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Part 2

Formal education in outdoor studies



Introduction

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Regional cultural perspectives involve outdoor studies in different ways in formal curricula. This section focuses on Western Europe, particularly the UK and Scandinavia, although also has a more international reach in Backman's consideration of the training of teachers and in place-responsive teaching as described by Mannion and Lynch. 'Outdoor studies' is not seen in curricula per se but under various more specialised aspects such as outdoor play, outdoor learning, environmental education, outdoor education, and outdoor and adventurous activities within or outwith the physical education curriculum in schools. In higher education, a range of nomenclature is described, with some programmes including the terms adventure and outdoor studies, sometimes accompanied by 'leadership' or 'management' and teacher training through physical education focused on adventure, skills and risk.

If cultures frame formal curricula, it may be questioned as to where and how the boundaries in our sections have been drawn. We acknowledge that they could be seen as diffuse in so far as some aspects of formal curricula are described in 'international voices and cultural interpretations', but strong historical and cultural perspectives are provided there in frameworks that provide a wide interpretation of the position of outdoor studies in a range of countries. The outcomes in the formal curricula here relate in the main to learning, education and pedagogy, whereas the broader international voice can speak for a wider influence and audience. Similarly, later in this Handbook, Cooper (Chapter 39) touches on formal curricula related to outdoor education, environment and sustainability following a more thematic approach. The authors in this section present outdoor studies in the formal curricula across their countries in the given context, rather than only through any particular project or initiative.

In successful school and pre-school outdoor curricula, there seems to be a clear emphasis on key values (or 'elements', 'capacities', 'habits') either at an institutional or on a personal level or both, and Christie, Higgins and Nicol demonstrate that in some curricula these are supported by policy. Teaching and learning outdoors provides many challenges as well as opportunities, which are discussed in all the chapters and pervade all age phases, from early years, as illustrated by Waite, and early childhood and care (ECEC), by Sandseter and Hagen, to higher education including teacher training, which are the focus of the chapters by Stott and Backman respectively. In school curricula in the UK, Prince and Exeter, Waite, and Christie *et al.*, all concur that measures of performativity and outcomes are at the forefront of considerations in the

delivery of outdoor programmes. These can be supported through a whole-school approach, outstanding teaching and facilitation, and holistic approaches, as explained by Sandseter and Hagen. In delivering outdoor learning, there is an emphasis on a student or child-centred pedagogy, involving affective and interpersonal domains as well as cognitive learning, with environment issues or environmental education and place considered by Mannion and Lynch to be important components, differentiating it from sport-oriented curricula.

The chapters in this section emphasise the unique teaching and learning in outdoor studies emanating from direct contact with the natural environment. In many settings, learning in the outdoors is the only way to achieve desired outcomes, child development or cognitive understanding, such as through Sandseter and Hagen, and Waite's approaches to outdoor play in the early years, and in fieldwork as advocated by Stott, even when virtual technologies can assist in bringing learning indoors. Pedagogical opportunities are enhanced in the outdoors, and curiosity, investigative and enquiry-based approaches are optimised. Prince and Exeter show that research into outstanding outdoor learning indicates that an emphasis on creativity and ownership for children through a progression of experiences and activities is important. Mannion and Lynch, however, suggest that there has been an overemphasis on cognitive and reflective processes, and advocate a place-responsive manifesto that privileges in-depth knowledge of places, place distinctiveness and sustainable responses to advance environmental and social justice. It could be that these writings emphasise different stages of outcomes that need to be scaffolded through process and cognition before a holistic and reciprocal model is achieved.

The richness and diversity of different regional cultural foundations is evident in the way that formal curricula have developed and are operating. The Scandinavian traditions of *friluftsliv*, 'law of common access' and direct contact with nature pervade the teaching and learning in these schools and pre-schools, but local culture is also important in Scotland and Australia. The UK perhaps has more of a tradition influenced by key educators such as Kurt Hahn reflected in the emphasis on young people becoming active and creative citizens; Waite introduces the term *cultural density* to provide a platform from which to discuss the competing and interrelated elements in the systems that influence outdoor learning in the early years.

Outdoor studies has an important part to play in environmental education, not least in the teaching of sustainability and sustainable development. Christie *et al.*, in Scotland, propose that the strategy of introducing 'Learning for Sustainability' into the curriculum is one of the most important recent developments for outdoor learning. Backman outlines how environmental education is usually positioned in a number of countries within general teacher education rather than within physical education teacher education (PETE), which emphasises physical activities. However, environmental education is found in many higher education programmes in 'outdoor studies', which can necessarily be more autonomous and broader in their provision. Stott examines the important place of fieldwork and expeditions in providing the interface of direct experience with the environment, real and virtual (see also Maher, Chapter 46 in this Handbook).

The position of outdoor studies in formal curricula seems to be at different stages of development and acceptance in the wider pedagogy of learning, education and consequent scrutiny both in age phases and in different cultures. The Scandinavian culture, with its direct contact with nature through family activities as well as formal teaching and learning, is long established with supporting research to evidence its efficacy (Henderson & Vikander, 2007). Outdoor studies including all its sub-sets, seems to be more developed and accepted in pre-school and early years education through outdoor play, easier to implement in primary education than secondary education, and influenced by developing technologies and traditional teacher training in higher education. It is interesting to note the change in higher education 'outdoor' programme provision in the UK even within the last ten years as institutions have changed names,

merged, associated with other subjects to offer joint degrees, or withdrawn from the market (Humberstone & Brown, 2006). This may be largely as a result of the high level of resource needed in its widest sense, as Stott describes, and government drivers. However, whatever the stage of development, all the authors here are solution-focused, progressive and take a developmental stance in their assessment of the potential of outdoor studies in formal curricula.

There are challenges, issues and opportunities in, and associated with, outdoor learning in all cultural contexts. Some are operational in terms of teacher experience, confidence, qualifications, student–teacher ratios, and health and safety, with more mention of risk as a management challenge in the UK than elsewhere. Some are more driven by policy and institutional constraints, which include economic considerations.

Ogilvie (2013) gives a detailed and extensive history of outdoor education and outdoor learning in the UK, and voices concerns about its development in the 1990s after the introduction of the Education Reform Act in 1988, construed in outdoor pedagogical terms as the ‘death of fun’ (p. 507). While a prescribed curriculum that does not overtly include outdoor studies might be more limiting than the perceived freedom of previous curricula, most proponents of outdoor curricula would agree that teachers are curriculum creators rather than dispensers of a curriculum developed by others (Smith, 2002). Teachers and educators will enable learning in the outdoors through their passion and enthusiasm, and will interpret formal curricula to optimise learning as they believe it to be, as can be seen by the authors in this section and throughout this Handbook.

Learning outdoors, although grounded in outdoor studies and its constituent subjects and approaches, benefits from reciprocal support from other disciplines. Advances in fieldwork technology and teaching approaches in geography and the environmental sciences will enhance fieldwork in outdoor-related subjects. Synergistic benefits of introducing an outdoor context are evidenced by research, and organisations in Scotland use this to justify outdoor learning in their engagement with communities. In the early years, facilitating the health and wellbeing of children as a key part of child development is an important part of the outdoor curriculum. Place-responsive teaching should be a reciprocal ecosocial process with the aim of improving human–environment relations.

Authors in this section also draw on theoretical frameworks outwith the discipline to provide a greater understanding of practice. In early years education, outdoor play can draw on a Gibsonian approach (Gibson, 1988), which examines ‘affordances’ – the potential of a physical environment that will support direct engagement by children in it. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological framework illustrates the complexity and interrelatedness of different elements within a system that are applied to early years education in the UK, and part of this may be teacher influence and reservations about the power relationship between teacher and student in outdoor contexts. There are concerns about uncritical and general statements that assume outdoor experiences to be inherently positive. Bowdridge and Blenkinsop (2011) call for a post-structuralist examination of such in a Foucauldian way to understand why some outdoor educators may not deliver from a reflexive position. If individual experiences and personal development are privileged through outdoor learning, then there are criticisms about the knowledge base of its discipline. Thus, there is the need to understand the relationship between teacher and child (and therefore the emphasis of teacher education) especially where freedom and unstructured individual expression are favoured.

It is important also to be conscious of the significant and diverse implications that neo-liberalism has had on the direction of policy and practice of education in general, and outdoor learning in particular. Evans and Davies (2015, p. 10) explore how the narrative of ‘freedom’ has been used to validate ‘changes to the structure and content of formal education in UK’.

Heather Prince

Outdoor learning in formal and non-formal curricula is similarly affected by neo-liberal policies and practices. For the most part the chapters herein do not explicitly focus on the mechanisms of these influences, yet they represent and report current research and practice. We argue for further research that more explicitly explores the processes and implications of privatisation and commercialisation on outdoor learning globally following key papers discussing outdoor adventure as 'recreational capitalism' (for example, Loynes, 1998).

Although some of the pedagogical approaches have meanings and applications across the wider understanding of outdoor studies, the consideration of these within formal curricula is important as most children throughout the world receive an education through the structure of schools and schooling. Many of these school environments are not privileged in location, teacher expertise in outdoor learning or through financial support for outdoor activities and experiences, which are often seen as 'added value' or luxuries in curricula competing for resource. This part of the Handbook provides a cross-section of positive practice, with each author positing operational models for sustainable outdoor learning and for its future growth and development.

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