This supports the 'new space' dimension of the Practice Model of outdoor education. But Loynes' perspective of the restoration of place does not take account of the work of Massey (1994) and others (May, 1996; Thrift, 1996; 1998; Shaw, 2001). The Practice Model draws on notions of space in the critical geographies (May & Thrift, 2001) of which Massey (1994) writes of space as an interaction of social relations and the physical location in which they occur. Place can be seen as a moment in the social and environmental interactions. These moments affect the way we understand place. Place, whether it be the 'great outdoors' or 'wilderness', is socially constructed and changes over time and space. For example, ideas of conservation and sustainability have been growing in use and understanding since Carson (1962) drew attention to the damaging affects of pesticides. An understanding of space as a web of interactions, and place as a moment in those interactions in relation to what is happening in a location, departs from earlier notions

of a space being simply a venue where an activity or an experience might occur. 'Learning from experience' alone is not the sole way of understanding outdoor education. As the Practice Model posits and drawing from Loynes' suggestion, a sense of 'new space' contributes to an understanding of outdoor education. In part, this reflects changing perspectives of humans and nature that for some might lead to changing understandings of how space contributes to learning (Comber & Wall, 2001) as well as the growing interest in space in educational thinking. In a similar vein, Paechter (2001b) describes how a view of power residing in relations, rather than in an individual or institution, guides the use of space in a classroom and the influence it may have on learning.

The influence on learning might be seen to relate to an individual's identity. Massey (1994:15) suggests "places are not stable in their essence therefore the chances of a stable identity are undercut"; not only is place and space subject to changing interactions but so is identity, hence neither space nor place nor identity can be considered fixed. Thus, there is an opportunity for learning through a changing sense of these. Mannion (2003) reports on such a circumstance in traditional school grounds, saying that they "optimise the indoor classroom work ethic...outdoors" (Mannion, 2003:75). In contrast, engaging students in developing the school grounds can lead to other learning opportunities and identities through changing interactions that create different senses of space and place.

For others, as the example of Loynes (2002) shows, the changing perspectives of space as an interaction between humans and nature might lead to adoption of Gaian

philosophy. The natural environment need not necessarily be a new physical location. But there is a sense in the literature that a natural space is privileged (Mortlock, 1984; Wurdinger, 1997; Loynes, 2002). It will become a new space as experiences of learning and social interaction therein occur, thus giving rise to experiences of place. This is a contrast to the perceived algorithmic view of nature as nothing more than a location in which physical activity can occur. For Carson (1962:243) the “‘control of nature’ is a phrase conceived in arrogance...when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man [*sic*]”. Greater understanding of the need for human activity to be sustainable may reflect a continuation of this view in order to preserve nature for human activity or benefit. Alternatively, some would say nature is privileged *per se* and therefore it is incumbent on humans to behave in a sustainable way. A logical development of this argument, which I have not identified in the literature, would be to leave nature alone and to restrict human activity to non-wilderness areas.

New space is an area of interest among those who have noted the way that recent developments in creating learning opportunities have changed the way space is used for teaching and learning. Notions of lifelong learning, the changing use and nature of distance learning materials, and the acknowledgement and recognition of learning that has previously taken place have prompted research and theorising on the matter of new space - or spatiality - that may illuminate understanding of the dimension of new space in the Practice Model of outdoor education.

Paechter (2001a:1) points out:

“We not only learn throughout our lives, but in a variety of places and spaces. These changes highlight the previously veiled relationship between learning, space and identity. The moves towards seeing learning taking place outside as well as within the taken for granted spaces of the classroom, workshop and lecture theatre bring to our attention not just the question of how our learning is affected by the specific features of particular spaces, but also how we as individuals are changed by our experiences in these spaces”.

Changes in individuals through their experiences in the new spaces of outdoor education are posited in the Practice Model as a way of achieving, among other things, the purpose of environmental education.

A growing emphasis was given to the significance of outdoor education for environmental education and the raising of issues of sustainability through the 1990s (Higgins, 1996; Cooper, 1999). Cooper points out the importance of personal and social education for environmental education, “we cannot expect an interest in and a respect for the environment if there is little self-esteem or respect for other people” (Cooper, 1998:10). This contrasts with notions of learning from nature and becoming educated through the experience of nature. The suggestion is that once people learn about themselves, perhaps through adventure activities, then they will be able to live for or do something for nature. It may be that self-esteem can be developed by engaging in activities with a more obvious environmentally-friendly outcome, such as planting trees or clearing rubbish; i.e., restoring the environment to its natural condition as unadulterated by humans, if it is ever actually possible to do so.

The purpose of environmental education as described in the Purpose Model can be discerned in various early manifestations of outdoor education. Not only has it involved going outside for a variety of outdoor adventure activities but also learning about and from nature has been a recurrent feature. The rhetoric of raising awareness of nature or the natural environment has been succeeded by concepts of environmental education and, more recently, educating for sustainability. The Dartington Conference (DES, 1975) looked to foster respect and heighten awareness for the natural environment through direct experience. Continuing this theme Cooper (1998:5) reminds his readers that environmental education is learning about, in and for the environment. He cautions that ‘educating for’ evokes the predetermined outcomes associated with training rather than empowering that might be expected of education (Jickling 1992). Educating for the environment “encourages understanding, critical skills and clarification of values” (Cooper, 1998:7) and is an understanding of current terminology that links environmental education with personal and social development through outdoor activities.

Nicol (2002b:91) states, “the stresses of urban lifestyles require a rural antidote which may be found in outdoor pursuits”. This is a view that has common currency. Eames (2006:2), in writing a newspaper report about summer holidays, said, “If ever there was a need for evidence of the uplifting power of nature...”, reporting that nature had a healing effect on relationships within his family. Wilson (2005) also supports the view that being in nature is good for us and brings physical and psychological benefits. For Kellert (1997:89), the close interaction with nature experienced through adventure challenge had produced a “heightened sense of vitality” and “a sharp

awareness and experience of the world”. It is not clear whether this arose predominantly through the adventure or through the contact with nature, but the view of nature as having an effect on individuals has found substantive support in outdoor education.

Again this echoes the work of Fleming (1998) who found the significance of the residential was found to be in the detachment from everyday life and the continuity of the experience. When students are engaged in outdoor education, they are not only in a new environment, in close proximity to nature: they are also separate from the pressures of their daily lives. It could be this that has the uplifting power. From this perspective, the expressions of value of the natural environment may be no different from being on holiday from a student’s usual environment. Whatever the causative factors the direct experience of a natural environment is privileged. Yet Nicol’s statement that “it is clear that environmental education is subordinated to personal and social development in outdoor education literature” (Nicol, 2002b:95) suggests the contrary and does not account for the experiences reported above. The experiences reported above are said to arise from being in the natural environment and it may be that environmental education so described is as important as personal and social development, and is even a source of such growth. Martin (2004) contends that skill learning in adventure activities promotes environmental education. Environmental awareness and discourses of outdoor education that reflect wider societal interests in sustainability and environmental stewardship have prompted a research impetus.

Lugg and Slattery (2003) report a case study of the educational objectives of teaching staff involved in environmental education through outdoor education. The study was set against a background of the Victoria Certificate of Education (VCE) outdoor and environmental studies curriculum - being primarily concerned with human-nature relationships and environmental impacts. The outdoor education students were engaged in a programme that included cross-country skiing and other adventure activities: it appears that the programme would be recognisable as outdoor education from a UK perspective. Lugg and Slattery used semi-structured interviews with teachers and park staff; and observations of a group of students, teachers and park staff. Analysis of teacher documentation relating to the educational aims was used to triangulate and inform the data from the semi-structured interviews and observations. As part of their brief literature review they found, in agreement with Cooper (1998:5), a discourse of environmental education that was concerned with three aspects of learning: *about, in* and *for* the environment.

In line with this, the VCE has moved towards environmental education objectives for Outdoor Educators whereby they educate for the environment as well as in and about it. The paper reiterates that the purpose of the research was to investigate teachers' objectives. Their findings revealed that these objectives fell short of what might be considered necessary to educate about, in and for the environment. Their conclusions related to the purpose of the case study, they also identified a need for more professional development for outdoor education teachers in order to help them be more effective environmental educators while engaged in outdoor education. The report of the study revealed Lugg and Slattery's predisposition to attach significance

to educating for the environment as a key role of environmental education through outdoor education. There is considerable discussion about educating for the environment, taking a socially critical stance and achieving action for the environment by the students.

This appears to demonstrate a drift from their original objectives: to “examine the educational objectives and roles of teachers and park staff involved in environmental education through outdoor education” (Lugg and Slattery, 2003:77); and, “the teachers’ perspectives on the park visit and their efforts to maximise the environmental learning opportunities” (Lugg and Slattery, 2003:78). Yet, part of the discussion is about whether learning for the environment has been achieved and whether attitudinal change guarantees positive environmental action. This is not about the teacher objectives: it was not identified as one of their objectives through the research, although Lugg and Slattery found it implicit in the VCE curriculum. The references they use, the discourses they identify and the amount of attention given to the matter in the paper suggest that Lugg and Slattery deem action for the environment to be an objective of environmental education. Either their predisposition towards educating for the environment preceded their literature review, that found the same to be significant, or they were influenced by the literature and wrote their paper accordingly. The paper leans in the direction of action for the environment. Lugg and Slattery open their abstract with the statement “The need for environmental education through outdoor education experiences is becoming increasingly evident in outdoor education theory and practice” (2003:77). While this statement may be true it, is not evidenced as a ‘need’ or otherwise supported



elsewhere in the paper, but it is an indication that Lugg and Slattery think it to be a ‘good thing’ that should be promoted as such. Of itself this is not a problem but it does reveal a scholarly paper purporting to be about one issue having a leaning towards a different one.

Elsewhere in the literature there are undoubted calls for outdoor education to be instrumental in environmental education (MNT/SNH, 1995; Cooper, 1998; DfES, 2004). In reporting their findings, Lugg and Slattery identify the teacher’s objectives to be “(1) for students to gather first hand data and personal experience of the place to meet (certificate) requirements, and (2) for students to enjoy the park experience through participating in outdoor and group activities”. They summarise this as being about “learning *in* and *about* the park”. They go on to say, “This teacher also understood the value for students of immersion *in* an environment in order to learn more effectively *about* that place” (2003:82, original emphases). This reads like an Outdoor Educator reporting what they think is important to another Outdoor Educator, the reader of the report, about a third party, the teacher, whose quote doesn’t necessarily lead me to the same conclusion. Lugg and Slattery represent it as necessary for students’ environmental education in order that they personally identify with the environment and the issues around it.

An alternative understanding might be that the teachers value learning from experience over a didactic approach. This alternative view can be supported by the following quote from a teacher, “They’ve done a lot of reading ... and talking in the classroom...it was really abstract. ... here it is really solid for a time and they can

really focus” (2003:82). In literature pertaining to learning from experience, notions of immersion in the experience have not come to the fore so much as thinking about facilitation of learning. Immersion may be a facilitative strategy, but not one that can be surmised from the brief report of the teacher’s comments. Lugg and Slattery acknowledge that the way an experience is facilitated is important to develop socially critical learning but they do not link this with immersion, despite advocating immersion earlier in the paper. Socially critical learning is seen as that which problematises the things being learned about and prompts learners to take action to effect change.

I make these critical points because they illustrate the weakness of much of the research base, but the discussion and conclusions of the researchers are nevertheless significant in contributing to understanding the social construction of outdoor education. Publication in peer reviewed journals may lead practitioners in the field to be influenced by changing discourses, perhaps espousing it as theory and endeavouring to structure their programmes accordingly. This and earlier examples make the research for this thesis more important as an effort to understand the meanings of the community of practice.

Lugg and Slattery’s paper is informed by their interest in whether the teachers were inclined to exercise a socially critical knowledge that they see as being implicit in the (State of Victoria) curriculum. They conclude that this form of knowledge is lacking and that this could be addressed through professional development. The teacher’s objectives or their role - the subject of the research - did not include a socially critical

knowledge. The indication is that Lugg and Slattery would like to see the teachers and their students becoming critical. They cite Carr and Kemmis (1986) on the subject in order to develop an argument that environmental education would not only be learning about the environment: it would also be learning that leads to action for and about the environment. The transformative nature of such educational objectives can be found in other works (Freire, 1974; White, 1989) and in bases for experiential learning (Henry, 1989). They may be an objective of environmental education, but if so, should be explicit.

A further insight offered by Lugg and Slattery is the significance of the 'quality' of the outdoor environment in which students' outdoor education, and thereby environmental education, might take place. This reveals a social construction that privileges some environments as being of 'better quality' than others. The suggestion is that space in a natural environment is privileged when the interactions constructing that space include those between people and untouched nature. It does not include interactions with environments changed, or harmed, by people. In using national parks, the students are exposed to a construction of a 'pristine' natural environment. If their critical faculties are developed through social interactions constructing that particular unspoilt space, the suggestion is that they may not transfer their critical skills to an environment constructed as damaged in some way. Consequently, they would learn less from an experience in an altered location. This is important when consideration is given to 'degrees of wilderness' in which outdoor education might take place. They quote Hogan (1991), who suggested that students should earn the

right to go to more pristine areas by first spending time in more local human-impacted areas.

While Lugg and Slattery do not express support for this view, they suggest the finding to be significant and use it to urge Outdoor Educators to reflect on where they undertake their activity. However, Kahn (2002) suggests that unless children experience an unpolluted environment, they will be unaware of pollution in their own home environments. Kahn's research showed that two-thirds of children studied understood about pollution in general terms. Only one-third understood that the pollution they experienced on a day-to-day basis affected them directly. Kahn's solution is to expose children to an unpolluted environment in order that they might make comparisons and understand more of their own environment when they return. This suggests that the pursuit of socially critical knowledge, as suggested by Lugg and Slattery, can be achieved simply by taking children into the national park and, they imply, facilitating the experience. Quality of the environment in which outdoor education might take place appeared to be significant in the literature on adventure. That similar issues arise when considering environmental education reinforces the difficulty in separating the dimensions of the Practice Model and indicates the importance Outdoor Educators attach to the natural environment as a location for outdoor education.

Lugg and Slattery's paper is in agreement with themes found in Fleming's (1998) research into residential education. For Fleming (1998:60) "... it is not merely the physical accommodation that is of concern: Residence itself becomes an integral

dimension of the learning experience and learning is a function of community". Fleming found through her research two overarching themes of detachment and continuity. Detachment is defined as both physical and psychological separation from participant's normal lives and the world around them, while continuity is the uninterrupted 24-hour a day nature of the residential experience often uninterrupted for several days. Although detachment might be achieved without continuity, continuity can only be achieved with detachment. Visiting a national park for an outdoor and environmental education opportunity brings detachment and continuity to the outdoor experience "it is really solid for a time and they can really focus. (OE Teacher 1)" (Lugg & Slattery, 2003:82). It seems that engaging in outdoor education, whether residential or not, involves going away for a period, and is therefore tantamount to being away on a residential experience and accruing the learning benefits associated with it.

The suggestion that the location for adventure might be a wilderness or a natural environment has been advanced by Beringer and Martin (2003). They are critical of notions of adventure therapy that draw attention to the lack of significance given to the environment and nature as central elements in the healing process, as put forward by, for example, Gillis & Ringer (1999). The latter researchers focus their paper on the use of adventure activities for therapy but, Beringer and Martin allege, do not give sufficient attention to the natural environment in which the activities take place. The natural environment, they say, is an essential component of the therapeutic process. Adventure therapy has emerged as a specialist element in outdoor education. The

concept of adventure being used as therapy suggests its use for those whose needs are sufficiently special to need help through therapy.

Alternatively, according to Furedi (2004), we live in a therapy culture where something has to be done to help people live in the modern world. Personal and social development is perceived as a need for many, perhaps most, participants because it is part of the taken-for-granted purpose of outdoor education. Some therapeutic work might also be seen as specialist and intended to meet needs of particular client groups. When writing about adventure therapy, the ideas advanced can be taken as relevant to mainstream outdoor education, which may have an emphasis on personal and social development among other things. The points that Beringer and Martin make about adventure therapy can also be considered in relation to outdoor education. Their paper argues for a paradigm shift "...to accept and honour the healing powers of nature" (2003:29). The argument appears to be predicated on their view that nature has some therapeutic value and they marshal other publications and research evidence to support this. However, while those who write about adventure experiences emphasise the activity, group work and the 'outdoors', they seldom claim that nature is intrinsically healing. A connectedness to nature a principle of the 'biophilia hypothesis', which suggests that closeness to nature increases well-being as well as the likelihood of understanding of and care for nature (Pretty *et al*, 2003; Kellert and Wilson, 1993). However this tends towards a response in people to an experience of nature rather than there being 'something special' in nature. Beringer and Martin (2003:30) note that for Gillis and Ringer (1999), "healing is attributed to adventure – action and experience". In calling for

more attention to be given to the restorative powers of nature they say that there is evidence in the fields of medicine, development psychology and environmental psychology but, “little if any research has explored the relationship between the physical environment and adventure education programmes” (Beringer and Martin, 2003:30).

The logic to Beringer and Martin’s argument is that nature has been shown to have alleged benefits elsewhere, so it must also have benefits in adventure therapy. Much of the remainder of their argument claims that nature is instrumental in adventure because such things as a canoe trip take place in a natural outdoor location. The assumption is that the outdoors includes nature in the sense of a natural environment, and therefore nature is taken to be significant. While this may be so, these writers’ arguments are not persuasive in calling for more research based on their own convictions rather than on evidence. It is not enough to point out that because adventure typically involves going into a ‘natural environment’ - construed as one unaffected by human activity - that it is “the intrinsic powers of the natural worlds, most likely synergistically, to stimulate change, healing and personal growth” (Beringer & Martin, 2003:34). In doing so Beringer and Martin do not pay comparable attention to the contribution to that synergy that might be made by the action and experience of adventure they report as part of Gillis and Ringer’s (1999) understanding. Neither do they acknowledge the contribution physical exercise, whether through outdoor education or not, can make to stimulate change, healing and personal growth (Fixx 1979).

I have already pointed to the research of Fleming (1998), that detachment and continuity are significant in residential education. Taking clients of adventure therapy away from their daily environment might be enough to effect therapy. Beringer and Martin's case does not withstand scrutiny and possible merits of their argument are obscured, particularly because they do not substantiate their criticism of Miles and Priest (1999) whose text, they claim, is lacking in this area yet, "is bound to receive a widespread distribution and will influence the coming generation of adventure programming practitioners and academics" (Beringer & Martin, 2003:31).

Despite these weaknesses, support for the case that nature has a role in adventure therapy is found in research reported by Pretty, Hine and Peacock (2006). This paper is notable because it is empirically-based research. Pretty *et al.*, point out, "It is well established that the natural and built features of the environment affect behaviour, interpersonal relationships and actual mental states" (2006:144). They discerned three levels of engagement with nature: i) viewing nature as through a window or in a painting; (ii) being in the presence of nearby nature which may be incidental to some other activity such as walking or cycling to work; (iii) active participation and involvement with nature, such as gardening, trekking or camping. For each of these levels of engagement they point to their own or others' research to support the premise. Viewing scenes of nature has been shown to enhance healing among surgery patients; it appears that the structure of the scene matters more than content. "Abstract pictures with a high density of lines and patterns are more aversive than simpler pictures with less density and more space. In general, urban scenes are more structured than rural, and so are more aversive" (2006:145).



In testing this hypothesis they found agreement as to what was pleasant and what was not among a large number of people to whom they showed 300 photographs of rural and urban scenes. The terms ‘pleasant’ and ‘unpleasant’ were values conferred by Pretty *et al.*, whereby a rural pleasant scene was unpolluted, an unpleasant one was polluted. Urban unpleasant scenes were damaged in some way, for example through vandalism. They then used the pictures to see what effect they had on an individual’s physical well-being while engaged in exercise. Two groups of participants were required to exercise on treadmills; the first were exposed to pictures while the second – the control group – were not. It was found that blood pressure (a measure of stress) was reduced while viewing rural pleasant scenes and that even a rural unpleasant scene conferred more beneficial effects than an urban one.

Following this, psychological measures of self-esteem and mood were used that found rural pleasant and urban pleasant scenes had the greatest positive effect. They were surprised that rural unpleasant scenes had more adverse effects than urban unpleasant ones and surmised that these views “embodying threats to the countryside had a greater negative effect on mood than already unpleasant urban scenes” (2006:146). Using ten case-studies of people taking exercise in natural environments in different parts of the UK they found that what they term ‘green exercise’, that is, exercise in pleasant environments “may have a greater effect than exercise alone on blood pressure...and on measures that are relevant to mental health” (2006:147). Their findings also demonstrated that green exercise resulted in a significant improvement in self-esteem but that “self-esteem was not affected by the intensity of

the green exercise activities, though it did appear to rise over very long visits” (2006:146), and they suggested that their research would be useful in supporting notions of “outdoor leisure activities in the countryside, and wilderness therapy programmes” (2006:147).

This research appears to give empirical support to the positive effect of nature when part of a programme of green exercise, and perhaps as part of a general outdoor education programme. There is also a suggestion in Pretty *et al.*'s paper that green exercise for a longer duration was more beneficial than an increase in the intensity of the exercise. This might be taken to support the view that engaging in outdoor adventure therapy over longer periods of time, perhaps a multi-day residential programme or one in a more remote wilderness location will bring more positive benefits. It should be noted that the benefits are accrued through an individual's presence in a rural scene and their response to it. It is worth emphasising here that this does not imbue the natural environment with a mystical property that is not yet understood, as mentioned in Beringer and Martin's (2003) paper in which they refer to the “intrinsic powers of the natural worlds” (Beringer & Martin, 2003:34). Pretty *et al.* go so far as to state that “aversiveness (to urban scenes) is linked to brain structure: we may be hard-wired, it seems, to prefer certain kinds of scenes that are more likely to be rural” (2006:145). However, they do not cite evidence for this.

The significance of nature as something with which people interact when undertaking activity outdoors was also investigated by Bell *et al.*, (2004). They undertook a project “to specify the contribution that ‘nature’ in green spaces makes to people's

social well being” (2004:18). Using a clearly defined methodology and theoretical perspective rooted in personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955), the report found similarities to the research carried out by Pretty *et al.* (2006). Both papers drew on work reported by Ulrich (1984) and by Kaplan (1995, 2001). While Pretty *et al.* used an experimental quantitative approach, Bell *et al.* drew conclusions that reflected a social constructionist stance, despite having referred in their methodology to a personal constructionist approach.

This is not necessarily contradictory. Focus groups were used to inform individual questionnaires and interviews. Thus Bell *et al.* (2004) sought to understand personal constructs in order to inform the social constructionist presentation of their findings. They reported from an attitudinal section of their questionnaire that people visit green areas for four main reasons: (i) to walk the dog, (ii) to get some exercise, (iii) for pleasure, (iv) to get fresh air. They stated that, “Getting away from stress was associated with relaxation and nature – seeing it, being in natural places and learning about it...In the focus groups people mentioned the belief that knowing that there is nature nearby can be enough to instil a sense of well being” (Bell *et al.*, 2004:108). This supports the significance of new space in the Practice Model of outdoor education. New space in the form of nearby nature inculcates a sense of well-being.

It would seem therefore that there is evidence to support the idea that natural environments are important and positive in outdoor education. Bell *et al.* (2004:109) found “that nature cannot be considered in isolation from the rest of human activity”. Words that were used to talk about nature (woodland, trees, flora, and fauna) were

also mingled with terms “associated with freedom, fresh air, serenity and tranquillity, all perceptual or experiential aspects as opposed to physical characteristics” (Bell *et al.*, 2004:109). This is interesting when considering the proposed learning from experience dimension of the Practice Model of outdoor education. The literature in experiential learning posits participants as being active in their learning. Adventure suggests risk and possible physical challenge. Bell *et al.*'s data suggests that if the new space is in nature, then people will value their experiences. Taken together with Pretty *et al.*'s (2006) finding of the benefit of green exercise, the role of the natural environment may be a motivator for people taking part in outdoor education. Bell *et al.*'s (2004) research found that nature reserves were valued but country parks were valued little more than urban areas. Together with wild areas, country parks had associations with ‘boredom’, (Bell *et al.*, 2004:119) thereby demonstrating that the natural environment is socially constructed.

Regardless of whether the social construction of the outdoors is positive or negative, it relates to understandings of the space experienced there and how time is spent there. Massey's (1994:29) remark that “space is very much on the agenda these days” suggests consideration of the aspects of space that influence these attitudes. May and Thrift (2001:1) say that a distinction between space and time is a limiting dualism and respective questions of these entities cannot be treated in isolation from each other. May and Thrift agree with Massey that it is necessary to move beyond a space/time formulation to a multi-dimensional space-time, recognising “that space and time are inextricably interwoven” (Massey, 1994:260). Although Massey looks towards a four-dimensional notion of space-time, May and Thrift construct it as a

multiplicity of space-times (May & Thrift, 2001:3) and call this 'TimeSpace' in order to dispel any notion of separation between the two. TimeSpace itself is a social construction that can help to understand social constructions of the natural environment. If nature reserves are valued, as reported by Bell *et al.* (2004), then they are valued for the TimeSpace experienced there. Although endeavouring to treat TimeSpace as a single concept, it is difficult not to think about time and space separately and then attempt to put the separate notions together. So the time spent in a nature reserve suggests time spent in close contact with nature, experiencing a degree of naturalness not damaged by human activity. The time is spent in the nature reserve in a space created by interactions with other humans and the natural environment.

These examples show the difficulty in separating the two entities, hence the logic of the notion 'TimeSpace' in facilitating an understanding of the issue. In the case of the country parks being regarded as 'boring', a TimeSpace analysis might be helpful in tracing the development of the attitude. Perhaps the interactions creating the space were limited or exhausted by time; or the time given to experiences in the interactions - both social and with the physical surroundings - i.e., space, limited or exhausted the interactions. Either way, the moments in the interactions that constitute a sense of place attach the connotation of 'boring' to the place that is understood as the country park. Wilderness, however, was not a term used by the general public, although it carried various meanings for outdoor professionals that are not enlarged on in the report. These meanings might be of natural environments that are completely unmanaged and some distance from human habitation.

Bell *et al.*'s conclusions state that, "The main values of nature can be categorised as those connected with relaxation, de-stressing and being close to nature. The quality of nature seems to be important to get the full benefit, for example the presence of wildlife adds value" (Bell *et al.*, 2004:117) and, "There are significant associations between the type and degree of use of green spaces by people now and how frequently they visited such sites when children....Those who had visited a lot as children were more likely to find magical and other positive qualities in nature, and to develop a closer relationship with it as part of their lifestyle, than those who did not" (Bell *et al.*, 2004:119).

These statements exemplify the use of TimeSpace to interpret experiences in nature at different stages of people's lives. The TimeSpace experiences acquired as children affected TimeSpace experiences as adults. Through their experience as children at a particular time in their lives they might attribute certain meanings to the space. The significant meanings attached to 'nature' are likely to mean that it has a positive role in outdoor education and the quality of space and place are seen as highly significant. These findings give some insight into the role that new space can play as a dimension of outdoor education in the Practice Model.

This brings us to an examination of the relationship between participants and new spaces. As progression in various adventure activities takes place the new spaces are increasingly distant and different from familiar environments. Such a journey brings the participants into a closer direct contact with a new space, contrasting, for example

with driving through the new space yet, not being in direct contact with it; being protected by the cocoon of the car from the smells and sounds of the new space.

There is a tension here between an inheritance of 'natural' education, which should not be tainted by the activities of man, and the increasing tendency for outdoor education to be provided through adventure activities that are only possible through technological developments. Plastic kayaks have made harder white-water paddling more accessible. Modern protection devices and training techniques have made rock-climbing at previously unimaginable grades of difficulty the norm. While these innovations can extend the adventurous journey into new spaces, they can also preclude an adventurous journey into a new space for those people who lack modern equipment. Conclusively, the journey into the new space of a natural environment is made possible by less natural means.

This paradox can give rise to doubts about the sustainable practice of outdoor education, despite ideas of sustainability circulating in discourses of outdoor education. The journey into nature for an educative experience now depends on the experience being mediated by humankind. Simpler journeys - going for a walk - do not seem to be so intrinsically exciting as to motivate the participant, although the simplicity of the required equipment makes such a journey more accessible to more people. Similar issues can be considered in relation to where a walk would take place whereby technology often still has to mediate its starting and finishing points; for example, unless a car journey is made prior to starting a walk, it may not take place in a new space.

This tension might be seen as having a number of outcomes. On the one hand, the adventurous journey of outdoor education may become much more difficult, require greater personal skill of the student, and be increasingly mediated by the instructor. In this sense it becomes a particular experience only available in a special outdoor education context. Such an approach might be seen to limit the development of outdoor education, especially in the context of lifelong learning, because it is not readily available and could become too expensive. On the other hand, the arguable quality of the new space and the journey needed to access it may be enough to support a view that this is a necessary precursor to outdoor education that is worth investing in.

The idea that nature close-up is an educator and inspires learning has continued to develop from extended walks to other adventure activities that may comprise shorter journeys but bring the participant into closer and more dynamic contact with the natural environment, despite, as previously discussed, being mediated through the influences of man. Rock-climbing, for example, takes the journey to a new space that the novice climber on an outdoor education programme will not have experienced before. The journey is one in which the climber is physically close, with hands, feet and perhaps face, to the rock. They may not be aware of the world very far beyond the immediacy of their situation, but will be very alert to the intricacies and detail of their location in the new space. Furthermore, as the climber engages in the ascent and becomes aware of the physical, psychological and emotional demands the activity and new space put on them, then there may be a growth in self-understanding.



Mortlock (1984) refers to this as the journey inwards: an opportunity to learn about themselves from nature in an unfamiliar environment - a new space.

Throughout the literature pertaining to outdoor education there is the idea that a closer experience of nature will have a more positive effect on the participant. Direct experience of the natural environment, being in that new space, appears to make the assumption that nature will educate without further intervention. Within the new space of the natural environment there is an unstated expectation that nature is intrinsically wholesome and beneficial. These are longstanding ideas found in widely differing discourses; for example, Louv (2005) says of nature that it is “often overlooked as a healing balm” (Louv, 2005:47), and goes on to cite Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1993). According to Louv (2005:71), Gardner added to the seven intelligences originally identified, naming an eighth intelligence as natural intelligence or ‘nature smart’. Louv uses this to support his ideas that humans need nature and that nature nurtures creativity.

The intrinsic wholesomeness and beneficial effect of nature is also present in popular perception, as reported by Eames (2006) of his family experiences of nature. The same ideas are found in a range of historical discourse, for example Sahakian (1974), who reports that Rousseau accepts as “infallible the premise that *nature is right*” (Sahakian, 1974:27, original emphasis). Contemporary educational discourses also hold the idea of nature as important, “Young people benefit from regular opportunities to learn in a natural setting” (Scottish Executive, 2006:7). This view reflects a position that nature is essential in education and for personal and social

development. Nature is self-evidently a good thing that can connect us with our essential being.

This also appears to reflect assumptions made by the outdoor education practitioners attending the Dartington Conference (1975), themselves having found nature to be an 'educator'. But their students' development of a respect for nature cannot be predicated upon the fact that it may be the Outdoor Educator's personal experience. However, as learning from experience in outdoor education is likely to be facilitated, there might be little opportunity for students to experience the natural new spaces as beneficial. The act of facilitation might obscure experience and understanding of the assumed essential wholesomeness of nature. This forms part of a debate identified by James (1980) that is worthy of ongoing consideration by Outdoor Educators. Simply put, it asks when should a facilitator intervene and when should they stay silent. By staying silent, James suggests "the mountains speak for themselves" (James, 1980:1).

A recurring theme throughout the literature pertaining to outdoor education is that students will have a closer experience of nature and that this will have a positive effect on the participant. Direct experience of the natural environment, being in what amounts to a new space, is given greatest significance. Discourses of environmental education as a component of outdoor education do not suggest learning about the environment in the sense of 'gaining knowledge and understanding', as environmental education within a traditional pedagogy might be understood. Within the outdoor education literature the strongest theme is about providing experiences of the natural environment, of taking students into new locations and natural places.

Thus, environmental education within outdoor education is revealed as venturing into new spaces, perhaps for the first time, thereby constituting an adventure.

Using different adventure activities arguably changes the experience in the location, effectively changing the space occupied by the students. In this way, for students in a natural environment their experience of the environment entered into through adventure activities will be different if the activity is rock-climbing or if it is orienteering, that is, depending on the activity itself. Following this point of view the question arises whether the new space has to be wilderness or whether it is sufficient for it to be a natural but rural location near the school. In the context of the adventure, wilderness would seem to be more important, and as far as providing new and different experiences is concerned it would also seem that wilderness would have more of a 'newness' value. This is not to say that environmental education cannot take place in an urban area, but the familiarity of an urban environment might limit the experiential nature of the activity and challenge any notion of the essential wholeness and intrinsic value of nature. This points to the notion of environmental education being related to the location where the adventure activity takes place. The location may be chosen for environmental education purposes, but if the purposes are not related to traditional environmental education, then the location or space in which outdoor education is taking place appears to be more salient than the idea of environmental education.

The concept of education taking place in new space has been enthusiastically adopted in some establishments. Reference has previously been made to the Rocky Mountain

Expeditionary Learning School, which bases the entire curriculum on the planning, preparation, undertaking and reviewing of expeditions. Outdoor education is embraced by this organisation as a viable alternative to traditional mainstream schooling in a way that is experiential and might not be found in schools that offer outdoor education as an adjunct to the curriculum. Entering new space is an obvious process on a multi-day wilderness trip. Nevertheless, what may be considered as short familiar journeys can take on the characteristic of new space when students have to plan and undertake the journey themselves, as the experience can encompass notions of new psychological and emotional space: for students to enter new space as part of their learning it may not need to be a new physical space - familiar space experienced under different conditions might be seen as tantamount to new space. A context where students embark on a journey with their peers rather than under the direct supervision of teachers creates a new social space within a new experience of a previously familiar physical space. In turn, the new experience of the physical space is influenced by their independence during this journey

The Dartington Conference brought to the foreground another issue that has subsequently been noted and commented upon. The conference appeared to make the assumption that learning takes place in communities; certainly, heightening awareness and fostering respect for others is envisioned as taking place through group experiences and the sharing of decisions. The implicit suggestion is that adventure and new space experiences are also encountered as part of a group, which in turn creates another new space. In articulating these aims the DES espouses notions of learning as a community practice. Earlier research (Simpson, 1992:133) reports that

among teachers who were interviewed - professionals who made an outdoor education provision for their pupils - an important factor in a school with a wide catchment area was the opportunity for new relationships to be established among students. For reasons of geography, in their usual space the opportunities for pupils to establish new friendships at school were limited. The residential outdoor education experience has demonstrated over a number of years that it can create a new space in which new friendships may develop and from which they can be sustained. This is supported by Scott (2001), who suggests that, "learning can be understood as participation in a social practice, in which both the learner and the practice are transformed" (2001:32).

The small-group nature of much of outdoor education and the new social spaces students find themselves in, especially when the purpose of a particular outdoor education programme may be for personal and social development or developing problem solving skills, suggest that the experience in the new space is one from which effective learning might take place. This is supported by Harrison (2001) in critiquing a discourse of learning as an individual rather than a social phenomenon. Harrison makes the point that in traditional societies (and suggests traditionally in our society) transitions in social norms (as a result of learning) are collectively established and maintained (2001:158). It is important to recognise the new social space being provided by an outdoor education programme: to negotiate the way in which the group will behave and the learning that is achieved, the members of the small group have to support each other and communicate about their activities in the new space. Hence, changes in the social construction of space while taking part in

outdoor activities can lead to changes in roles and identity. This supports Cheesmond's (1981) suggestion that the importance of including outdoor education in the curriculum was for the benefit it brought to teacher-pupil relationships. Teacher and pupil may both be learners, and relationships may change if, for example, a pupil helps a teacher overcome certain fears or cope with a physically demanding task. The learning that arises from this can only be socially constructed as its basis is in the interactions between the participants.

Discussion of environmental education as it might be understood in the Purpose Model suggests that assigning a purpose to environmental education may be based on a simplistic understanding of its role in outdoor education. The location and the space in which outdoor education happens appear to be significant for outdoor adventure activities, for personal and social development, and for environmental education. This is often taken for granted in the literature. Literature on space, place and human interactions therein helps to develop understandings of space in the social construction of outdoor education. Literature that relates to natural space contains threads that resonate with outdoor education as environmental education, or being in a natural environment for the purpose of personal and social development, or the role of the natural environment in helping to create the adventure experience. I have used the term 'new space' to refer to the significance of the outdoors and the natural environment in outdoor education discourses. It seems from the literature reviewed hitherto that 'newness' is important in the adventurous journey in that the qualities of both newness and adventure are ascribed to a natural environment that is often new to

participants. Therefore, 'new space' refers to the physical location of outdoor education itself and the way in which this has been discursively constructed.

These constructions also carry associations of the new space as being alternative space and perhaps even exceptional space. These ideas are in accordance with those in discourses holding an essentialist view of nature and the natural environment and refer to the essential goodness of nature as a place where humans can retreat in order to find true happiness. Louv (2005) writes of 'nature deficit disorder' to describe how humans are not 'complete' without an experience and affinity of nature.

Space has traditionally been taken as "a passive container for social action" (McGregor, 2002:3). A traditional understanding of space as a location confined by physical surroundings takes no account of the way in which an individual might interact with the surroundings and others in the space. These interactions constitute a space that is not necessarily a particular locus but may be taken as a location in which human activity, such as learning, takes place. I have noted earlier that learning is often seen as a social activity, and this can develop the notion of space being a location for activity to space being where social relations occur. The social relations may change as the physical space changes. I have already commented on the change in social relations that occurs when a pupil helps a teacher on an adventure activity. This creates a new social space arising from a new physical space. The social relations are constructed differently and, for Massey (1994:120), have a spatial form in their interactions with each other. In the context of outdoor adventure education, not only do participants enter a new space in the location in which an activity takes place, but the relationships with each other form a new space as previous experience

and the familiar milieu of the classroom are replaced by interpersonal relations that are different and new. The new space can thus be seen as having the potential for personal and social development and for environmental education.

Thinking of space in this way shows that a space occupied by one individual is different from the space occupied by another individual in the same group. This may be a positive outcome of outdoor education where a change in social spaces brought about by a change in physical space and the activity that gives rise to it can alter any stereotypes or prejudices about individuals based on how they behave or who they mix with in the old space.

Notions of place are linked to ideas of space. Space, when seen as dynamic and changing, allows a sense of place to be considered as a particular set of social relations at a particular time in a particular physical space. It follows that a physical location that might be valued by the experience of it at a specific time of year with a specific set of friends can then seem like a different place in different circumstances. Place is thus as much a moment in time as a physical location. Space and the sense of place gained in space are both socially constructed. The way they are perceived relies on the experiences in space and how they have been socially constructed with others. The perception also relies on the social constructions an individual takes into a particular space from their previous interactions. Their memory and sense of place arising from the interactions in a space will also be subject to revision through subsequent social construction. An experience of the interactions that create an understanding of space in a natural environment, or involve close proximity with



nature, need not carry a notion that nature is special. Essentialist views of nature as good and wholesome may not be a social construction of a space or place that outdoor education students have experienced. However, essentialist notions of nature in popular perception might be powerful enough to attach to social constructions. Essentialist notions are themselves social constructions, but may have been constructed in a different TimeSpace (May & Thrift, 2001) from that of an outdoor education programme. Earlier, the Romantic Movement was given as an example of how nature is socially constructed in this way. There is support in this for the Practice Model, where new spaces can be created by doing different things in a familiar physical place, or familiar activities give rise to a new space when in a different physical location. Thus, the adventurous journey can occur on a familiar crag when a different, perhaps more challenging ascent is undertaken. I have noted earlier that the journey, however construed, is more important than the destination. This reflects that the journey continually takes the participant into new space; once arrived at it becomes familiar.

Massey (1994:254) discusses the notion that space is socially-constructed and, as a corollary, that society is spatially constructed. The first of these statements follows from an understanding of space as articulation of social relationships with a physical location. The interaction of social beings that is dynamic and changing according to the physical environment and the activities undertaken in it socially constructs what the 'space' means or what it is. This social construct is likely to be different for different participants; certain popular perceptions, themes or discourses have particular power. If space is socially constructed, among the meanings and

understandings that give rise to the social construction are the various positions that individuals occupy in the space. Traditionally, in a teaching and learning situation the teacher will occupy a position of authority and power while the learner will occupy a position subordinate to the directions of the teacher. Space constructs social relations and discourses through such conventions as where individuals stand or sit. The implications for Outdoor Educators are those relating to the role of the instructor and to the changing roles of teachers and pupils in the new space. For the instructor, to know who the teachers and learners are, who is not coping with a new situation and who is stressed, has implications for the way in which they facilitate learning from experience and how they ensure safety in adventure activities.

In consideration that society is spatially constructed, the notion of spatiality has to be examined further. Massey (1994:5) draws on Einstein to describe space and time as being interwoven as opposed to being conceived as separate entities. Space can only exist in relation to two or more actors or objects where there is a physical space between them. Moreover, the space exists at a particular time and, as time changes, so does the space in response to meaning-making among the actors and changing discourse of the space. This understanding of spatiality is taken up by McGregor (2002:3), who states that spatiality “draws attention to the fact that social life necessarily happens in certain spaces and places”. That they happen in certain places reflects Massey’s notion of place as a particular point in social relations, a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings (Massey, 1994).

Gray (2004:2) also points to spatiality being about relationships between people, space and places. In outdoor education the role of new, alternative or exceptional space is taken for granted as being highly significant. This draws on particular discourses of nature and the natural environment that privilege it. In addition, great significance is placed on social relations in outdoor education. Taken together these aspects of outdoor education present us with discourses of participation and learning in which the issue of spatiality cannot be ignored. This is important in serving to deconstruct influential discourses in the development of outdoor education as well as understanding the social interactions within such spaces.

Hay (1988) sought to develop a theory of a sense of place and provided an early critique of approaches that emphasised people's position in a space while not considering their emotions, perceptions or relationships while occupying a place. For Hay a sense of place related to a personal connection with it that could be built up through familiarity and the activities engaged in within the place. In one sense it can be seen that such a sense of place might occur within outdoor education, especially when it is residential. Alternatively, outdoor education programmes might offer such a short time of experience in a space that a sense of place does not develop.

However, the shortness of time might be compensated for by providing experiences that are shared and that change the perspective of the place. A sense of place thereby develops from a moment in time of social relations in a particular location. In terms of environmental education, if the activity in a space is, for example, pond-dipping, then environmental knowledge and understanding might be expected to grow. If the activity is an adventurous outdoor one, then growth in environmental knowledge and

understanding could be less obvious, but facilitation of a sense of place might develop attitudes that lead to environmental awareness and action to conserve the natural environment.

A suggestion of nature as a special space in which a unique sense of place can develop recurs among Outdoor Educators. James (1980) identifies two schools of thought: one where being in the mountains is enough for the hoped for outcomes to be achieved; the other where an instructor has to arrange activities so that the location of the mountains can be used as part of a programme carefully designed to meet particular objectives. This notion of whether the mountains can speak for themselves, i.e., is it enough to be there, or does an instructor need to facilitate the experience, also has its roots in essentialist notions about nature, and resurfaces in Kaplan and Kaplan's work (1989). Their report (1989:132) was based on research that proposed a list of ten physical features that might contribute to outdoor programme participants developing a sense of place: stars and sky, island, rock formations, ravines, roads, hills, streams, lakes, trails and swamps. Only the last two showed any change in supporting a sense of place early and late in the programme. Of these the positive change reported for trails could be linked to their relative absence earlier in the programme. Swamps were thought to increase a positive sense of place only as familiarity with them increased since at the outset they might be more likely to be perceived negatively.

The influence of change that physical features might have on outdoor education students is reflected in Raffan's (1993:39) research into the notion of 'land-as-

teacher'. He reports research that acknowledges his own assumptions and interests, based on a two-part research method comprising firstly, a three-week solo canoe trip in a wilderness area then, secondly and separately, a series of conversations with people who actually lived in the wilderness. Raffan's report is convincing in its findings. While his research records narratives of the indigenous population, he employs the same method to learn from his own solo journey. It is in creating a narrative of his experience in order to share it with others that he is able to find meaning in his solo wilderness experience. In the same way, the narrative of the indigenous people gives meaning to their sense of place. Raffan's research was founded on a number of assumptions that included "experience on land plays an important role on shaping sense of place" and "that interacting with people ... would allow some of these other ways of knowing to be included in discourse about place" (Raffan, 1993:40-41).

His discussion of his findings supports these assumptions, although he does not reflect on whether a solo canoe trip contributed to his increased understanding of land-as-teacher or whether such a trip in company or research entirely among indigenous people may have been more fruitful. However, his conclusions identify the need for an experience of land to be necessary in order to acquire a sense of place. Knowledge about land gained through reading or listening to others' stories leads to a limited or vicarious sense of place, and is not conducive to the development of an emotional bond with the place.

The suggestion that a sense of place is predicated on an emotional bond echoes Massey (1994:169), who describes place as being “in part constructed out of positive interrelations”. For the Outdoor Educator, this points to the facilitation of outdoor experiences - shared experiences, from which students derive an emotional bond that is constituent in a sense of place. Emotional bonds between participants can arise from a range of indoor and outdoor activities, while bonds that might contribute to a sense of place of a natural environment can be facilitated through adventure activities that provide a new or special experience. The experience becomes strongly associated with a place, thereby creating an emotional bond. This might be described as ‘educating for’ – a term that suggests prompting in students a desire to take action and care for the natural environment. Jickling (1992), however, cautions against the notion of ‘educating for’ as antithetical to education. He describes education for sustainable development as the advancement of a particular agenda (Jickling, 1992:7) and as being tantamount to training students in particular behaviours. Cooper (1998) acknowledges the problem but argues that environmental awareness can lead to sustainability through providing students with the knowledge, understanding and the competencies to take action should they choose to do so.

The activity in a natural environment that may engender a sense of place can produce different learning experiences for the participant. Whilst outdoor education typically engages students in adventure activities, the appropriateness of the adventure activity for a student will influence their perception of the space and the sense of place they derive from it. Differences in learning experiences and the efficacy of the learning will depend on whether a student chooses their own activity in the space. Gray

(2003:115) reports research findings of students going into a different space and engaging in a different activity in order to embed their earlier learning: walking helps thinking, for example. Thus a change of space and, to an extent, a change of activity in the same location - such as stopping for a coffee break, which is effectively a change of space – would seem to help with learning. Outdoor Educators might therefore be expected to consider the contribution to learning of a new adventure activity in a new location. Participants learning from such experiences, either for personal and social development or for environmental education, might be expected to discover new aspects of themselves, others, the environment and interactions between them. Learning through the new space could lead to the possibility of their developing their own theories from practice. The opportunity for adventure provides an experience of new space that could reinforce or help that learning. However, the scenario differs from that of going for a walk to help think about an issue. The adventure scenario provides experiences that can give rise to learning rather than consolidate learning.

## **Relationships between the three dimensions of the Practice Model**

Experiential learning ideas suggest that participants must choose to be involved and not be mere attenders. However, it may be that just being situated in nature will engender learning. Facilitation of experiential learning enhances the safety element but may detract from the adventure, decision-making or self-direction aspects in the same way that Harrison (2001) mentioned the keeping of records of achievement.

How we are changed by our experiences in these new spaces would seem to partly depend on the essence of the individual experience, whether it be of a new space, of adventure, or of interacting with other people who, in turn, may be people with whom little interaction has previously taken place. It may be that the experiential learning process in itself is new.

If changes take place through the experience of the new space, the Outdoor Educator or learner must ensure that the change is a desired one that can be sustained when the learner is removed from that new space, and possibly returned to their 'old' more familiar space. An understanding of the new space experience would be helpful in ensuring that the learning that has taken place in the new space can be carried forward. It is not clear whether the new space experiences have to be part of a series of numerous, frequent or regular visits to the new space, or whether the new space experiences should be of a minimum or maximum length.



Earlier research (Simpson, 1992) reports that the change in, and the learning and alertness of a student in the new space of a week-long residential outdoor education programme was noticeably different to teachers in comparison with anything they had seen in the traditional space of the school. However, when the boy returned to his family, his body-language and attitude reverted to the pre-outdoor education experience state. Although a single example, it suggests that in the same way that nature may not be the educator or healer without intervention in the form of a facilitator, the new space experience may also need other factors, such as facilitation, in order to ensure that the learning from it can be sustained. Alternatively the new space experience may have been complete but the learning and changes said to be evident in the student were not sufficiently supported to overcome other things in his life on return from the outdoor education experience. The student's return to his home and school situation may have prompted a response that was more familiar to teachers, but markedly different to that displayed during the residential outdoor education week. In such a case factors other than facilitation, such social support, may be needed in the return to home phase in order to sustain changes initiated through the outdoor education phase.

Outdoor Educators would argue that outdoor education is a powerful medium for learning. When adventure happens in the new space and is shared in order to be more readily learned from experientially, then the opportunities for learning may be more likely to persist. In the example above of the boy not maintaining his newly heightened alertness, a tension emerges between the old and new spaces and what occurs within them. The empowering of the student has an effect for a short while

during the course of the new experience, but is not powerful enough to sustain the changes on returning to the old space. The old space has features of longevity and permeation to greater parts of the student's life. Perhaps it may only be overcome, and the student truly empowered to take control of their own life and learning, if the new space experience is more powerful or of a longer duration. The longer duration may be something that can only happen when the student leaves home and engages in new experiences in a new space; a different kind of adventure.

This poses fundamental questions about what is learned through outdoor education and how that learning is prioritised and legitimated in schools that are facing competing pressure on resources. Each of the three dimensions of outdoor education are claimed to provide learning opportunities as stand-alone approaches to learning. The significance of all three being provided together has been understood in terms of deriving purposes such as personal and social development, as well as environmental education. Changes in the understanding of learning, the concept of lifelong learning and the emergence of new technologies are affecting what is understood as learning (Paechter, 2001a). Whilst the learning that can take place through outdoor education has been described for a long time, it may be that developments elsewhere will now illuminate what we understand as that learning and the relationship between the three elements. For example, in terms of lifelong learning, whatever the learner learns accrues legitimacy. This legitimacy is unlikely to extend to outdoor education for school-age students where learning is largely prescribed, despite there being efforts to make students more responsible for their own learning (Harrison, 2001). Neither might it extend to the physical challenge of adventure activities or simply being in a

natural environment, notwithstanding those things arguably being educative. As

Paechter (2001a:2) points out;

“Because learning has been seen traditionally as something that takes place only in the mind, the fact that learning is something that happens to embodied learners occupying particular spaces has generally been ignored or played down...we are moulded and altered by our learning experiences that involve both the mind and the body”.

The inclusion of outdoor activities in outdoor education hitherto appears to be for the provision of significant experiences from which such things as environmental

education or personal and social development might emerge. Outdoor activities or adventure for their own sake have not emerged from the literature as significant.

However, Brookfield (2001) discusses the visceral experiences of a learner contributing to their learning so that the learning goes beyond ‘head knowledge’, and

this is reflected upon and revised in order to acquire more meaning as knowledge in action; the theory-practice relationship described by Jarvis (1999). Outdoor

education comprising all three dimensions can provide a memorable visceral

experience of experiential learning through adventure in a new space, from which

learning goes beyond an intellectual understanding to the application of the learning to practical situations; i.e., the learning from a practical situation can transform that

practice. The practice may be advancement in skill in an adventure activity, or it may be developed skills of operation in a social situation. It may even lead to action for

the environment.

**Chapter 5**  
**Field Research**

## **Introduction**

The field research explored practitioners' perspectives and ideas within the community of practice of Outdoor Educators, and focused on practitioners delivering outdoor education courses as well as including local managers who directly oversaw their work. The managers also had direct contact with students participating in outdoor education programmes and may have taught some parts of the programme themselves. The research precluded students of outdoor education who might have been found in higher and further education. Students referred to in the text are those attending an outdoor education programme rather than those attending a programme about outdoor education. Research interest focused on Outdoor Educators teaching programmes for school pupils for whom outdoor education was provided as part of the school curriculum. This also served to confine the research to those areas where outdoor education provision was likely to be generalist and an adjunct to mainstream schooling - the primary concern of my own professional practice. Finally, the field research was conducted in residential outdoor centres.

I noted earlier that a significant amount, nearly 50%, of outdoor education takes place in residential centres and these are the basis for my own professional practice.

Arguably, residential centres also offer a clearly defined community of practitioners where the head of centre is a member of a professional association i.e. the Association of Heads of Outdoor Centres (AHOEC). As a past chairman of AHOEC, arrangements to conduct the research could be made readily and informally. In addition, the similarities of provision to my own professional practice meant that any

application of learning could be made directly to my own situation. AHOEC is not only part of the community of practice of outdoor education but is also a recognisable and delineated community of practitioners itself. The AHOEC community of practice is concerned with the management of a facility and staff that have been established to provide outdoor education. Management responsibilities normally include the professional staff of Outdoor Educators, the programmes they teach, health and safety during the activity programme, and the management of support staff. The experience required for appointment to the position of Head of Centre suggests that their perspective of outdoor education, how programmes are devised and the ways in which learning may be derived from them are more developed than those of their staff. Furthermore, as the lead professional in the establishment they might be expected to influence, direct and guide the practice of their staff. The overlapping communities of practice, Outdoor Educators who are Heads of Centres and Outdoor Educators who do not have the same management responsibility, will have differing perspectives on practice and varying levels of awareness of the influence of ideas, research, policy and wider educational discourses on practice. A selection from both communities of practice was taken to seek to understand the range of meanings given to outdoor education. Semi-structured interviews were used for reasons discussed below.

## **Field Research Method**

Adopting a qualitative approach to research in the community of practice - an interpretive methodology of seeking directions along which to look - suggested variations on an ethnographic approach using participant observation. Although ethnography holds possibilities for this sort of research, the fine detail of information it would produce was not thought necessary for my research. Ethnography involves “participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said and asking questions” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995:1). Such an approach would illuminate all that constitutes the daily lives of Outdoor Educators and, by interpretation and analysis, might provide insights into and influential ideas and discourses in practice. However, it would also provide details and a wealth of material not pertinent to the research. Neither was it considered that the substantive focus of the research could only be revealed through taking part in people’s lives for an extended period of time in order to discover tacit knowledge and understandings.

Baker (1997) points out that interviews are among the most widely used methods of data generation in the social sciences. The value of interviews as a source of material for research raised their use as a convenient and accepted tool for this field research, the purpose of which, in answering the research questions, was to find out through first-hand dialogue with outdoor education practitioners the meanings and understandings they attach to their professional practice. While not undertaking an ethnographic study, the insights gained from an ethnographic approach and from

qualitative interviewing would be more helpful in interpreting the understandings of the respondents. Thus, the use of an interview approach might elicit a series of answers from which something of the meanings held by respondents could be understood. However, the focus is on what practitioners do and why they do it, therefore direct answers to direct questions may not reveal the tacit knowledge they hold, or shed light on all of the understandings and the meanings they attach to their practice. It was therefore decided to listen for the ideas that they might draw upon in explaining and describing their practice. Such an interview would take the form of an informal conversation.

According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), the intention of the interview is to get to the meanings and understandings of the respondents. In seeking to achieve this outcome, ethnographers do not decide beforehand the exact questions they want to ask, and they may not ask each interviewee exactly the same questions, but will often have a list of issues they wish to cover. They will adopt a flexible almost *ad-hoc* approach and in so doing the conversation that develops will be a result of responding to the interviewee's replies. For this reason although piloting an interview guide was considered it was decided against. A pilot of an interview guide would be intended to refine a set of questions in order to formulate the 'best' combination of words and questions irrespective of the responses of the interviewees. Whereas the guided conversation of the semi-structured interview would be flexible enough for me to develop the wording, order and probing questions as the conversation developed and from interview to interview. Even so, the informal conversation will never be a simple conversation because the researcher has an agenda and needs to guide the



conversation along particular directions (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995:152).

Questions will be used to prompt talking about a particular broad area. Care is needed in formulating and posing the questions as “a question that sharply defines a particular area for discussion is far more likely to result in omission of some vital data which you, the interviewer, have not even thought of” (Dexter, 1970:5).

It is an interview of this type that was adopted as a research tool: a semi-structured, semi-formal guided conversation. Having adopted a social constructionist epistemology for an understanding of outdoor education, the same ideas were used to critique informal interviewing as a source of understanding. The meanings and understandings in the community of practice are socially constructed through discourse. Discourses circulating in the community of practice are not the same as discourses between interviewer and respondent. Thus, the interview conversation itself socially constructs a reality that is a construction of what the participants understand as the discourse of the community of practice. Interviews create meanings that lie with the participants (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997); yet, Miller and Glassner (1997) are reluctant to embrace the notion that nothing can be learned about the social worlds beyond the interview. In the case of the present research, there was an advantage in that the interviewer is an ‘insider’, i.e. already part of the community of practice of outdoor education. My professional role positions me in the broad outdoor education community of practice and in the overlapping, smaller, delineated, community of practice that is AHOEC. Thus, when engaging in the interview process I decided against seeking insights into what for me was the hitherto

undiscovered world of the respondent, but chose to seek to understand the respondent's construction of our already shared reality.

In the context of the field research there were disadvantages associated with my already being a part of the community of practice. These included the danger of my own understandings influencing the nuances of the respondent's expression of their insights. Moreover, there was the possibility that respondents could wait for me to lead before revealing their own views or understandings, thereby reflecting my own, perhaps perceived as 'right' views, rather than theirs. This highlights one of Wenger's (1998: 131) critical characteristics, "knowing what others know, what they can do". Despite this apparent shared knowing my research is to understand their knowing that may be shared but may also be tacit. In addition, the material I was to gather could also have been the material I perceived to reflect the ideas circulating in the community of practice rather than those of the respondents. It was therefore imperative to guard against these challenges through cautious contributions to the 'informal conversation' revealing my own insights into ideas not substantive to the research. By taking part in the conversation in this way it was possible to relax and prompt my respondents to contribute without my leading their insights and expression of understanding.

It is these features that distinguish the adopted process from being readily described as participant observation, which is often the prevalent research method of ethnography (Bryman, 2001) and frequently involves interviewing. Classically, participant observation will involve the researcher entering a social setting and

playing a role of involvement with the members of the social setting while retaining a detachment that allows them to observe sufficiently to fulfil the aims of the research. Bryman (2001:299) refers to Gold's classification of participant observer roles as ranging from complete observer to complete participant, depending on how they play the role and find a niche appropriate to their research aims. Whatever the role adopted, the essence of the participant observation lies in the researcher entering a social scene and attempting to see it through the eyes of the members. The participant observer is entering a social setting of which they are ignorant and seeking to learn more. Even though they participate in the setting they do not share the interests of other participants. The participants have a direct personal involvement in the interaction and an interest in ongoing interactions. The participant observer however carefully they participate can not have the same interest in what is happening and why. They are interested in watching what is happening rather than taking part and influencing what is happening. In the case of my own research, I am already a part of the social setting of outdoor education and thus contribute to its social construction. This largely takes place through participants meeting each other in a variety of ways; for example, Outdoor Educators typically hold a range of national governing body coaching awards. Attending training, assessment or refresher courses for the awards requires attendance at courses, which also serve as a platform for networking, exchanging views and to talk about other matters that contribute to the social construction of outdoor education.

As an existing participant in socially constructing outdoor education the role of the participant observer eludes me. My interest in the social construction is as one involved, not one watching what is happening. My experience, as Kaminski puts it, “can stimulate ones understanding of insider problems” (Kaminski, 2004:7). For these reasons, the variation on ethnography and participant observation that was selected for the purpose of this field research was one of ‘observant participant’, a notion suggested by Kaminski (2004) in his study of prisoners. Kaminski was a prisoner himself. He was therefore already a part of and a participant in the community that he observed from within, using the term ‘observant participant’ to describe his role in undertaking his research. This contrasts with an undertaking by a ‘participant observer’ who would not normally be a part of a community. They have to enter it, gain acceptance and then seek to observe from within while refraining from influencing its ideas and practices.

This suggests that as an existing participant, the research task was to become observant along the interpretive directions that I needed to pursue in order to answer the research questions. One of the challenges of this approach was to ensure that I looked along the interpretive directions indicated by the respondents without being diverted along other lines of interest that were not substantive to the research. As an observant participant involved in the community of practice and contributing to the social constructions therein, it has been challenging not to privilege my understandings from my part in the social construction, and instead to seek the understandings of others through their part in the social construction.

## **Interview guide design**

An interview guide was devised to achieve two objectives: firstly, to prompt practitioners to describe what they did that they understood as outdoor education; and secondly, to prompt them to talk about their thoughts on what they did that constituted their outdoor education practice. This second part was intended to reveal how they understood or theorised their practice. In seeking to answer the research question ‘what are professionals in the field of residential outdoor education doing that they understand as outdoor education?’ it was necessary to identify a number of directional lines along which to look, as follows: What is their practice? What is their understanding or theory underpinning that practice? That is to say, does what they are doing and thinking about their professional practice as Outdoor Educators exemplify what they think about outdoor education? The interview was also designed to gather information about qualifications and background in order to provide descriptive data on this sample of practitioners. Researcher understanding arising from the literature review and the development of the Practice Model to describe outdoor education informed the design of the interview schedule (see Appendix 1) in particular ways. The three dimensions identified in the Practice Model prompted a number of questions requiring sets of three responses in the answers. The interview guide was designed in four sections focusing on the provider, about the students, about the practitioner (research subject) and about the practitioners’ thinking on outdoor education.

Section One was concerned with the provider or residential centre in which the research subject worked. The context in which the outdoor practitioner works was sought in order to help to understand their practice. Thus, questions two and three were specifically about the provider, and question four about the management of the facility. This was considered important as an indication of the reporting lines and how the subject's place in the structure might be an influential factor in their understanding of their outdoor education practice. Linked with this was question five which asked about the number of teaching staff. It is important to mention here that the diversity within the community of practice and its size may have an influence on its discourse.

All sections included questions intended to cross-refer or support other questions. This was considered particularly helpful in the case of planned guided conversations where the conversations were to comprise the field research. Questions that cross-referred or supported other questions were intended to enhance understanding through approaching an area of interest from a slightly different direction. I anticipated that respondents would place different emphases on their experience of outdoor education, partly depending on the pressures they were facing at the time and partly on their own career path. Therefore questions were included that contrasted outdoor education with other forms of learning such as students experience in school. This approach was based on my own understanding that it is often easier to talk about something in relation to something else. Similarly if it is difficult to say what something is then it might be easier to say what it is not. Furthermore, having recognised that interviews are social events that construct their own reality, and with

the aim of generating data to provide an insight into an already constructed reality, the interview guide was designed to elicit whatever multiple constructions of the reality might be expressed during the informal conversation. It was noted that during the interview / conversation, the response to a question might prompt a particular social construction of reality that might not reflect the social construction held within the larger community of practice. Therefore, the asking of a similar question was intended as a way of confirming earlier responses.

The questions included in the interview guide included open and closed questions. In general, in order to explore the point of view of the respondent, open questions are generally preferable and offer the opportunity for an exploratory conversation, and so these were used in the field research. However, closed questions were also found to be useful for gathering factual information about what actually happened as outdoor education for each respondent. Closed questions were also used to help the interviewer retain control of the conversation and to signal a slight change of subject.

## **Research Subjects**

Outdoor centres were selected on the basis of the seeming similarity in the provision that they made and their being respected in the field. Centres meeting both these criteria were identified through my own participation in the community of practice. All of the centres held licences from the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) and the Head of Centre either participated in the Association of Heads of Outdoor Centres (AHOEC) or the Scottish Advisory Panel on Outdoor Education (SAPOE). The centres were therefore known in the overlapping communities of practice as those where generalist outdoor education for school groups was undertaken. In conducting the research in these centres I sought providers whose provision was similar to my own professional practice. Thus centres where the emphasis is known to me to be more formally on environmental education, activity holidays or where the head of centre does not participate in AHOEC or SAPOE were not included. Thus Outward Bound, despite being among the earliest providers of outdoor education was not included in the research as the head of centre in Scotland does not participate in the overlapping communities of practice of AHOEC or SAPOE. The centre designated Farragon, although charitable, was indistinguishable from the centres belonging to councils in the programmes offered. Each of the centres has been given the name of a hill in order to protect anonymity and facilitate writing about them.



Residential outdoor education centres are a convenient location for a researcher of a number of outdoor education practitioners since they potentially have different backgrounds and are at different stages of their career. Moreover, their practice as Outdoor Educators was likely to be a significant part of their professional lives. Each week a residential group in the centre would follow an outdoor education programme requiring instructors to lead it; therefore it was less likely that their outdoor education practice would be an adjunct to something else that might engage their working lives. Interviews with outdoor centre staff offered the possibility of researching among a community of practice, of conducting several interviews at one place on the same day, and access to volunteers in the centres being facilitated through the offices of the (AHOEC).

As I indicated when describing my research method (page 75) my research is composed of two stages. The literature review is part of the research. The field research is a second part. The field research is not intended as a survey of the community of practice but to answer the research question “what are professionals in the field of residential outdoor education doing that they understand as outdoor education?” This would then allow consideration of how their personal understandings resonate with the literature (research question 2). It was thought a sample size in the teens would be sufficient to do this. However the question of how big is enough was not easy to resolve. I determined to start with a number in the teens and review as I went along whether I thought the data gathered was allowing me to answer the research question. In the event 15 volunteers came forward and I found the data gathered to be sufficient to develop categories for analysis (see Data

Analysis page 205). Sufficiency was determined when I was only receiving small bits of new information, and gathering information that was consistent with what had gone before (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Therefore approaches were made to the Heads of Establishment of four outdoor centres with a request for them to ask for volunteers among their teaching staff who would be willing, in confidence, to take part in the research. The request for volunteers specified that they should be Outdoor Educators with a range of experience and at different stages of their careers. Each Head of Centre arranged for their staff to be available for interview on the same day. The cohort from each centre included the Head of Centre, a relatively junior member of their team, and other instructors who may not have been in promoted posts but who had volunteered and were available. Influences on the understanding of practice among the Outdoor Educators interviewed were likely to have included the number of colleagues in the centre and their background. Numbers of teaching staff ranged from seven to eleven with a variable number of freelance associates who were employed for a short term to run particular programmes. The background of the teaching staff showed two main routes to employment in outdoor education: either they progressed through a route of gaining the coaching/instructing/leading awards of national governing bodies (NGB) of each sport, or they were qualified teachers in either outdoor education or another subject, and who found that outdoor education suited them more as a professional arena. Those from a teaching background also held a number of NGB awards.

National Governing Body coaching awards are specialist awards for the safe coaching of a particular sport. For example, the British Canoe Union (BCU) has a hierarchical series of coaching awards from levels 1 to 5. Coaches at each level are expected to have personal skills in the sport appropriate to the award level in order to safeguard and coach the participating students. Whilst coaching skills are assessed in the sport that the NGB award is designed for, it is as a demonstration of the safe delivery of activity in the sport that the award is most significant. In general, for Outdoor Educators the leadership of the activity is more important than finer points of coaching. The Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) inspects safety standards and licences providers of adventure activities. There are a number of measures of competence and safe practice, including NGB awards, that are acceptable to AALA, but NGB awards are a common demonstration used by providers. This is significant when considering the background of Outdoor Educators in the present research. They can typically be expected to hold a number of NGB awards but this cannot be seen as being of any other significance than an authority and ability to deliver particular activities, they do not necessarily give any insights or access to a formal body of knowledge that might be part of the social construction of outdoor education.

In terms of outdoor education having purposes that go beyond safe acquisition of skills, the background of the Outdoor Educator might be expected to include other experiences that have facilitated their development of an understanding of outdoor education. These other experiences include working alongside other Outdoor

Educators as part of a community of practice, or the undertaking of formal education in the form of a diploma or degree.

Of the cohort of respondents in this research, three subjects (Colin, Fred and Hugh) held only NGB awards. The remainder were all graduates in various subjects – one in education and design, three in geography, one in history, three in biologically related sciences, one in forestry, one in environmentally related science and two in outdoor education (or otherwise titled). Three held postgraduate degrees and five held a postgraduate certificate of education (PGCE). Of the undergraduate degrees, two were B.Eds, according qualified teacher status. The following table shows each interview subject with the name of their centre, together with their job title and qualifications.

| Interviewee <sup>10</sup> | Centre       | Job title           | Formal Qualifications (Question 22)                          |
|---------------------------|--------------|---------------------|--|
| Alan                      | Farragon     | Operations Director | BEd Design NGB Awards  |
| Brian                     | Farragon     | Instructor          | BSc Geog NGB Awards  |
| Colin                     | Farragon     | Instructor          | NGB Awards   |
| Dawn                      | Lawers       | Head of Centre      | BEd MA Geog Dip OEd (IM Marsh)<br>NGB Awards                 |
| Eric                      | Lawers       | Senior Instructor   | BA Hons PGCE Geog & OEd (Leeds)<br>NGB Awards                |
| Fred                      | Lawers       | Instructor          | NGB Awards   |
| Grant                     | Lawers       | Instructor          | BSc Forestry PGCE NGB Awards                                 |
| Hugh                      | Tarmachan    | Principal           | NGB Awards. Industry background                              |
| Ian                       | Tarmachan    | Trainee Instructor  | BA OEd in Community (Strathclyde)<br>NGB Awards              |
| Julie                     | Tarmachan    | Instructor          | BA History PGCE NGB Awards                                   |
| Keith                     | Tarmachan    | Instructor          | BA Outdoor Recreation Studies (Ilkley)<br>NGB Awards         |
| Liam                      | Schiehallion | Principal           | BSc Biology MSc (Ed Man) PGCE NGB Awards                     |
| Mike                      | Schiehallion | Principal Teacher   | BSc Biology PGCE Bio & (OEd)<br>(UCNW) NGB Awards            |
| Nick                      | Schiehallion | Instructor          | BSc Botany & Zoology PhD PGCE<br>(OEd) (UCNW) NGB Awards     |
| Owen                      | Schiehallion | Trainee Instructor  | BSc Env. Geological Science MSc<br>Marine Science NGB Awards |

Table 1: Interview subjects, their Centre's, job titles and formal qualifications.

<sup>10</sup> Names have been changed to protect anonymity

The range from trainee instructors to Heads of Centre at centres' Tarmachan and Schiehallion, together with an informal assessment that other instructors had a range of different experiences, brought together influences from what were perceived to be peripheral and core members of the community of practice. The range of job titles in Farragon and Lawers was more limiting but masked that some instructors had been employed in their post for much longer than others. From my own experience I considered this selection of interviewees a suitable cross-section of practitioners, thereby meeting the requirements of the research.

## **Conducting the Interview**

The interviews were all planned to take place in the residential outdoor centre where access to practitioners had been agreed. Apart from the convenience of interviewing a number of people in the same location, being in their place of work was conducive to the substance of the interviews. However, it also resulted in imposing limitations on the process. Chief among these was the length of time each interviewee was available before being called back to their regular duties. For some respondents sufficient time was available, for others it seemed the guided conversations could have gone on longer than the respondent was available. For example, Mike, a practitioner with long service and seniority in the centre, had a great deal to say about how he understood outdoor education, and he also invited dialogue with the interviewer in a negotiation of meaning making. Although Mike was prepared for a longer conversation, the demands of being at his place of work meant that he had to turn his attention to other responsibilities. At the same centre Owen, a trainee instructor, needed less time to complete the guided conversation. Among the strengths of conducting the interviews at the respondents' place of work was that it was their 'home territory', where they were comfortable, and this familiarity helped them to relax into the guided conversation and made the matter of establishing rapport easier for the interviewer.

Interviews as informal conversations in places used for other purposes make the dividing line between interviewer and respondent difficult to discern. Although the role of the interviewer included retaining control of the conversation, not creating

artificial distinctions between the two parties formed part of the strategy for creative interviewing, as described by Douglas (1985). The informal guided conversation is said to generate richer material when the interviewer is creative in conducting the interview. Creativity requires the interviewer to go beyond rational neutrality to engage in mutual disclosure. As an (almost) equal participant in the conversation, the interviewer will be willing to disclose some of their own thoughts and feelings in order to elicit a similar response from the interviewee. This is problematic as while it may generate richer material, there is also the danger of the interviewer contaminating the data through taking part in the construction of interview-specific reality. One of Douglas's tenets for creative interviewing is "researcher, know thyself" (Douglas, 1985:51). While this is intended as an aid to mutual disclosure, in the present research it has been implemented as an aid to guard against the interviewer leading the respondents understanding and meanings.

The task of building rapport with the subject was facilitated by drawing on shared interests and biographical experiences. One of Wenger's (1998: 131) critical characteristics of a community of practice is "the absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were part of an ongoing process". This was found to be true and helped in starting the interviews. However, as I was researching in a geographically dispersed community of practice I did not take it for granted and negotiated the start of the interview carefully. The outdoor education field is relatively small, identifying mutual acquaintances, wearing clothes appropriate to the outdoor education community and a willingness to talk about 'adventures we have undertaken' were strategies developed in early interviews and continued in later ones.



Despite my known role as the head of an outdoor centre, these strategies helped to verify my credentials as a genuine member of the outdoor education community of practice. In this way, my membership of the community of practice was an asset in gaining more than physical access to respondents: it also encouraged them to talk knowledgably about their field without having to explain shared tacit understandings. However, this also required me to engage in a role play to give the impression that as a Head of Centre I was largely confined to an office and no longer very involved in directly leading activity programmes. This was a useful strategy for making explicit that which is tacit and asking the respondents to explain that which is normally taken for granted. Questions framed in such a way as, “I used to know the background to that, but please just explain it again”, were found to be helpful in doing this.

Establishing my credentials in this manner helped contribute to establishing and maintaining the interview situation by making the respondent feel comfortable and competent enough to “talk back” (Blumer, 1969:22). When talking back, they provided deeper insights into the meanings they attached to their community of practice.

The initial minutes of the interviews included some explicit and implicit negotiation about the form of the process. I provided information about the reason for the interview, gave reassurances of confidentiality, where we would both sit, how I would be recording the interview, and confirmed my intention to be attentive and not judgemental. I saw my role as guiding a conversation and consequently there was more leeway to talk than in a structured interview.

The data gathered from the interviews was recorded in writing at the time. This was a pragmatic decision as it was recognised that an unstructured conversation within which I intended to be creative in asking questions, engage in mutual disclosure and respond to perceived needs of the respondent for dialogue, would generate large amounts of material (Bryman, 2001) much of it not salient to the research questions. Thus had the interviews been tape recorded analysis would have required sifting out conversation intended for other reasons, notably to facilitate the respondent in expressing their perhaps tacit knowledge and understanding. Thus an advantage of making a written record at the time was that all writing was pertinent to the research questions and did not need to be sifted from transcriptions at a later stage. Making a written record using the interview guide as a template also created non-threatening pauses in the conversation when the respondent could gather their thoughts and offer additional comments. As the interviewer I was able to test the accuracy of my record immediately by asking the respondent whether what I was recording was an accurate representation of what they were saying. This in turn prompted further explanation of the answer to the question and helped to yield richer information. However there were associated problems with making a written record at the time. These included the pauses needed in the conversation in order to write and the sense that could be created of the 'rightness' or otherwise of a particular statement or answer when selectively recorded while other parts of the conversation were not. To overcome this I endeavoured to be as transparent as possible about what I was doing, sharing the interview guide with the respondent, seeking their agreement to pause in order to write, and telling them why I was writing some things down and not others.

Nevertheless the written record made during the interview would inevitably constitute a form of field notes that required reviewing as soon as possible after the interviews (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998; Bryman, 2001).

Despite my intention to embark on mutual disclosure in order to be as creative as possible, it became apparent early in the series of interviews that the respondents had to be advised that while both parties might enjoy a wide ranging conversation, it was not possible. Moreover, the interviewees were informed that if there were instances when my response to a statement or question might be to change the subject, it would be necessary to be led by the interview guide rather than pursue a line of conversation that might be less fruitful for the research. Making this explicit early in the meeting was found to be helpful in all the interviews.

All of the respondents were volunteers and, as far as could be ascertained, they were genuine ones. Although their reasons for volunteering were not investigated, the request for volunteers came through their managers, so there was a chance of it not being completely of their own free will. However, there was no suggestion in any of the interviews that the volunteers were anything other than there voluntarily.

Moreover, they knew only that they were participating in research in outdoor education and nothing more until the meeting began. It is recognised that the effect of the audience (the interviewer) and the context of the interview (in this case the association with their professionalism) can have an effect on what is being said.

(Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995:156). Efforts were made to ameliorate this by assurances of confidentiality, and an assertion that there was not a 'right' answer to

any of the questions. By being reflexive during the interview and not suggesting any predetermined ideas of appropriate answers, by not being judgemental, by adopting a mode of enquiry that valued and received the respondent's entire contribution to the informal conversation, the material gathered was expected to be more reliable than otherwise.

## **Data Analysis**

Initial analysis of the data was made by extracting the answers to questions 1-16 about each centre, its management, staff and user groups. The responses were then used to write about the context in which each respondent worked as an Outdoor Educator. Answers to remaining questions (18-21 and 23-32) were organised into themes which had been identified from the literature review. Answers to question 22 were about the interviewees and have been reported earlier. Theme generation required laying out piles of paper on the floor in a similar manner as described by Lofland and Lofland (1984). Each pile of paper represented a theme and an attempt was made to assign the theme a name that would encompass all of the responses within it. The themes were outdoor environment, physical challenge, natural environment, personal development, adventure activities, new physical or social space / doing something different, experiential, relationships.

Once the responses to each question were categorised in this way, they were examined to understand any substance and nuances that were contained within them and that might typify the theme. If any doubt arose as to whether an item should be assigned to a particular theme or not, then a new theme was created. If it was difficult to determine whether items of data in different themes were actually different, then themes were merged. If themes could not be merged, then margin notes were used to indicate a link with another theme. Themes generated from each question were then examined and, where appropriate, merged with themes from other questions.

Consideration was given to using an *inter-rater* to check my categorisation of data to themes. However this was not pursued because it was recognised that the data arising from the informal conversation of the semi-structured interview is itself a social construction arising from the interview. An *inter-rater* would not be party to that social construction and to the nuances recorded in the interview notes (Bryman, 2001:403). Somebody looking at the bald words and shorthand generated by the interview would not be in a position to interpret that reality second-hand. This was anticipated in the construction of the interview guide when questions designed to cross-refer and support each other were included, the responses would help me as the researcher in the development of themes arising from the social constructions of the interview.

Themes identified by this process were understood to be descriptive of the respondents' understandings and the meanings they attached to their practice of outdoor education. Of interest for the research were apparently shared meanings and understandings (as well as disparities) that could be seen to illuminate this particular community of practice. This focus on meaning and ideas as a way of understanding the practice of outdoor education means that the research has also been concerned with the identification of influential discourses in practice. Influential discourses already discerned from the literature included those of adventure, learning from experience, new space, risk, and the essential wholesomeness of nature. Also included is environmental education, as described in a number of ways, including education for the environment. Discourses of sustainability and therapy, although

seemingly less influential, were also identified. This mode of analysis was suited to the research method as respondents are expected to express their construction of outdoor education in terms that are comparable with each other and whose meanings are to some extent shared within the community of practice. Shared meanings would therefore be allocated to the same theme. For example outdoor environment and natural environment had meanings that allowed them to be merged into 'new space'. If a range of constructions was elicited, then it would be reflected in the number and diversity of themes.

It was recognised that splitting up the records of individual narratives in this way could also destroy some of the sense of individual's narratives. In order to overcome this difficulty, when a section of dialogue was being allocated to a theme it was also reviewed to look for a broader context and wider meanings. Where these were identified, the records of that part of the informal conversation were copied, marked and kept on one side to be used when reporting the research.

### **Reporting the data**

Reporting the data will follow the process used for data analysis. Firstly responses to questions 1-16 will be reported centre by centre as a narrative to describe the context in which the interviewees engage in their professional practice. The remainder of the data will be reported thematically.

## **Narrative reporting of the data by Centre, questions 1 – 16**

### **Farragon**

The Centre is owned by a charitable trust which is limited by guarantee, and does not have any funds to support the centre. Hence, capital developments are dependent on fundraising and operating costs are paid from course fees. The Trust has appointed a Chief Executive who in turn has appointed an Operations Director who has day-to-day management responsibility for the Centre. There are seven members of teaching staff who in turn are led by a Chief Instructor to whom a Senior Instructor reports. The teaching staff comprises a mixture of qualified teachers, instructors who have trained on the job and instructors who have completed a one-year instructor training course.

‘All the main activities’ are offered to students attending courses from all over Scotland, but who are predominantly in class groups from primary schools. The Trust does not have its own clientele; instead it provides services for other people who attend for a general outdoor education programme. Occasionally, secondary school students attend for weekend leadership development courses. The initiative for making a booking usually comes from the school’s Head Teacher, but sometimes the impetus rests entirely with a keen class teacher. Parents usually pay for the course. Whoever brings the group has ultimate responsibility for the students’ welfare, but responsibility is passed to instructors during the activity programme. Visiting teachers assume responsibility during non-outdoor activity time and at night.



Schools - especially those lacking facilities for outdoor sports - come to the Centre to use theirs, to gain the benefits of outdoor education and to have the learning experience of being in a residential setting. They also come to take part in team-work and for personal development. Often there is a particular educational element within the course, such as the Centre's Discovery Workshops or John Muir Award. Some will have specific aims and run parts of their own programmes; others will have a different emphasis, for example an environmental impetus such as the John Muir Award. This is a specific environmental education programme devised by the John Muir Trust and delivered through a variety of providers such as outdoor centres. Most groups engage in outdoor pursuits in the mornings and afternoons over half-day blocks, while in the evenings a game or similar activity is arranged.

## **Lawers**

In Lawers the Centre is owned and operated by a Council which does provide some funding but the Centre has to be income-generating as well. The Head of Centre reports to the Service Manager for Countryside, thence to the Head of Community Services, and to the Chief Executive, while the instructors' accountability on a daily basis is to the Senior Instructor. The Depute Head of Centre carries out instructors' annual appraisals. Each instructor has a daily log-book so that the Head of Centre can be made aware of events.

There are four instructors and 10 trainee instructors. Only the Head of Centre is a qualified teacher, having been employed at a time when all staff were teachers.

Although some instructors hold teaching qualifications, all are employed on local government terms and conditions. The trainees are working towards SVQs and they carry out the day-to-day activity leadership of clients, supervised by instructors.

Students attending the Centre are predominantly from the Council area. School/ groups are in the majority but also notable are social work and community groups.

While all the main activities are offered, some emphasis has been given to themes that have been identified in the school curriculum, such as enterprise, and efforts are made to include notions of enterprise in the activity programme. Parents pay part of the course fee while the remainder is subsidised by the Council. There is additional support for people who cannot afford course fees. Activities are led by instructors or trainee instructors during the day, while evenings are supervised by trainee

instructors. Visiting teachers supervise lunch and evenings from 9.00 pm. Generally, students attend the Centre for team-building/personal development purposes, for the aspect of challenge, environmental education, building confidence, and looking after themselves. Some groups come for all of these things, others for just one. The programme includes abseiling, climbing, canoeing, raft building, gorge walking, a woodland skills day when students make things, charcoal for example, and do conservation work. In winter, when there are no water activities, they are engaged in more environmental activities.

## **Tarmachan**

The Centre is owned and funded by the Council and the Principal reports to the Quality Development Service of the Council's Education Department. There are 11 members of teaching staff, and older instructors are also qualified teachers. Newer appointments, however, tend to hold degrees in sport studies or youth and community work. In the year prior to this research, the Centre had been used by six high schools, six special schools and a number of P6 and P7 groups. The Centre staff expected that the following year it would be used entirely by P7 groups as a result of policy change within the Council. Activities offered included dry-slope skiing, gorge-walking, coasteering, climbing and increasingly environmental activities; in addition, all the usual activities were also available.

The Centre is staffed to accommodate 88 students but in future there will be 100 beds and they expect to cater for 100 students each week. This will be without an increase in staffing and will necessarily affect the programme. It is the Council's intention to fill every bed for 40 weeks of the year, thereby providing a residential opportunity for every P7 pupil in the Council area. From Easter to June there will be a Monday to Friday group followed by a Friday to Monday group, sharing transport for arrivals and departures. The Education Department allocates weeks to each school, but some choose not to come: of 130 primary schools 109 use the centre. Evidently, there is strong support for outdoor education in the Council, and parents pay £100 for their children to attend a five-day course. Pupils receiving clothing grants or free school meals are charged £10. Supervision is carried out by the Centre staff during the day,

although there will be an increasing use of visiting teachers as student numbers are augmented. Activity group size is eight at present and this will increase to 10. The evening programmes are arranged by two of the instructors but, as student numbers increase, there will be a growing reliance on visiting teachers to share this responsibility.

The Centre at Tarmachan did not seem to have a well-developed articulation of the reasons or purposes for outdoor education. “In ‘Higher Still’ it says every child should have a residential experience” (Hugh). However, he was not able to provide a concrete reference to support the statement, neither did a search of the literature nor a conversation I had with a representative of Learning and Teaching Scotland elicit support for the view. The residential facility available to the education authority was an outdoor centre, so it may be by default that outdoor education has been the programme undertaken in the process of providing a residential experience. In addition to ‘all the usual activities’, dry-slope skiing was specifically mentioned.

At Tarmachan it appeared that little autonomy was delegated by the education authority. Moreover, the Council’s intention to increase the number of visitors to the centre led the respondents to anticipate an influx of larger groups, little flexibility in programming, fewer adventure activities and a move away from their ideals of outdoor education.

## **Schiehallion**

This Centre is also owned and operated by a Council which does not, however, cover the costs of the operation but does fund any approved overspends. While the Principal reports to a Principle Education Officer, the Centre's Principal Teacher and Senior Instructor both report to the Principal. In turn, Associate Instructors report to the Principal Teacher, and other instructors report to the Senior Instructor. This division reflects the difficulty in ascertaining how many members of teaching staff there are, as a variable number of associates are employed short-term to run programmes. Nevertheless, the teaching staff are all outdoor practitioners with NGB awards. The Centre is used predominantly by primary schools, 60% of which are from the Council area. The remainder include a high proportion from the area of the Region that preceded the Council before a local government reorganisation in 1996. For the majority, it is traditional to go away to 'camp'. Although the Centre has 100 beds, students are divided into activity groups on arrival and the course is planned to prevent them from having a large group experience.

At Schiehallion question 16, '*What do they (the students) do when they come to the Centre?*' did not elicit a litany of outdoor adventure activities, although they are provided, but emphasized the experiences and responsibilities accruing to the students through the programmes, each of which included elements of personal challenge, team challenge and a remote experience. It did not matter that all the students from a school did not take part in all of the adventure activities; rather that the students engaged in all of the experiences that could be derived through them. Mike (Principal

Teacher) particularly observed that skills acquisition was not a main objective of the programme. *“Far more important were students undertaking a rite of passage that is the residential period away from home”*. Within that rite of passage, they were obliged to take some responsibility for their own learning.

However, in answering question 15 *“for what reasons or purposes do they follow the programme?”* it seemed that the reason underpinning the booking was made clear to the Centre staff, or that respondents were imbuing a booking with their own understandings of why students were taking part in the outdoor education programme. Mike was more explicit when he mentioned that the aims of the programme largely emanate from the Centre and that there is a need to educate the school staff members who make the bookings. Mike expressed that a *“recent concern is to try to get them to think about why they are here”*. He also stated his belief that outdoor education is not about skills acquisition so it doesn't matter which activities are taught, and he preferred to cite some of the purposes and direct links with the school curriculum

Themes of challenge and the natural environment are also promoted at this Centre. Outdoor activities provide a vehicle for challenge, as well as personal and social development, but they are also a means for students to access the natural environment, interact with it and be independent in it. Initially, decisions about the activities students take part in are made by a senior member of the Centre's staff in liaison with the responsible visiting teacher. Changes to the activities planned for the

day may be made by individual instructors in consultation with their managers in order to meet the changing needs of the student, the weather, or other factors.

The programme is intended to be “*structured but flexible*”. However, there is also an indication of the Centre’s own objectives being imposed on the programme as well as meeting objectives of visiting teachers. As Owen stated, “*The programme will usually include one full day of activity; one water activity and one remote experience*”, which concurs with Mike’s comment that “*Every programme will have a component of personal challenge, team challenge and a remote experience*”.



## **Thematic reporting of data, questions 17 – 32**

The themes of ‘adventure’, ‘learning from experience’ and ‘new space’ that became the dimensions of the Practice Model emerged from a critical review of the literature. Using the dimensions of the Practice Model to inform the interview schedule allowed the efficacy of the Model to be tested in the field. Reporting the field data thematically, using the dimensions of the Practice Model, illustrates that the personal understandings of the respondents resonate with those found in the literature research and suggest that had the field research been conducted first then the findings were capable of giving rise to the Practice Model which could then have informed the literature research. Thus demonstrating the efficacy of the Practice Model in interpreting how the community of practice understand and attach meanings to outdoor education. Each of the themes / dimensions will be used to report the interview data. The way in which themes are generated and merged from respondents answers to questions are reported using direct quotations. Quotations and meanings from different respondents are used to identify common knowledge and shared understandings.

## Adventure

In the process of formulating the Practice Model, the dimension of adventure emerged as a theme. Ideas identified in the relevant literature, such as adventure comprising uncertainty of outcome, personal challenge and doing something new or different, meant that such ideas found in practice were merged into the over-arching idea of adventure for the purpose of analysis. Although there was considerable shared understanding of the idea and meaning of adventure there was also diversity.

The theme of adventure was constructed through a variety of statements offered by the respondents, including how they described their role - which they partly saw as the provision of adventure activities, as reflected in responses to question 17 “*If somebody asked you at a party what you did for a job, what would you say?*” Some answers mentioned only the managerial responsibilities of the job; others specifically referred to the role of Outdoor Educator . Additional comments that were made in order to describe what individuals did served to enhance an understanding of their ideas about their professional roles. Colin (Farragon) “*facilitates the outdoor activities*”. Fred (Lawers) would say he was an Outdoor Education Instructor and then relate it to outdoor pursuits (i.e. “*what the activities are rather than what is behind it*”, researcher emphasis). Grant (Lawers) teaches outdoor activities, but mentioned, “*There is a much bigger subtext about the activities being a means to an end and especially about sharing wilderness with other people*”. Ian (Tarmachan) ‘*takes people out doing activities*’, but “*not for their own sake; there is a deeper purpose of personal development for which reviewing of the experience is important*”.

Nick (Schiehallion) describes himself as “*an outdoor instructor who helps create a sense of adventure with a safety net*”. Students are exposed to adventure but the existence of the safety net suggests that it is adventure tailored for and appropriate to the students: their perception is of an uncertainty of outcome, whereas for the instructor the outcome is more certain. Nick also seeks to “*open students’ eyes to the outdoors and the natural world*”. The implication is that there is something in the outdoors and the natural world that Nick has experienced, valued and wants to share with others. In saying this Nick indicates how themes, although separated for convenience, have overlapping components. He talks of creating a sense of adventure but links this to the natural environment. For Owen, a trainee instructor in the same centre, a similar sentiment was expressed that there are two concomitant aspects: taking part in outdoor activities and going out into nature. Although the first of these can take place in a wide range of locations, he saw it as significant for outdoor education that it is set in a natural environment. However, his peripheral role, as in that of a recent arrival, was later evident in a conflicting statement. When asked about his understanding of what outdoor education means, Owen replied “*Outdoor activities, not so much the environmental side*”. It was clear throughout the rest of the interview that adventure activities eclipsed anything else in his understanding of what outdoor education means.

How the respondents would describe their jobs in response to a question at a party is also reflected in some of the answers to question 18, ‘*What do you do from day to day?*’ Again, for some there was reference to managerial or supervisory work; for others there were shorthand ways of saying that they take groups outside for outdoor

activities. It was clear that the bulk of what the respondents perceived they did was to take students on a range of what might be thought of as traditional outdoor adventure activities. Interspersed with these are indications that what the respondents do from day to day is seen by them as more significant than doing outdoor activities would appear at face value. Thus Colin (Farragon) said that he makes sure students get what they want “*in terms of the outdoors and facilitating the whole experience*”. Here, the decision for students to be engaged in the programme lies in the main with the school staff who are making the booking. It seems likely that in addition to the students getting what they want from the experience - outdoor activities - that Colin is also fulfilling the objectives of the group organiser. This conclusion is drawn from respondent’s use of language and his pointing to the students’ benefit extending beyond the immediacy of the outdoor activity programme. There is also a suggestion that Colin has a tacit understanding of what the ‘outdoor experience’ is that helps his facilitation of it for his students.

Dawn and Ian (Lawers) both refer to management of risk as part of their every day occupation, suggesting their job is partly to equip students for encountering risk. Hence, adventure - the uncertainty of outcome - is implicit in the outdoor education programme. But the risk management on behalf of students engaged in the programme leads to students’ undertaking something they perceive as risky. Other notable variations on what the interviewees do from day to day, in addition to expressions of taking students on outdoor activities, are more expansive statements from Julie (Tarmachan) and Nick (Schiehallion).

Julie (Tarmachan) stated that she teaches outdoor activities but rather than describe these, she concentrates on the purpose of what she does i.e. “*personal and social skills, residential education, encourage teamwork and all that*”. In indicating the purpose for which she teaches different activities, Julie supports the frequently stated view both in the literature and from the respondents that outdoor education is about personal and social education, including teamwork. The lack of further comment failed to connect what she does - “*teach outdoor activities*” - and what the activities achieve in terms of the students’ personal and social development. From Julie’s response to question 26 about three key elements of outdoor education, it seems she believes that engagement in the physical challenge of outdoor activities inevitably leads to personal and social development. Facilitating this is a key part of her role, but she does not explain in practical terms how she succeeds in doing so.

Julie also touched on the matter of residential education, which she ‘taught’. The residential context is important to her but she did not make it clear how it can be ‘taught’ and it may in fact allude to a different role for her as an Outdoor Educator. Nick’s daily occupation is to “*provide experiences the student cannot get in their normal city environment through the medium of outdoor activities*”, and which may produce a thrill from engaging in physical activity. To do so in a natural environment provides an experience in and of that environment: “*... helping them to see the natural environment in a new way*”. Providing new experiences notably different from students’ previous ones is an important aspect; thereby illustrating the interrelationship of the three dimensions of adventure, learning from experience and new space.

While it is apparent that adventure was revealed to be an important theme when respondents were asked about the uniqueness of outdoor education, other unique themes included ‘outdoors’, as stated by Colin (Farragon); Grant (Lawers); Ian, Julie and Keith (all Tarmachan); Mike (Schiehallion), and intimated by Nick and Owen, (both Schiehallion). For these respondents, outdoors meant anywhere in the outdoors. Four interviewees, i.e., Brian and Colin (both Farragon); Keith (Tarmachan); and Liam (Schiehallion) included risk assessment and issues of safety as part of the purpose. The need to assess risk and manage safety implied adventure in the outdoors.

Challenge was regarded as a unique feature by Adam and Brian (both Farragon), Eric and Fred (both Lawers), Julie and Keith (Tarmachan), Liam, Mike and Nick (all Schiehallion). Challenge was mentioned as a personal and usually physical challenge, and was frequently seen as unique to outdoor education, contrasting with mental challenges found in school. Keith talked about helping students to realise their capabilities “*and not to turn back at the first sign of something being tricky or uncomfortable*”. This response does not specify adventure *per se*, but chimes with uncertainty of outcome and thus the role of adventure in outdoor education.

The notion of challenge as part of the programme was interpreted broadly.

Adventure activities and their physical tests were linked with the challenge of the unknown that arises from the environment and from the residential situation. The question about the three key elements of outdoor education generated responses that included mentions of physical challenge. Keith summarised the matter: “*It is unique*

*to outdoor education; they have to do, something*” (original emphasis). As key elements, others identified adventure, the physical challenge, risk, and student choice in taking part in the adventure.

Julie spoke of the novelty and excitement of taking part in outdoor activities and again the adventure of facing the personal and physical challenges they provide.

Keith spoke of the challenges of the outdoor activities but also of his key role as instructor/facilitator in managing those challenges to the students’ benefit.

Other related points were made about the activities or the location where outdoor education might take place. For example, Adam and Brian at Farragon felt it must involve risk and be challenging, respectively. However, this risk must not be *“of a contrived nature such as a barrel and planks”* (Adam). Such a statement is significant when considered against the background of outdoor adventurous activities in the physical education curriculum that emerged in the literature. It became apparent that the outdoor education practitioners interviewed did not recognise such a reductionist approach as outdoor education. Indeed, probing questions used golf as an example. The elicited response was that golf is not physically challenging so is not considered outdoor education, whereas when considering a skateboard park, a response was *“I want to say no, but it could be outdoor education”*: part of this ambiguity arose from the fact that it was unlikely to be in a natural environment.

Julie (Tarmachan) indicated some of the uncertainty that exists at the boundaries of outdoor education. Hugh (Tarmachan) was less uncertain about location: *“It doesn’t matter where outdoor education takes place; activities can happen in lots of places”*.

Hugh's view was not expressed as clearly by anybody else. However, in response to a later question about how else students might be offered the benefits of outdoor education, Dawn (Lawers) pointed out that ropes courses are widely used in outdoor education programmes and could be set up anywhere. In commenting this, she also conveyed a sense of difficulty in finding a response to the question. Nevertheless, Dawn expressed a strong preference for the natural environment as a location for outdoor education at different stages of the interview, saying that the natural environment is important but if this was not an option then ropes courses and other activities could be set up anywhere.

The influences in Hugh's background may be relevant in understanding his responses as an Outdoor Educator. Although a Head of Centre, he described himself as having an "*industry background*" and holding a number of NGB awards. This points to perspectives arising from skills in adventure activities and teaching them safely to students, and may partly underpin his view that the location of outdoor education is unimportant in that, for example, canoeing can be taught on an urban canal as well as a rural loch. Dawn, also a Head of Centre, has an academic background that includes a diploma in outdoor education and the completion of a one-year teacher exchange in Canada, which she described as being formative in her understandings of the "*whole concept of outdoor education*".

The significance of the natural environment extended to whether activities offered were natural or not. At Tarmachan, Keith emphasised that the activity programme included "all the usual activities but nothing motorised". It became evident across all



the centres that motorised activities were not included anywhere. Further probing disclosed that the exclusion of motorised activities was as conscious a decision as the inclusion of other activities. Motorised activity was seen to detract from students' personal effort in achieving objectives through the expenditure of their own energy, from having to rely on themselves to undertake the activity and deriving enjoyment from it. There was a sense that motorised activity serves to continue to locate students in an artificial environment, and was not seen as very different from what the respondents thought of as their students' own environment. There they could rely on artificial means for their entertainment and understanding of the environment in which they are located and with which they interact. Additionally, the argument was advanced that part of the intention of outdoor education is to educate students within and about the natural environment and this intention would be undermined by motorised activity. This resonates with discourses of nature found in outdoor education literature. If nature is implicitly wholesome and associated with healthy lifestyles, then outdoor education should not be detracting from it by introducing an activity based on unnatural means.

Other respondents said the adventure of being in a different place was an important part of doing adventure activities. The location and the activity were both part of the adventure and, for example, Adam (Farragon) and Nick (Schiehallion) thought they should go together. Discourses in the literature also support the view that location is important and is part of the adventure. Although outdoor education can take place in an urban environment (Beedie, 1998), the literature generally supports the view that a natural environment is preferred (Pretty *et al.*, 2006; Martin, 2004; Simpson, 1995).

Early in this thesis it was posited that outdoor education is often described in terms of its benefits to students. Having asked during the informal conversations what respondents thought were the benefits, which I will discuss later, I also asked them what contributed to the students accruing these. In response, six themes were generated. Of these, adventure activities, natural environment and learning from new experiences were the most frequently cited. Adventure activities included some descriptions of adventure “*getting them out of their comfort zone,*” (Keith Tarmachan), and the element of risk. The appropriateness of the adventure was mentioned by two people, “*balanced programme,*” (Liam, Schiehallion), “*appropriate activity,*” (Adam, Farragon), and “*perceived adventure in a safe, structured framework,*” (Brian, Farragon). From the interviews with practitioners we can conclude that adventure activities are seen as making a significant contribution to outdoor education and the Outdoor Educator’s role is to manage them properly.

## Learning from Experience

The dimension of learning from experience is a theme constructed from a range of interviewee's statements about experiences available through outdoor education. Within a variety of precursor themes that merged to finally form 'learning from experience' were those that privileged 'something different', 'new experiences', 'activities' and 'learning skills'.

Eric (Lawers) expressed his understanding of outdoor education as "*experiential, outside, impactful; it makes a mark on people*". Eric values the fact that outdoor education is not geared to produce measured results. His comment that "*It's not tied by performance indicators*" suggests that there is more scope for students to engage with the adventure experiences in a personal way, perhaps to seek more or less adventure if they choose and for the experience to be more memorable: "*People remember it*". Eric regards lack of performance indicators as a good thing in order to allow him to concentrate on providing outdoor education experiences that a student can respond to without being constrained by externally imposed requirements.

According to Eric, among the distinctive features of outdoor education, are "*awe and wonder moments, education is practical and away from their daily experiences*". For Eric that outdoor education does not have to meet performance indicators contributes to these distinctive features and is part of the Outdoor Educators' daily task of providing memorable, impactful experiences.

One of the themes generated from question 28 about the benefits of outdoor education was the acquisition of new skills. New skills and abilities were mentioned and suggest the benefits of outdoor education do not all lie in the physical nature of adventure activities. There are ways in which students can learn from experience, to make decisions and to learn about risk assessment and management. An early title for the category used the term 'physical activity', as this was a strong initial impression, but further examination of the data suggested new activities and innovative features that could readily be categorised without emphasising physical activity. Thus fresh skills exceed the physical skills of outdoor activities and encompass knowledge that students learn that can be applied in other contexts after the outdoor education programme. It seems how to learn from those experiences is the thing that will be useful in the future.

What Mike (Schiehallion), a Principal Teacher, does from day to day was described as being "*Head Chef of a posh restaurant with lots of exotic things on the menu*". Probing questions revealed an understanding of his role as overseeing a number of strange new things (to the students) and his role is to arrange them so that different parts of the programme complement others as well as excite and stimulate the students. This focus on what outdoor education is for the students is further emphasised in his response to question 20 "*What activities do you instruct?*" Mike's answer was that "*it doesn't matter as outdoor education is not the acquisition of skills*" - a contrast to some of the other views expressed. Further probing elicited his belief that it is about providing new experiences in the natural environment; he has the skills and can sufficiently instruct outdoor activities to provide these experiences.

In response to a specific question, but not volunteered, it was established that Mike holds a wide range of NGB awards and leads all the main activities. The centrality of new experiences to Mike's thinking is an important factor in the construction of outdoor education. Adventure activities have a high profile but Mike is articulating the purpose of adventure activities as providing new experiences. This is a development of purposes of outdoor education, which includes such things as personal and social development. If outdoor activities can be understood as a purpose as I discussed earlier, then a purpose of the implicit adventure includes providing new experiences. The reason for the new experiences being adventure activities is a likelihood that students will not previously have taken part in them and they will therefore be new. Locating the new experiences in a natural environment adds to the newness as it will be different from the urban homes of students coming to the centre.

Mike's role in the centre as Principle Teacher with nearly 25 years' experience and a PGCE in outdoor education positions him as part of the core of the community of practice, as described by Wenger (1998). He shares in and contributes to discourses in the community in a way that is more influential than a more peripheral member, such as Owen, a trainee instructor in the same centre. I have already noted Owen's ambivalence about the natural environment and his focus on adventure activities.

Mike's emphasis on experiences over skills also serves to illustrate diverse discourses in the community. Other respondents deem the acquisition of new skills to be important. Learning them is a new experience and they give access to adventurous journeys and the quest of exploring a new environment. Mastering new skills and

practicing them in a new environment is a challenge that is part of the adventure experience.

According to Mike, reviewing is part of the process by which students learn from the experiences. Mike implements reviewing techniques to make links with the school curriculum, and fosters learning from the links and transferring that learning to the students' lives in the future. His comment that "*Kolb's learning cycle is useful*" indicates an experiential learning pedagogy or, in terms of the new Practice Model of outdoor education, an approach of 'learning from experience'. In this way Mike is in fact reporting a practice identified in the literature and described earlier using the DTAG learning cycle, which is a variation on Kolb's model.

Dawn, Eric, Fred and Grant are all from Lawers and in some ways their answers reflected their respective roles in the Centre. Dawn is the Head of Centre and said the school chose activities to build a programme according to their objectives. The Centre furnishes the school with a list to show how different activities could deliver a different emphasis and curricular objectives, such as personal challenge or communication skills. In the same centre the Senior Instructor (Eric) emphasised activities as a metaphor for life, stating that "*the activity itself isn't important*". These two views from senior staff in the same centre reveal diversity in understandings of the outdoor education they offer: one a directly alternative approach to achieving school based objectives; the other as learning more generally in readiness for living in society. In addition Dawn, as Head of Centre, also has to interpret her professional work in a context of financial and other pressures from her

Council. Unsurprisingly, therefore, her focus is on what she perceives schools most obviously want in order to retain a support base in the Council area.

Question 25, *'What does outdoor education mean to you?'* also yielded data on the theme of experience, within which respondents talked of outdoor education as a metaphor for life. This was expanded on to include the experiences of being outside and using all the senses in learning about the outdoors. An experiential learning cycle was used to link the experience of adventure activity to student learning by Fred (Lawers), who said, *"We need to make sure they review what they've been doing, it can't be left to chance"*. Various statements reflect elements identified from the literature of learning from experience: *"... experiential learning – analysing risks. In the strictest sense it isn't experiential but gives students the opportunity to be at height, feeling scared with their fingers sweating"*; *"powerfully experiential and gives an immediate response"* (Liam, Schiehallion); and *"Impactful, not abstract,"* (Eric, Lawers).

At Lawers, Grant mentioned, *"Experience in the outdoors with learning that can relate to their lives"*, while Adam at Farragon believed that, *"a longer journey is useful because it sustains the experience and the learning opportunities"*. Both these statements suggest that something has to be done with the experience: the something being provided by other statements that speak of review (Adam, Farragon), reflective quietness (Dawn, Lawers, - a contrast to her earlier remarks about meeting objectives of the school curriculum), and *"...review during and after the activity..."* (Keith, Tarmachan).

Principles of gaining understandings of new experiences and learning by doing included notions about the newness of outdoor education and the chance for a new start for students. Students do not need to bring any previous understandings to their outdoor education and can work at their own level. Five respondents emphasised students not being limited by previous perceptions and being able to 'be different' (for example, Nick at Schiehallion). In order to gain maximum benefit from such a situation, both the experience and the location must be new to the students. The notion of difference has two perspectives: firstly, the different experiences of adventure activity, environment and perhaps the people they share it with; and secondly the student is allowed to behave differently by virtue of the new context.

'Learning from experience' was initially a theme of 'new experience', it included, "*progressively developing the students' experience, increasing the complexity and level of the challenge*" (Ian, Tarmachan). This indicated that what the students did with the new experience was important and this also arose in a suggestion in another statement: "*There are things that develop teamwork and physical skills, but you have to be careful not to lose spin-off benefits by over reviewing*" (Nick, Schiehallion).

These responses echo the literature, and in particular Dewey (1938), who called for experience to be examined. Therefore, the theme was enlarged to include three statements about reviewing and one about reflective time, these being activities related to what the students do with their experiences. This was also summarised by Ian as, "*a way of watching and realising they are learning something they can take home and into the rest of their lives.*"



The theme of learning from experience arises from the respondents' articulation that the experiences of adventure activities and being in the outdoors are significant in the lives of their students. A significant notion from the interviews is that the new experiences should be reflected upon in order for students to learn from them. The learning that arose from the experience was seen as something that could be carried into other parts of the students lives. It also included learning how to learn from experiences in the future.

## **New Space**

The dimension of new space refers to a range of discourse including themes of environmental education, essentialist views of nature, getting away from the usual context in which students live their lives (sometimes constructed negatively) and experiencing a different place.

Ideas of nature and the natural environment were included in responses from Colin (Farragon), Grant (Lawers), Julie and Keith (both Tarmachan), Mike, Nick and Owen (all Schiehallion). Together with Ian (Tarmachan), these same respondents indicated the importance of the outdoors. Environment/nature aspects might be seen as a qualification of the theme of ‘outdoors’, since the outdoors is seen as requiring a natural environment. In distinguishing between the two themes of outdoor and environment/nature they appear to be overlapping and complementary rather than completely separate. However, they were initially treated as separate themes because they were identified separately by the respondents. This offers some understanding of the notion of ‘outdoors’ as an important feature of outdoor education and practitioners privileging outdoors in a natural environment, but leaves little room for urban adventure. A statement made by Colin (Farragon) illustrates an idea in the construction of the theme, whereby he emphasised that he is not just teaching canoeing but wants his students to *“be in the middle of the loch enjoying being there, experiencing the location and the view”*.

Being outdoors in a natural environment brings a “*big experience, awe and wonder moments from being in amazing outdoor places;*” as well as “*being cold and wet*”.

Both these statements from Eric (Lawers) illustrate how the natural environment fosters different kinds of experiences. The first he mentions as the sort of response he thinks the experience will prompt in students; the second is a direct consequence of being outside and an experience that may not be pleasant but is a challenge that has to be addressed and responded to.

Statements supporting the generation of the theme of environment/nature included slightly different perspectives: “*outdoors, not necessarily wild and remote*” (Eric, Lawers) and, “*needs a degree of wilderness*” (Nick, Schiehallion). There are clear overlaps with adventure and learning from experience: “*The challenge is from being in and waking in the natural environment, with some educational content, something physical*” (Nick). One of the statements relating to experiencing another environment (Brian, Farragon) linked explicitly to a response to question 26 about three key elements of outdoor education and demonstrates the blurring of boundaries between the categories of environment and different experiences. It also supports an idea of ‘difference’ identified in the theme ‘learning from experience’.

One of the features of a natural environment is that it is seen as different from the students’ home environment. It was from a precursor theme of ‘new’ and ‘different’ that new space, to include environment/nature, arose. An understanding of new space included the notion of it being different: “*wilderness...needs to be appreciatively different from their normal environment*” (Nick, Schiehallion), and doing something

different: “*scope to learn and to do something they can’t do at home*” (Brian, Farragon). In some cases there are links with other ideas “... *new surroundings, even a canoe is a new environment*” (Brian) and “...*a new environment such as an off-site hill walk*” (Owen, Schiehallion). In these cases, the physical challenge or the adventure creates a new environment into which a student is taken.

A number of respondents talked of ‘difference’ including Brian (Farragon), Grant (Lawers), Liam, Mike, Nick and Owen (all Schiehallion). It was described as “*something completely different from what they’ve done before*” (Liam, Schiehallion). Respondents from Tarmachan did not contribute to the construction of this theme. This was not thought to be more significant than their giving emphasis to other points during the informal conversations rather than their not valuing ‘difference’. The respondents from Schiehallion who contributed to this theme were all the respondents from that Centre, thus including the Principal and the trainee instructor. This suggested that in the Centre the idea of ‘difference’ was talked about and an effort made to include ‘difference’ in the programmes. This seems a likely conclusion about Schiehallion as they were also the only Centre where I found a strategy to their programme planning. All programmes would include something with a personal challenge, something involving teamwork and somewhere remote. The new outdoor education settings may not be unique in that they are often locations accessible to students not attending an outdoor education programme, but they are unique as locations where part of their educational provision is being made.

I have already made a reference to Hugh and Dawn's views on whether it mattered where outdoor education takes place. Other respondents included a natural environment as their preferred location for outdoor education. The notions of natural environment, wilderness, rural or country areas were mentioned by eleven interviewees, seven of whom also made statements that generated a theme of 'new place'. This suggests a strong link between the 'new place' and the 'natural environment'. Of the remaining three 'new place' respondents, one said "new," one "new place" and the third (Ian, Tarmachan) said "further away from cities," indicating the 'new place' to be understood as a natural environment and giving an example of the boundary difficulties between sub-themes, when a statement could be allocated to either.

Additional comments were made, for example Liam mentioned that: "*Being in a remote environment that is not readily accessible... gives an inspirational 'wow' feeling*", that arises from being in the natural environment. There was a hint as to how a 'magic spot' might be found in the overlap of themes of adventure, outdoors and learning from experience. Grant talked about the uniqueness of doing things in the outdoors and "*relating experience back to life ... to get some love of the outdoor world, the environment, to effect change in behaviour or attitude*", Colin mentioned, "*Experiencing a wild place or other outdoors and gain(ing) appreciation of it*", Dawn described the experience of "*doing it in the natural environment*" while Fred talked about the potential to "*learn about the environment and practice looking after it*". These responses express a sentiment that being in the natural environment will lead to a more memorable experience and to action on behalf of the environment.

Mike's aspiration is that his students would learn to "*cherish the natural world*". This suggests their acquisition of an Outdoor Educator's value; that students will respond by cherishing the natural world. However, this transference of such an explicit value can be seen in terms of its benefit for the Outdoor Educator rather than as an obvious benefit of outdoor education for students. This example from Mike raised the issue about education, also posited by Jickling (1992) and discussed in my literature research: it is the difficulty about 'education for' when the 'for' is determined as a purpose by the educator.

Generation of the theme of new space, often but not always, construed as a natural environment, also drew on respondents' attempts to suggest alternative ways in which students might derive benefits such as those claimed for outdoor education. In order to do so, many could only suggest other ways of replicating known features of outdoor education. 'New physical and social space / doing something different' was an early theme merged into 'new space' and which echoed the new challenging environment. It was notable that the need for a new challenging environment did not include specific references to a natural environment. It is the new and challenging environment in which outdoor education took place that was reported as one of the distinctive features marking it out from previous learning experiences. It is this which is seen as offering benefits to outdoor education students: being outside, perhaps in a natural environment or wilderness; described by Liam as "*a quality environment*".

## **Impact of Outdoor Education**

In addition to expressing the ideas leading to the three dimensions of adventure, learning from experience and new space, all the respondents identified the dimensions as a means to an end. Some of the ends respondents had in mind were those that have been construed as purposes of outdoor education. Others were an immediate response to an experience or a means of enhancing a programme. They are recorded and commented upon here as they arose from the semi-structured interviews, and are among the notions of outdoor education held by the community of practice. However, data analysis did not find them to be themes in their own right so much as issues that arose from the themes identified above.

In order to achieve the perceived ends, to which outdoor education is seen as a means, it helped that the adventure activities were attractive. Adam (Farragon) pointed out they, the Centre, are market-led and therefore need to offer activities that might provide an instant response or adrenalin release to bring people into the programme.

The buzz and excitement of some adventure activities was seen as contrasting with offering (only) hill-walking, which might not attract and engage students in the same way. Outdoor activities, including hill-walking are said to provide a vehicle for other experiences, such as an appreciation of the environment, personal development, self-esteem, and personal motivation. Any combination of activities could achieve similar outcomes, but drawing students into a programme is easier if it is a varied programme that is more likely to have something for everybody. This contrasts with the literature

(Mortlock, 1984) that claims that a hill-walk is preferred over short-term activities requiring little skill and offering excitement. For Grant (Lawers), the activities provided learning opportunities and practice in working together: *“They develop self-confidence and self-esteem rises”*. Grant made special mention of the role of adventure and the uncertainty it creates which, when addressed, can produce *“a sense of ‘I never thought I could do that’”*: he added, *“Getting into the natural environment can give awe and wonder moments”*. In making this last statement Grant also suggested that outdoor activities in the natural environment have intrinsic value and need not only be a means for something else. He expanded on this by describing the effect outdoor adventure activities can have on the student, and the ‘awe and wonder moments’ he thought of as spiritual effects. Not all feelings of awe necessarily relate to the spiritual of course- the term is often used in relation to feelings of amazement, surprise, of a sense of something greater that cannot be understood. In this sense it is often considered spiritual (Simpson, 2005) and probing revealed that this was what Grant was referring to. However, the recent example of conflict in Iraq related the term ‘awe’ to shock and amazement arising from the severity of the attack on the country, and are not construed as spiritual.

Liam (Schiehallion) suggested a student’s responses might find outdoor education to be a *“magic-button pusher, a wow factor producer”*, *“very motivating”* and *“powerfully experiential”*. Mike (Schiehallion) stated that a key element of outdoor education is excitement and fun. Both of these were described as *“very motivating”*.



Personal development was nearly unanimous as a reported benefit of outdoor education. Of the two respondents who did not specifically mention it, Eric said that the benefits depend on the individual, while Nick noted three things that were not specific on this point but might be interpreted as leading towards personal development: physical benefits, social benefits and learning about the natural environment. The statements included in this category highlighted increased self-esteem, gaining confidence, independence, and the opportunity for students to make choices, thereby *“realising their own potential”*. Other comments were made about relating personal development to *“learning about themselves”* (Fred, Lawers); *“feeling better about themselves and recognising why”* (Grant, Lawers) and *“discovering new things about themselves”* (Owen, Schiehallion). To *“learn about others”* (Fred) is categorised with three statements pertaining to teamwork and one to small groups.

Social Development was also a benefit that was nearly unanimously acknowledged. Dawn and Keith said more about personal development, while Liam offered the qualification that it depends on the individual. The remainder all recognised the outcomes of working with other people, learning about other people, changing relationships between teachers and pupils, and making new friends. Social development was sometimes understood to include learning to work in a team, but this was not unanimous. For example, Keith (Tarmachan) noted; *“teamwork is in there, but is not the main thing”*. Adam (Farragon) mentioned team-working as being part of the experience rather than having any major significance of its own. These two respondents reflect an understanding that the literature suggests is absent

(Loynes, 2002). Keith and Adam appear to recognise that teamwork does not equate to social development in contrast to Loynes suggestion that experiential facilitators located in a traditional algorithms paradigm inevitably see social development as a consequence of team-working.

Important to the personal and social development are the facilitative skills of instructors and their intention and awareness to use opportunities for students' personal development, as Grant described: "*What students take home with them through being constantly challenged to consider their practice*" extends the concept of outdoor education beyond the programme to having a lasting affect on understanding, behaviour and attitudes. Throughout the literature and field research, the intentionality of the instructor as facilitator of learning is thought to be an important feature of outdoor education. The responses of students as well as their learning are seen as being emphasised through the social contact with the instructor, their peers, and the ideas the instructor brings to an experience. The field research supports the emphasis on the social nature of learning found in the literature.

The social nature of outdoor education is highlighted in the residential nature of outdoor education. Two respondents saw this as a key element. Adam (Farragon) explained why, "*The best outdoor education programmes are through longer term programmes...the length of the outdoor education experience is important, this is why the residential is significant, students can't switch back to their own environment*". This was also a finding of Hattie *et al.* (1997:47). Other statements also relate to the residential experience being beneficial in providing a new social place as well as a

new physical place. Being residential affords the opportunity for informal learning from an experience as well as providing a new experience through residence. Talking during meal-times and social breaks serves as a vehicle for a student's reflection on an experience and allows the assimilation of another's views and learning.

Residential was not used to create a theme of new place as there was a subsequent statement: "*day courses don't have such a profound effect.*" This linked with 'residential' but related to a theme of continuity of experience. Detachment and continuity of experience were two overarching themes of residential education identified by Fleming (1998). They gain legitimacy through being mentioned again as features of residential outdoor education. It is not seen as enough to have a short experience. Longer experiences not only allow students to be separate from their usual situation but the separateness means more when return to the usual is not immediately possible. This argument could be extended to distinguish between short activities that give buzz and excitement and those that require more persistence to complete, and is similar to the distinction between motorised and non-motorised activity. Immersion and perseverance seemed to be part of the thinking surrounding outdoor education. In addition, the view of residential being in a remote place emphasised the 'difference' or new space of the location and linked it with a natural environment. It is not clear that the distance from the students usual environment was seen as the important factor or whether increased contact with the natural environment was more important. As the two invariably go together support was found for the notion of the dimension of 'new space' rather than 'natural environment', which is included in new space.

The significance respondents placed on outdoor education as a way of learning is underlined by the paucity of ideas they had about any alternatives. Five people, from Farragon, Lawers and Tarmachan and including senior and junior staff, had no suggestions for alternatives. This range is noteworthy in order to validate the idea as more than a response based on the inexperience of newly-appointed Outdoor Educators in that the negative answers were a positive response to the question. However, other respondents suggested music, different forms of risk, sketches and performing in front of other people. Three responses refer to the different needs of different individuals: *“drama would do it for some”*; *“finding the things that work for each individual”*; and *“whatever ‘flicks the switch’ for that individual.”* All of these might be summarised in the words of Liam as, *“taking people into a new environment away from usual social props.”* In turn, this was understood as taking them into a new space of social interactions and interactions with the location: a situation in which they could not be confident of relying on previous knowledge to know how to behave and how to understand the experience.

Some respondents considered the location of the programme as adding to the quality of provision. However, if the location was considered poor then it could be improved in other ways. An urban environment could provide outdoor education, *“if the instructor’s rapport with the group is good”* (Fred). Liam developed a similar theme *“learning through outdoor education is like a planet orbited by moons that are location, activity, instructor and student. Learning takes place under the varying influences of the different moons,”* and *“some urban locations for outdoor education will be qualitatively different from the loch”*.

Among the ideas expressed, a number referred to outdoor education as educative in the broadest sense: “*It’s about educating the whole person*” (Grant, Lawers); “*a means of approaching educational objectives*” (Liam, Schiehallion); “*an approach, a medium, not a subject - cross curricular*” (Mike, Schiehallion); and “*a classroom for geography or history in a real way*” (Adam, Farragon). With the exception of the last example, these extracts illustrate a notion of education other than that linked to the school curriculum and suggest a means to an educative end in the way that schooling is not. The statement about geography and history also reinforces this point; outdoor education is ‘real’ in a way that mainstream schooling and the formal curriculum is not perceived to be.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

## **Introduction**

The research reported in this thesis has found that understandings of outdoor education in the literature resonate with those in the field. Outdoor education is continually socially constructed in the literature and in practice and relevant discourses are therefore fluid and subject to change. However, understandings in the literature of outdoor education are primarily descriptive and concerned with the purposes for which outdoor education might be deployed. This was also found in the field. This key finding obscures more critical understandings of the practice of outdoor education. However, through inquiring more deeply into outdoor education discourses it emerged that what is practiced as outdoor education can be understood in a way that will aid analysis in order to understand and develop notions of outdoor education. What has emerged from research, the literature and previously published research is an analytical tool, the Practice Model, which is fluid and can contribute to critical analysis of outdoor education.

## **Research questions revisited**

The research questions are:

1. What are professionals in the field of residential outdoor education doing that they understand as outdoor education?
2. How do their personal understandings resonate with those in the literature?

The data analysis from the field research revealed Outdoor Educators to be offering a range of traditional adventure activities. What my respondents were doing and their understandings of it suggested a lack of critical awareness of the basis for practice and there was an emphasis on purposes of outdoor education. For practitioners outdoor activities were ‘what they were overtly doing’. However, a full understanding of practice could not simply be taken from a list of activities because of the practitioner’s conscious concern with purpose(s) as revealed in the interviews. Nevertheless, they were not overtly carrying out personal and social development for their students. If any personal and social development took place it was manifest in the lives of the students, the Outdoor Educators were creating opportunities for it to occur. Similar points could be raised with regard to other responses made by students. The examples of occasional ‘awe and wonder’ moments or ‘buzz and excitement’ arose from whatever it was that the respondents were doing and the visible things that respondents were involved in were providing experiences.

A number of discourses or sets of ideas underlie particular activities, the exploration of which tells us much about the way in which outdoor education has been constructed over time and in practice. Among the discourses of experience was



adventure. Adventure was seen to include an uncertainty of outcome, to include a personal physical challenge and an element of risk. The influential nature of discourses of adventure appeared to be based on the high visibility of adventure activities to the students and to the respondents; to the need for practitioners to manage risk and to hold qualifications in the activities. Experience of the activities themselves was said to be impactful, motivating, and could prompt the responses mentioned above. This is a discourse of adventure that gives it special status in providing intense or transformative experiences. As a prerequisite of students gaining a range of experiences, arguments for skill acquisition were persuasive even if their purpose was for something else. Despite this there was diversity of opinion as to whether skill acquisition was important or not, ‘general adventure’ such as gorge walking was seen as a valid alternative to such things as learning to kayak.

My interviewees emphasised outdoor education as something engaging for and demanding of their students in order that they might learn from the experience. The possibility of students having to gain a skill in order to access adventure experiences contrasts with some of the growth identified in parts of the commercial sector of adventure providers, notably ‘adventure tourism’ and the appointment of a Professor of Adventure Tourism at Lochaber College. This would seem to be part of a ‘commodification’<sup>11</sup> of adventure where an experience can be ‘bought’ without very much investment of personal learning or skill development by the student. This is

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<sup>11</sup> I use ‘commodification’ to indicate adventure when construed as a package to be bought, taken part in and moved on from, with little preparation or reflection. A contrast to outdoor education which anticipates instructor led preparation, facilitation and reflection in order to achieve an educational purpose.

illustrated in Loynes (1996) *Adventure in a Bun* which packages and sanitises adventure and might be mistaken for a growth in outdoor education, a trend likely to continue “in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the direction of faster, more structured, sanitised and mediated experiences of commodified nature” (Travlou, 2006). This trend was also identified by Keane (2006) who found a reduction in expeditions undertaken through local authority outdoor education centres despite his respondents believing them to be educationally valuable, a view also found in the literature (March and Wattchow, 1990) and reflected in Raffan’s (1993) journeying in order to understand experiences of ‘place’. A perceived move to ‘commodification’ also arose during the interview with Adam (Farragon) who pointed out that market pressures mean some ‘packaging’ at Farragon of their provision in order that ‘sales’ can readily be made. Adam later developed this remark, made early in the interview, with a later comment about longer term experiences, “*the best outdoor education programmes are through longer term experiences...the students can’t switch back to their own environment*”. This points to a tension in which outdoor educators deliver programmes and activities in a social milieu that demands an experience with a quick measurable outcome for relatively little engagement.

Adventure, it seems, is a matter of perception for the student. In a similar way it was noted that ‘challenge’ is different for different individuals. The notion of challenge arose during a number of interviews. However, ‘challenge’ was absorbed entirely into the adventure theme as it was construed as being part of adventure but did not encompass ‘uncertainty of outcome’ in the same way that discourse of adventure did. The instructor will plan for their students to have an adventurous experience. They

will then look for indications that the planned experiences are appropriately adventurous for their students.

The notion of an adventurous journey was more prevalent in the literature (Mortlock, 1984; March and Wattchow, 1990; Raffan, 1993) than it was in the field. An adventurous journey is the sense of using an adventure activity to undertake a journey, however construed and however long or short. It was implicit in the teaching of adventure activities that all such activities empower a student to make a journey. The journey becomes a necessary component of developing skills and of extending the experiences that are ‘what professionals in the field do that they understand as outdoor education’. In providing experiences for their students it thus appears that the provision of activities is largely the visible manifestation of my respondents’ role of offering adventure, and in turn affording experiences that can lead to other experiences. However, the discourse of ‘journey’ also suggests that simple journeys can be included within notions of outdoor education. Thus, the theme of adventure as a provider of many and varied experiences was found to be so frequently emphasised that it became one of the three dimensions of the Practice Model of outdoor education.

The adventure experience is commonly held as taking place outdoors. Although this is partly due to the nature of the activities, in the literature and in the respondent’s perspectives, being outdoors was held to be important to outdoor education. The finding by Parkin (1998), that some practitioners considered that outdoor education could take place indoors, did not emerge in my research. Parkin’s respondents were

talking about skills that could be learned indoors in preparation for outdoor education. In suggesting alternative locations in which outdoor education could take place, some of my respondents reluctantly agreed that urban environments could be used as they were at least outdoors, and traditional outdoor activities such as canoeing could take place. Even a non-traditional activity such as skateboarding might take place outdoors but the experience was thought to differ from their perception of outdoor education experiences, largely because it takes place in an artificial environment and doesn't offer so much 'difference' as a natural environment. I will return to the notion of 'difference' later. Importantly, the theme of 'outdoors' in a 'natural environment' recurred in responses to different questions throughout the interviews. There were suggestions that the natural environment prompted particular responses in students, awe and wonder, for example. If these responses led to an emotional attachment, then it might also lead to action for the environment which would fulfil the ambitions of some of my respondents. For example, Nick (Schiehallion) wanted to "*open students' eyes to the...natural world*" and help "*them to see the natural environment in a new way*". This suggests a value Nick places on the natural environment and there is something about it that students might not previously experience or appreciate. Nick's privileging of the natural environment and his apparent emotional attachment to it is something that he would like to engender in his students. Thus it would seem the significance of the natural environment as part of outdoor education is linked with the intentionality of the instructor, as reported to be important by Hovelynck (2001b) following his research among Outward Bound instructors. The sense of 'place' so developed, "in part constructed out of positive interrelations" (Massey, 1994: 169) might go some way

towards environmental education through engendering an emotional attachment and desire to 'do something' in order to promote conservation or avert further environmental degradation, despite the warnings of Jickling (1992) against 'educating for'.

Experiences provided through adventure activities alone might be thought to fulfil certain purposes of outdoor education, as might experience of the natural world alone. Bringing the two together increases the variety of experiences and the students' personal engagement with both. The natural world can be experienced through what might be seen as an activity that is not very adventurous, a 'low adventure' activity with little 'buzz and excitement', such as walking, yet this research and other published research might still regard this as a significant experience. In order to maximise the experience of a 'low adventure' activity, students might be exposed to a natural world even less intruded upon by humans - a 'wilderness'. Alternatively White (2005) identified that time, experience and knowledge make up a sense of place, places became special when people spend a lot of time in them and are engaged in significant activity, such as living and working in a location. Adam (Farragon) expressed a similar view about the length of time spent in a location or undertaking an adventure: "*a longer journey is useful because it sustains the experience and the learning opportunities*". However, reference has already been made to Massey (1994: 15) who pointed out that as understandings of space and place are based on inter-relationships neither space nor place are stable. Thus length of time alone is not enough for a positive sense of place to develop, the experiences in the location and the knowledge gained are also significant factors. A sense of place

that develops through inter-relationships and that could engender a positive attitude to the space and the place seems to be part of the basis for environmental education through outdoor education. The intentions of the instructor are significant (Hovelynck, 2001) in learning through outdoor education and the experiences in the new space can create a strong attachment to a certain place (Takano, 2004; Louv, 2005). This attachment to a certain place would appear to meet some of the purposes revealed in the literature (Cooper, 2004) thus the experience of a 'low adventure' activity might also be held to be significant through understandings gained of a location and the time spent there. This is a rationale that could mitigate against the commodification of adventure and lean towards residential or other longer term contexts. While time for longer term experiences is scarce and expensive, a 'commodified' short term adventure might be said to neglect the relevance of the temporal dimension of a more sustained adventure experience providing for outdoor education.

However, the notion of being in the natural world and its links with environmental education merits further examination. Being in the natural world might lead to environmental education, but there may be other purposes; one being to gain a range of experiences not usually available to students. This was supported by a statement from Liam (Schiehallion), "*something completely different from what they've done before*" and a finding of the Outdoor Connections research summary (Nicol *et al.*, 2007). The experience of a natural environment had intrinsic value, partly because it was thought of as something 'different' from the students' usual experience of an outside environment.

A common feature of the data from the interviews is that respondents talked about 'difference' for their students. The sense of difference seemed to be more important to them than being in the natural world. But the 'natural world' imparted so much 'difference' the two were often seen as synonymous in the same way as 'outdoors' and 'natural world' were. The experiences of difference in the natural world were verbalised in a number of ways by my respondents. It could hold a 'wow' factor, allow for reflection, possibly provide spiritual moments, and capture the imagination of students. Staff also felt that being somewhere where students cannot rely on previous social props to help them was important. There was no evidence to suggest that prompting a 'wow' response in students was as a result of anything intrinsic to the natural environment, therefore it seems possible that man made environments could do the same. This contrasts with the reports (Wilson, 2005; Eames, 2006) I referred to earlier where it seemed 'nature' was held to have an intrinsic 'something' that had a positive affect on people. However, in this research interviewees spoke of their students being exposed to the natural environment and experiencing 'the interaction of social relations and the physical location in which they occur' (Massey 1994); *it is about sharing the outdoors with them* (Grant, Lawers). This is an important point underlining the socially constructed nature of both outdoor education and the 'natural' environment in which it most often takes place. Respondents at Schiehallion centre particularly drew on discourses that privileged 'nature' and 'wilderness'. I have earlier identified that wilderness appears to be understood as being less influenced by human activity (Beringer and Martin, 2003), i.e. 'more natural' than a rural area influenced by humans, which might also be thought of as

being natural, or at least including ‘a lot of nature’. It is not clear whether the ‘amount of nature’ or degree of wilderness is important or whether the corollary is more significant, that is less intruded on by human activity, if indeed the two can be separated. Nevertheless, it was the socially constructed nature of the natural environment that appeared to be important and it is this that concerned Nick (Schiehallion) “...*helping them to see the natural environment in a new way*”.

These ideas suggested the theme of ‘new space’ that can include the ‘natural environment’. Ideas of ‘natural environment’ are descriptive and imply an essentialist view of nature illustrated in Beringer and Martin’s (2003: 29) urging to “honour the healing powers of nature”. ‘New space’ challenges an uncritical acceptance that there is ‘something special’ about nature when understandings of the natural environment are socially constructed in the way that other knowledge is, and is the epistemological stance of this thesis. As an alternative, ‘new space’ offers an analytical concept that can be used to further understandings of outdoor education. Practitioners held the view that a new physical space was what they understood to be significant for outdoor education. I have already quoted Colin (Farragon) as wanting his students to “*be in the middle of the loch enjoying being there, experiencing the location and the view*”. A new physical space, especially in a natural environment, could also offer new psychological or emotional ‘space’ metaphorically speaking. The understanding adopted in this thesis is of space as an interaction between individuals and their environment. Physical space was seen as paramount in offering a range of experiences. There are links here with the notion of adventure where an adventure could be emotional but this was seen as less a part of outdoor education



than engaging in personal physical challenge, which in turn might lead to emotional challenge.

Literature on space (May and Thrift, 2001; Massey, 1994) informs an understanding of space as a particular set of social interactions and the physical location in which they occur. Many of the ideas of outdoor education in a natural environment, some of them amounting to environmental education, can helpfully be understood by this explanation of space. However, to confine the space of outdoor education to a natural environment limits notions of outdoor education and where, for example, adventure might take place. It also poses questions about how natural the environment has to be, given that an idyllic rural scene has often been managed by humans for long periods of time and is in itself a social construct. This is an issue I noted in the literature and one raised by Lugg and Slattery (2003) in relation to ‘degrees of wilderness’ for outdoor education. How natural does natural have to be? If my respondent Liam’s (Schiehallion) comments about likening outdoor education to a *“planet orbited by moons...learning takes place under the varying influences of the different moons”* are noted, then a shortcoming in outdoor education in one aspect can be compensated for by enhancing another. Thus it seems use of the idea of natural environment, which in turn was prompted by the term ‘outdoors’ in the field research, might limit notions of outdoor education. If what was thought to be a suitable natural environment for outdoor education was not available then locating in a different, or new, space might compensate. Thus the term ‘new space’ has been used to describe the dimension that includes natural environment as one of the three dimensions in the Practice Model. This is important as it shows the social

construction of outdoor education. Outdoor education need not be limited to particular notions of nature, but my research suggests that the concept of new space can be used analytically to examine claims made for the practice of outdoor education in particular spaces. Pretty *et al.*, (2006) found ‘urban pleasant’ scenes less stressful locations than ‘rural unpleasant’ ones. Kaplan and Talbot (1983) found spiritual meaning to be found in built environments rather than in untouched natural surroundings. Work such as this together with findings from my research suggest notions of new space lend themselves to a way of understanding ‘outdoors’ without necessarily being dependent on essentialist notions of the natural environment.

My research in both the literature and the field showed that experiences, however gained, should not be left unexamined in learning situations. Exploiting or applying the experience emerged as a theme with sufficient support to be identified as one of the three dimensions of the Practice Model. Some respondents cited Kolb (1984) as the source of a model for learning from experience. Another stated that student learning could not be left to chance and the instructor’s role was to help learning to take place. This did not mean that all experiences were similar and provided learning opportunities for a purpose, such as personal and social development. Experiences that prompted a very personal physical response, such as being scared and having fingers sweating, were held to be valuable. A student might learn something about themselves from this, but the review process might be less thorough than the review held after a team event or an overnight camp. In guiding learning from experience, the intentions of the instructor in providing the experience and facilitating any learning as a result were seen as instrumental in outdoor education achieving any

purposes. Again this supports Hovelynck (2001b), who found the skill and practice theory of Outward Bound tutors to be an essential part of student learning. The relationship between outdoor education students and their instructors is critical in order for the students to learn from experience. Developing it supports the views of those respondents who advocated longer outdoor education programmes. A residential or multi-day programme is said to help the relationship to form in a way that a short session does not.

### **Three Dimensions**

The above discussion suggests that what Outdoor Educators do as outdoor education is to provide experiences and to facilitate learning from those experiences.

Identifying these two aspects among a number of important discourses which have developed over time and underlie practice might help to clarify for Outdoor Educators some of the knowledge and understanding they hold tacitly. In general the community of practice emphasises learning from experience more than the ways they might provide appropriate experiences. This is partly because the notion of outdoor education is strongly attached to going outside and that is 'the experience'.

Practitioners find agreement with evidence from the literature in describing their work in terms of purposes rather than practices. However, adventure was found to be a key notion underlying outdoor activities in the literature and in the field. An examination of adventure leads to a notion of 'the experience', from which learning derives. The community of practice values adventure for the experiences it affords. Thus a notion of the experiences of adventure became one of the dimensions of the Practice Model.

Similarly, my earlier discussion of knowledge and understanding in the community of practice suggests the terms 'outdoors' or 'natural environment' limit an understanding of outdoor education. Linked with 'outdoor' and 'natural environment' was 'difference' that emerged as part of the theme that became new space. New space provides experiences for learning in a similar sense that adventure

does and it offers a useful concept for critical analysis of outdoor education rather than merely a description that encompasses others. Moreover, the dimensions are linked whereby adventure can lead to new space and entering a new space can be adventurous. Rubens (1997) used 'newness of place or activity' as a dimension of adventure, however my research findings tend towards new space and the places therein as a setting for an adventure of social interactions and the physical location in which they occur (Massey, 1994). In contrast to Rubens, 'space' gives rise to 'place', a moment in the interactions that comprise the 'space'. Whilst for Rubens 'place' is a dimension of adventure, in the Practice Model it is part of the dimension of 'new space'. However 'new space' and adventure are closely linked, one can lead to the other and together they can synergistically contribute to outdoor education, therefore 'new space' and adventure became dimensions of the Practice Model. Where an emphasis might lie rests with the individual outdoor educator. Julie (Tarmachan) wanted "*to say no*" to a suggestion that skateboarding might be a form of outdoor education, because it was not in a natural environment. At the same Centre (Tarmachan) Hugh emphasised activities over the location in which they might take place. Dawn (Lawers) while preferring adventure to take place in a natural environment note that ropes courses and other activities could be set up anywhere. Both Hugh and Dawn appear to privilege 'adventure' over 'natural environment', supporting the development of 'new space' as a dimension of the Practice Model. A natural environment would be preferable to Hugh and Dawn but they also recognise as outdoor education new space accessed through adventure in a non-natural environment. Again, it is too simplistic to posit 'experience' as an idea at the core of the community's social construction of outdoor education. The outdoors and natural

environment are privileged too highly not to be included in an understanding of practice; however, as descriptive terms they can also be limiting in clarifying understandings of outdoor education. A student who lives in a wilderness area, for example in the north of Scotland, might find that new space in a managed rural area, or even an urban area, affords experiences from which he or she learns more easily. The alternative might be to experience the wilderness of their home location in a different way, through an adventure activity. This does not privilege the natural environment, but does privilege the experience of it through the new space, which has been opened up and accessed through adventure. As ‘difference’ emerged as a strong sub theme within new space and a feature of the natural environment the data analysis might have given rise to ‘difference’ as a dimension of the Practice Model. However the understanding of space adopted in this thesis being one of interaction of social relations and the physical location in which they occur (Massey 1994) led to the dimension of new space where ‘difference’ and ‘natural environment’ as opportunities for experience can be recognised within ‘new space’. This implies a critical understanding of fixed ideas about the natural environment as intrinsically powerful or essential in delivering difference. ‘New space’ implies that the idea and discourses surrounding location are socially constructed, fluid and , crucially, open to analysis and critique. The opportunity for changing interactions of social relations in outdoor education were also recognised as allowing students to “*be different*” (Nick, Schiehallion), extending the notion of difference and suggesting a more appropriate name and understanding be used for a theme. Thus, new space as one of three dimensions was thought to be more useful in developing the Practice Model than ‘difference’, ‘nature’ or the ‘natural environment’.

The above discussion illustrates the logic of the third dimension ‘learning from experience’. Experiences of adventure and new space are of little educative significance unless something is done with them and they are learned from (Dewey, 1938; Wurdinger, 1997; Luckner & Nadler, 1997; McWilliam, 2004).

The literal use of a scaffold for the Practice Model is intended to emphasise the relationships between the three dimensions and to suggest how the relationship between the three dimensions might change, i.e. their fluidity, yet still exist in outdoor education practice. Although the context of my interest and research has been residential outdoor education in Centres providing an activity programme predominantly for the P7 to S4 age range, it is hoped the dimension of new space will facilitate the use of the model in other contexts of outdoor education premised on notions of ‘all learning outdoors’.

## **The Practice Model in the Present Context**

The broader context of outdoor education has been changing during the writing of this thesis and the three dimensional Practice Model offers possibilities for the critical understanding of the field.

The Outdoor Connections programme 2005-2007 was intended to conduct research and report on the position of outdoor education in Scotland (Outdoor Connections 2005). One of the publications arising from the programme is a summary of recent research (Nicol *et al.*, 2007) which identifies 26 key findings from seven pieces of research commissioned under the Outdoor Connections programme. This research summary is of research that underpins the report *Taking Learning Outdoors* (Outdoor Connections, 2007) and in which the following vision statement is articulated to achieve sustainable outdoor learning in Scotland: “We must work in partnership to overcome the barriers and provide all children and young people across all school subject areas and beyond, and at all stages 3-18, with opportunities to learn outdoors regularly” (Outdoor Connections, 2007: 3). In overcoming barriers the research summary identifies that government support for outdoor education is growing and current curriculum development initiatives, notably *A Curriculum for Excellence*, provide opportunities for outdoor education. The four capacities of *A Curriculum for Excellence*, developing successful learners, developing confident individuals, developing responsible citizens and developing effective contributors, can all be realised in outdoor education. The Practice Model could be deployed to help in this process. The research summary notes that “outdoor education is as much about a



teaching approach for all teachers as about discrete specialist provision” (Nicol *et al.*, 2007: 10). Use of the Practice Model can help teachers considering outdoor education to design a programme that includes, to a greater or lesser extent each of the three dimensions. Emphasis given to each dimension might depend on the locations and resources available for the planned outdoor education programme, but to hold the three dimensions in their inter-relationship would help a teacher to overcome notions that outdoor education is a specialist approach to learning that is only available through specialists. Key finding 10 of the research summary (Nicol *et al.*, 2007:4) is that young people valued experiences “that are fun or enjoyable, often involving doing something new and doing activities that engaged the senses, leave them feeling uninhibited: being ‘free’, outdoors, setting their own agenda, not being rushed, being close to nature; feel authentic and contingent, i.e. relating to the hands-on nature of practical activity, encounters with animals, being exposed to the effects of the weather and not always knowing what will happen next”. Using the values of young people identified in key finding 10 (Nicol *et al.*, 2007:4) as motivators for learning, together with consideration of a relationship between the three dimensions of the Practice Model in planning an outdoor education programme, could lead to effective learning through outdoor education. Thus consideration of new space might help to fulfil some of the valued characteristics mentioned above; adventure experiences in the programme would epitomise the young people’s value of “not always knowing what will happen next”.

In taking the insights derived from Nicol *et al.*’s (2007) research summary and using them to develop the practice of and opportunities for outdoor learning, use of the

Practice Model as illustrated above is particularly important. An emphasis throughout the research review is that outdoor learning has a focus on learning about the natural heritage. Commentary on key findings one, nine, 11, 12-14, 15, and on general issues, page 10; young people, page 11; local authorities, page 12; specialist outdoor providers, page 13; further research, pages 14 and 15 all privilege learning about the natural environment. If the three dimensions of the Practice Model are used in planning outdoor education programmes then the potential for a breadth of outdoor learning as well as particular objectives could be realised.

The advent of *A Curriculum for Excellence (ACE)* also provides opportunities to extend outdoor education as it moves away from a prescriptive approach to the curriculum. It recognises that learning is embedded in experience (Outdoor Connections, 2007: 10) and that outdoor learning can improve children's learning experiences. The Practice Model posits provision of experiences and learning from them as fundamental dimensions of outdoor education. However, among the barriers to outdoor education becoming more widespread is fragmentation in the field, which "can be interpreted as confused and poorly directed" (Nicol *et al.*, 2007: 14). As an aid to overcoming the fragmentation and perceptions of multiple purposes for which outdoor education may be considered or deployed, use of the Practice Model as a basis for understanding what outdoor education is will be helpful in order to achieve the purposes.

The research summary of the Outdoor Connections research programme also offers a challenge to one of the communities of practice identified in this thesis while supporting the views of Arrowsmith (2006) noted earlier on the membership of the Scottish Advisory Panel on Outdoor Education (SAPOE). Nicol *et al.* (2007) overwhelmingly found that local authorities had no consistent way of identifying how much outdoor education goes on in their jurisdiction. They found a policy vacuum and a range of ‘players’ in local authority outdoor education. However, “whilst all Local Authorities could provide detailed guidelines and regulation on safety in outdoor education, with one exception no evidence was found of any guidance on the philosophy or curricular potential of outdoor education” (Nicol *et al.*, 2007: 8). It might therefore be surmised that SAPOE is largely part of a health and safety community of practice with a minor overlap with the outdoor education community of practice. Clarification of roles may help to overcome the difficulties and use of the Practice Model as a means of providing a language with which to talk about outdoor education which may help to balance health and safety concerns with widening opportunities for outdoor education.

In the present context the Scottish Executive also has physical and mental health agendas (Physical Activity Task Force, 2003; Scottish Executive, 2003) that can be realised through outdoor education where physical activity and the detachment and continuity of adventure in a new space, especially a natural environment can contribute to health (Pretty *et al.*, 2003; Griffin *et al.*, 2005; Pretty *et al.*, 2006). Adventurous activities can contribute to healthy lifestyles as children and young people who are physically active in woods and greenspace at a young age will be

more likely to be active in them as adults (Malina, 1996). The present context also includes the response by the Scottish Executive to the UN Decade for Sustainable Development (Scottish Executive 2005; 2006) which identifies outdoor education, with the direct outdoor experiences it brings as part of a strategy to change the ways in which people live and work and to develop values necessary for current and future generations to meet the challenges of sustainable living and working. As part of sustainable development education, *Learning for our Future* (Scottish Executive, 2006:3) aspires to the acquisition of new skills by learners. The three key skills identified as integral to learning for sustainable development are joined-up thinking: the ability to identify and understand links between the issues being addressed and other relevant issues; participative working: involvement in decision making, setting priorities and action plans; reflective practice: being able to look back, identify lessons learned and apply them in the future. Each of these skills can be developed through outdoor education especially when the three dimensions of adventure, new space and learning from experience are used to guide programme planning. The uncertainty of outcome and personal physical challenge of adventure provides direct experiences for students who have to live with the consequences of their actions and have to take responsibility for them. Entering into new space, in small groups requires participative action and planned opportunities to learn develops the skill of reflective practice. Furthermore each of these three key skills of learning for sustainable development show strong links with the findings of the Outdoor Connections research programme where key finding 10 refers to young people valuing experiences through which they feel “authentic and contingent” (Nicol *et al.*, 2007:4). This resonates with the purposes of sustainable development education

which include “not telling people what is important and what they should do, but to enable them to decide what is important to them, decide what they want to do about it, and equip them with the skills they need to do it” (Scottish Executive, 2006:3). Learning from experience as a dimension of outdoor education allows practice in such decision making.

In *Learning for our Future* the Scottish Executive state it is “keen to raise the profile of outdoor education in Scotland by developing outdoor education for all young people” (Scottish Executive, 2006: 7) and recognises it as a way of developing citizenship. Thus making links with the capacities of *A Curriculum for Excellence* that I have identified can be added to through outdoor education. However, in *Learning for our Future* the Scottish Executive (Scottish Executive, 2006: 7) draws attention to the appointment of a national development officer to take forward the Outdoor Connections programme. This appointment was a two year secondment, 2005-2007. At its conclusion there is no indication of the Scottish Executive (now the Scottish Government) continuing the initiative.

For England and Wales the House of Commons second report of the Education and Skills Committee called for the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to issue a ‘Manifesto for Outdoor Learning’, giving all students the right to outdoor learning (House of Commons, 2005a). The government accepted this recommendation, including making a “commitment that all children should have the opportunity of a

wide range of high quality outdoor learning, including at least one residential experience” (House of Commons, 2005b: 2). The Government responded by stating it “strongly supports the educational case for learning outside the classroom” (House of Commons, 2005b:11) and a manifesto, *Learning Outside the Classroom*, was published in 2006 (DfES, 2006). These have been found to be fine words but “pressures at a local level mean that the aspirations are simply not delivered” (Williams, 2007: 9). The English ‘manifesto’ views learning outside the classroom as “the use of places other than the classroom for teaching” (page 1), the Scottish *Taking Learning Outdoors* says “the outdoor classroom is a setting, outdoor education is a process in which educators, students and others take part, and outdoor learning is the learning which accrues as a result” (page 5). Notwithstanding both statements offering a view of outdoor learning that is much broader than the residential outdoor education that has been the subject of research in this thesis, if the Practice model is deployed then outdoor learning in a variety of contexts can be planned in a way that will engage students and help them learn from the experience. This is particularly pertinent as understandings of outdoor education continue to be fluid and re-constructed through discourse.

I noted earlier that recreation is often distinguished from outdoor education, a view supported by Rubens (1997: 10) and Martin (1999). However the above descriptions of outdoor education and the finding in the research summary (Nicol *et al.*, 2007:5) that outdoor experiences with the family and in other informal social settings are valued, suggest that the role of informal outdoor education may be gaining wider recognition (Smith 2005; 2006). Higgins and Loynes (1996:2) write of “the ongoing

and seemingly unresolved debate...on the nature of Outdoor Education”; Baker (2006) found that terms within outdoor education discourse are used interchangeably but, generally outdoor learning tends to identify with environmental discourse and outdoor education with adventure. My thesis is that for whatever purposes outdoor education might be deployed and whatever the terminology used an increased understanding of the three dimensions of adventure, new space and learning from experience and their use for the critical understanding of practice will enhance education outside the classroom – outdoor education.

## **Practice and Purpose**

My research revealed that in the literature and in the field outdoor education is typically stated to be a means of achieving purposes, most notably personal and social development (Hopkins and Putnam, 1993; Higgins and Loynes, 1996; Rubens, 1997; Hattie *et al*, 1997; Sibthorp, 2003; Ian, Tarmachan; Julie, Tarmachan). In some ways this could be expected, the different contributions to the discourse influence each other and appear to be searching for legitimacy in the broader field of education (Crowther, 1999 in Nicol, 2002:31). Reference to the backgrounds of my interviewees (Table 1) shows six of the fifteen respondents having a formal education in outdoor education (Dawn, Eric, Ian, Keith, Mike and Nick). Together with other, perhaps more peripheral, members of the community of practice, they could be expected to articulate understandings of outdoor education in a similar way to that in the literature. They are, in fact, products of their time and as core members of the community of practice have continued to promulgate understandings of outdoor education as they have been inducted to it. This is supported by Rubens' (1997: 28) finding that practitioners were "not greatly influenced by recent literature and theory of outdoor education". In this my respondents with a formal education in outdoor education are supported by other respondents (Alan, Hugh, Liam) whose management positions and need to rationalise outdoor education in order to attract and retain their user groups can be expected to lean towards purposes, i.e. 'what the students will get out of it'. This resonates with literature which points to outdoor education being deployed for particular purposes that vary (DES, 1975; Cheesmond,



1981; Jickling, 1992; Hopkins & Putnam, 1993; Barrett & Greenaway, 1995; Cooper, 2004; Martin, 2004).

However probing during field research in order to answer research question 1 ‘what are professionals in the field of outdoor education doing that they understand as outdoor education’ identified a range of different things that outdoor educators ‘did’ that they understood as outdoor education. This resonated with findings of the literature research whereby outdoor education was typically described as being about purposes. Yet purposes are to be achieved through a process and therefore outdoor education must include ideas of the process: the things that outdoor educators ‘do’. They provide for students to have adventure experiences in a location markedly different from that which they are used to. The adventure experiences, the new spaces and learning from those experiences were what led to the purposes of outdoor education.

Practice and purpose were both found to be closely associated in the literature research and the field research. In both parts of the research purposes tended to be revealed first followed by the practices giving rise to the purposes. Although the literature research was conducted first in anticipation of it informing and suggesting the ‘lines along which to look’ of an interpretive perspective (Schwandt, 1994), the converse was also found to be the case. The field research first identified purposes, further inquiry identified the practices. Thus the Practice Model emerged from the literature and the field, finding support and agreement in both areas of inquiry as my discussion of the findings from the interviews shows.

Development of a three-dimensional Practice Model, describes the findings of my research in a way intended to add clarity to the knowledge, understandings and meanings within the community of practice. The Model is an analytical tool that can be used to understand the interaction of ideas and practices and for adopting a critical constructivist approach. The dimensions of the model are not new to outdoor education, what is new is bringing them to the surface and arranging them to show their inter-relationships in such a way that they can be used as an analytical tool in a field where discourses change. Of particular note is the dimension of 'new space'. I have noted that space and spatiality have been the subject of increasing interest in recent years. Often interest has been in the use of space for learning (Comber and Wall, 2001; Gray, 2004) or the 'changing places' associated with flexibility, lifelong learning and a learning society (Edwards, 1997). 'New space' will undoubtedly overlap with other ideas of space and spatiality, yet it is distinctive. In the context of the three dimensional Practice Model of outdoor education the meanings attached to 'new space' include a new location or a familiar location experienced in a new way and the changing interactions associated socially and with the environment of the new space. New space implies 'difference' and 'otherness'.

Outdoor educators are part of a community of practice that privileges the purposes of outdoor education without appearing to examine what it is of their practice that gives rise to the achievement of the purposes. In order to show how some purposes might be linked with the Practice Model, the representation of the three dimensions as literal

scaffolding was further developed to allow representations of various purposes, as shown in Figure 4.

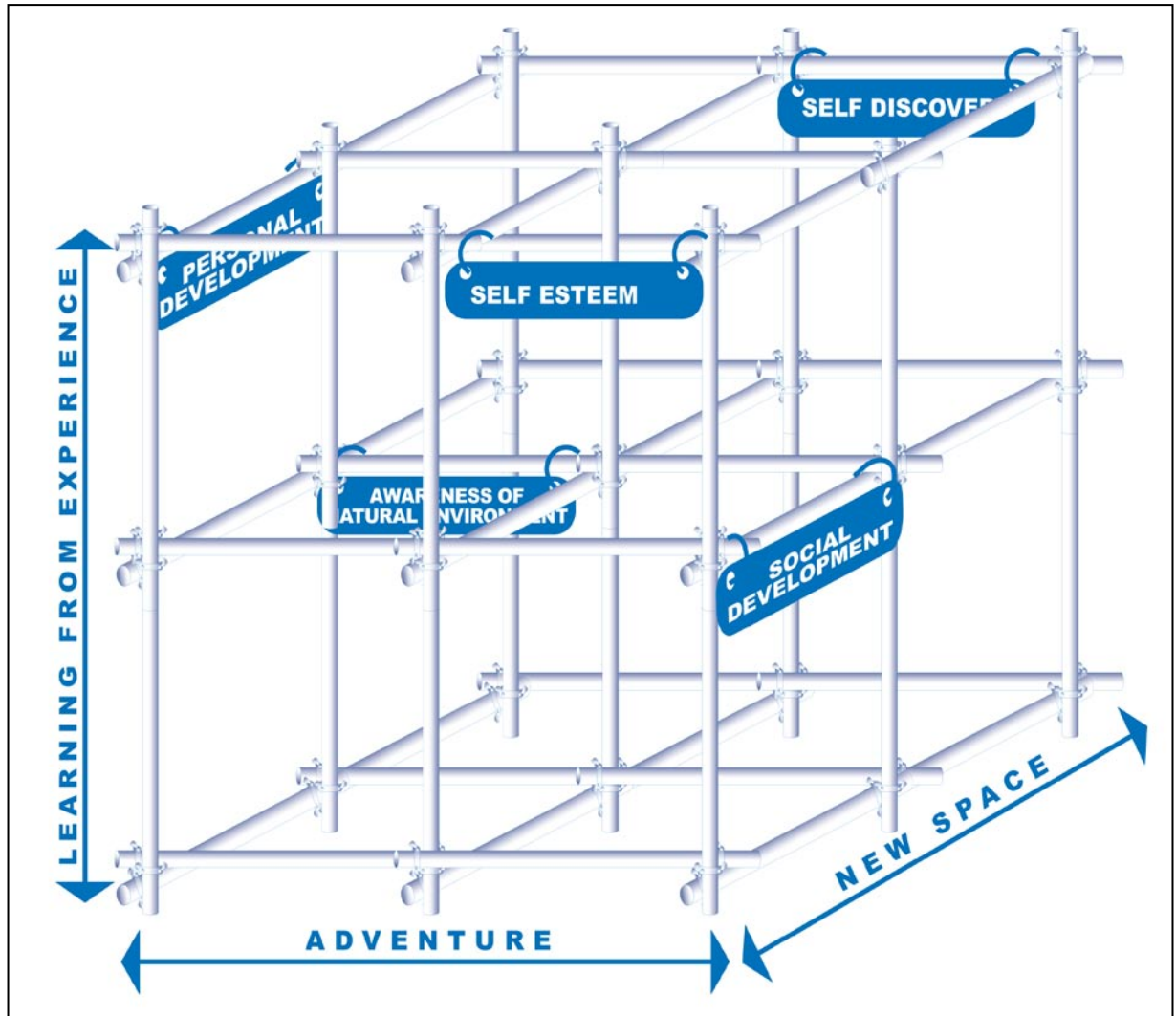


Figure 4: The Practice Model showing some purposes of outdoor education

## **Further Research**

The Practice Model offers a tool for analysis and a critique of current practices; it can be used for re-thinking and developing practice. Any or all of the three dimensions can be used to analyse outdoor education practice in order to help devise the most appropriate programmes for particular purposes. The notion of ‘new space’ and the recognition of the socially constructed nature of space and place is of increasing relevance environmentally and politically. Using the notion of ‘new space’ there is the potential to raise practitioner awareness and to create opportunities for critical understandings of environmental changes of all kinds for participants in outdoor education.

The role of nature in the new space of outdoor education merits further investigation. I have identified that the dimension of new space includes notions of ‘nature’, the ‘natural environment’ and ‘difference’. Privileging of nature by my interviewees included these notions but left “a trace, a scent of a notion” (MacLure, 2003:20) that there may still be something about nature that has not surfaced through my research. Although many of my respondents talked of nature it seemed to be because they like nature, it seems to come to the surface because of an interest in, or historical attachments of, environmental education. For their students they suggested the significance of nature was newness or difference. The things the Outdoor Educators may do and say about nature are not enough to make it significant except within their social construction that appears to include an essentialist view of nature. Further research might inquire into the significance and meanings made of ‘nature’ among

non-Outdoor Educators and whether a ‘specialness’ is conferred on nature for similar or different reasons and may answer the question ‘what does nature bring to a new space?’. Similar questions have been asked in other contexts: “Why do certain places possess, or enable, types of experience and forms of wisdom that are unavailable elsewhere” (Mellor, 2007: 19). An area for investigation would be whether it is ‘nature’, or ‘certain places’, as generally understood by Mellor to be particular locations, that bring significance to the experience or whether it is the social relations that take place in those locations that are significant. How changing locations contribute to changing social relations in creating ‘new space’ would add to the development of knowledge and understanding of outdoor education.

The Practice Model has been derived from themes arising from taking the interview data and re-forming it thematically. A possible weakness of this approach was identified as losing the context and narratives of the respondents. Undertaking similar research or re-working the existing data in order to use narrative analysis might bring further understanding of ‘nature’ or of the dimensions of new space, adventure and learning from experience: of outdoor education. Narrative research would recognise the continuity with which individuals live their lives and, in this case, experience and understand outdoor education. Narrative analysis would relate not just to understandings expressed in answer to a series of, albeit semi-structured, interviews but also to accounts therein which relate to episodes and to the interconnections between them (Bryman, 2001).

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**Appendix**  
**Interview Guide**



## Interview Guide

I'd like to spend some time talking with you about the Centre, what happens here and your part in it. Broadly speaking I'd like to ask you questions about the Centre, who comes here to use the Centre and its programmes, your job and what you think about outdoor education. There are no right or wrong answers.

Let's start by talking about the Centre.

1. What is the name of the centre?
2. Who owns it?
3. How is it funded?
4. How is it managed? (clarifying secondary question: What are the reporting lines?)
5. How many teaching staff are there?
6. What is their background?
7. Who uses the programmes?
8. What activities are offered here?

Now I'd like to talk about the students who come here.

9. Where do they come from and in what numbers?
10. Are they all from the owning or sponsoring body?
11. What ages are they?
12. Whose idea is it for them to be here? Who makes the booking?
13. Who pays for them to be here?
14. How is their supervision arranged during their stay?
15. For what reasons or purposes do they follow the programme?
16. What do they do when they come to the Centre?

Let's talk now about your role in the Centre.

17. If somebody asked you at a party what you did for a job what would you say?
18. What do you do from day to day?
19. Of the things that you said to describe what you do from day to day which of them are unique to or a particular feature of outdoor education? Why do you do those things?
20. Which activities do you instruct?
21. What particular contribution do these activities make to the students outdoor education?
22. What qualifications do you have for your job?
23. How many people will you instruct at a time?
24. Who decides which activities a group takes part in on a particular day? How are those decisions made?

Finally I would like to talk about outdoor education.

25. What does outdoor education mean to you?
26. So, if I were to ask you what the three key elements of outdoor education are, what would you say?
27. Does it matter where outdoor education takes place?
28. What do you think students gain from taking part in outdoor education? i.e. what are the benefits of outdoor education?
29. What three things most contribute to students getting those benefits?
30. How else might the benefits of outdoor education be brought about?
31. How would you say outdoor education is similar or different from the student's previous learning experiences?
32. Which of the similarities or differences bring the benefits of outdoor education?