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Part 1
Constructs and theoretical
concepts



Introduction

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The breadth, depth and diversity of applications and professional practice in outdoor studies are widely acknowledged. This section seeks to define and explore the structural and philosophical underpinning of the discipline in key areas and through multiple perspectives, with a flavour and sense of internationalism and culture.

As in other parts of this Handbook, the choice of conceptual frameworks and areas of focus is necessarily selective but includes critical perspectives that we consider to be foundational to outdoor studies. These are established not only from the ‘Anglosphere’ – Australia, Canada, the USA and UK – but also from Sweden and Germany with specific cultural constructs (e.g. the German *Erlebnispädagogik* and *Bildung*, described by Becker, and Indigenous knowledge, by Mullins, Lowan-Trudeau and Fox). The authors describe different philosophical perspectives with a range of outcomes through experiential, adventure, recreational and educational approaches, historical roots and meanings, environmental concerns, health and wellbeing, and research. We recognise that these constructs might be seen as time specific and that, were this book being written in a different decade, the prioritisation of contributions might be different, nevertheless they all present conceptualisations that have rigour and application, and influence practice.

Our intention is not to focus on semantics or definitions but to note that the foundations and direction authors take within the scope of outdoor studies is interesting. Brookes and Becker derive current propositional meanings from adventure, Öhman and Sandell, and Mullins *et al.*, focus on the connections with nature for environmental concern and environmental education, and for outdoor recreation and outdoor education, respectively. Experiences in the outdoors and experiential education and learning are the concepts discussed by Quay and Seaman, and Carpenter and Harper (for health and wellbeing). Humberstone, Coates, Hockley and Stan acknowledge this multifaceted nature of outdoor studies through examining research paradigms, and suggest that cross-disciplinary research could be of value in supporting all areas of outdoor studies and in extending the reach of the field.

Two different approaches are taken in the discussion of the emergence, explanation and interpretation of current practice and rhetoric. Brookes focuses on the inspiration, influence and contribution of single individuals, and hagiographic interpretations of these figures to explain outdoor practice and discourse, acknowledging that myths probably overemphasise the

influence of individuals, which are also subject to multiple and contested interpretations. He examines the influence of militaristic and masculinist tendencies within a historical perspective on the understanding of contemporary adventure education.

Becker discusses frameworks, processes and pedagogies that have influenced the interpretation of adventure in Germany, and the relative importance of these in its conceptual understanding. He argues that *Erlebnispädagogik* is a pedagogy that is now transcending schools but does not have a theoretical foundation, and introduces *Erlebnisse* (and variants) as emotional states of awareness as outcomes of this and other processes. More important to outdoor studies is *Bildung* to overcome challenges, tensions or crises, following the objective hermeneutics work of Overmann (2004). The adventurous 'being on the way' is a cultural pattern that can support *Bildung*.

Environmental education is a specific and engendered component of outdoor studies with the rich pedagogic tradition of using nature as a fosterer, as outlined by Öhman and Sandell. Similarly, Mullins, Lowan-Trudeau and Fox emphasise Indigenous knowledge as relational where reciprocity is important, with nature fostering deep connections to place. Encounters with nature are crucial to both these perspectives, but are interpreted differently.

Öhman and Sandell focus on the possible implication of nature encounters for environmental concern as the contemporary manifestation of an historical process of development through 'nature protection', 'nature conservation' and 'environmental control', to the current tensions between 'alternative' and 'sustainable development'. They argue that what constitutes outdoor studies has shifted concomitantly with the traditions and pedagogy of environmental education to a position of pluralism. Suggested potentials for future ways in which outdoor studies might expand perspectives on the environment and a sustainable future have clear parallels to other chapters in this section: experiential, relational, existential, human ecology, ideological and spatial.

The positioning of outdoor studies in deconstructing experience is clear and understood in practice but the theoretical conceptualisation of experiential education and experiential learning is still a challenge. Quay and Seaman examine this close connection between experience and education, combining the philosophies of Dewey and Heidegger to articulate a theory of experience that embraces being, doing and knowing. They posit that outdoor educators have a good awareness of the inherent connection between these elements, but that theoretical frameworks and the manifestation of these in practice are not well developed. They advocate that a sound philosophy of experience that views traditional and progressive forms of schooling through the same lens should be the way forward.

The knowing and being elements identified as key to experiential learning in outdoor studies reflect Indigenous ways. Indigenous knowledge that is mythic, sacred and locally ecological (Marker, 2006), and its practical application or embodiment, is highly valued. The Western dominant conceptualisation of land as a space to be conquered, occupied and visited but not inhabited, and of culture as place-independent, is challenged by Mullins *et al.*, with Indigenous knowledge providing alternative ways of thinking and doing outdoor recreation and outdoor education. In their chapter, the authors attempt to disrupt the nature–culture dichotomous thinking with its foundational paradigms situating humans within or outside the natural world (the inherited epistemological position of Cartesian rationality critiqued by Nicol, 2003) upon which much outdoor recreation and outdoor education theory is structured. They suggest ways in which cross-cultural understanding can be enhanced through different outdoor experiences with critical self-reflections and creativity informed by Indigenous perspectives. Interestingly, ways of knowing have been identified previously as a framework for holistic understanding into which outdoor and environmental education might more broadly sit as an alternative pedagogy (Nicol, 2003).

Connections to the natural world for communities as well as the individual are framed in the multidimensional (socio-ecological) approach advocated by Carpenter and Harper for promoting health and wellbeing. Conceptually, the individual is shown as being nested within their community and environment as in Indigenous cultures. This approach has generally been focused on the built environment or human-centric places, but the model suggests that more natural areas have benefits. The social dimensions of the group context to promote health and wellbeing are important in the experiential process as they enable individuals to look beyond themselves. The authors propose a ‘dose of Nature’ as the minimum time exposure people should be in the outdoors to have benefit, and also highlight ‘numinous’ components (Otto, 1958), which contribute to the spiritual or existential qualities of outdoor experiences as suggested by Öhman and Sandell.

All these chapters suggest a shifting landscape in the understanding and extent of outdoor studies mirrored by shifting perspectives on research in the outdoors described by Humberstone *et al.* The range of constructs and conceptualisations within this section illustrates the need for a range of research paradigms and methodologies. These are mainly, but not exclusively, qualitative in nature and the authors here provide examples of socio-cultural and spatial research towards the understanding of the outdoors as social phenomena. The match to the wealth and diversity of content within this section is good, but if outdoor studies is going to establish itself further, and gain credence, meaning and impact across other disciplines, then research methods and approaches also need to have extended and valid reach.

Outdoor studies, with all its constituent parts, focuses on situated learning with a strong focus on historical, cultural and social aspects (Brown, 2010). Many of these authors derive meanings and understanding from other perspectives and subject areas. They follow the implicit thinking that, rather than develop eclectic new theories, researchers should seek to understand the efficacy of practice through established frameworks in other disciplines (Houge Mackenzie, Son & Hollenhorst, 2014). The contextualisation of outdoor studies within epistemological pluralism will better define it for international understanding.

Outdoor studies is a young and emerging discipline not without issues of identity, particularly in a global context. This section describes and examines critically the tensions, challenges and dichotomies in understanding theory and practice, as well as potential and possible future solutions. Although this approach could be construed as a disorganised position for the development of the discipline, it illustrates a clear drive to recognise its contribution as vibrant, exciting, stimulating and pedagogically important to individuals, groups, communities and society.

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