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If you want to learn to navigate throw away the map

by Chris Loynes

My background is as a teacher and youth worker and so what I know is mostly about young people. I believe that what I have to say about young people in the context of education for sustainability has wider implications to adults as well. This is either because they also missed out on the education I believe is lacking for young people or because they are the people who can provide that missing education for both themselves and the youth of today.

I live in a liberal, capitalist, democracy. The trends in this culture have had a major impact on the experience of being a young person. In three generations the UK has moved from a culture in which financial independence was achieved, on average, at 16 in 1950 (my parents generation) to 25 in 2000 (my children's generation). This has created nine years of previously impossible youth. These young people have a longer education, more leisure time, more disposable income, fewer jobs and greater economic and class mobility. A rich youth culture is one of the outcomes of this. During this time young people are expected to construct a lifestyle for themselves from a broader range of employment, education, faith, friendship, housing, relationship and neighbourhood choices. Guidance on this project also comes from a wider range of sources and is often less easily accessed or offered (Roche and Tucker, 1997).

In the UK version of this lifestyle education and politics have become increasingly pragmatic moving away from debates about values and focussing on the practicalities of citizenship, employment and health. This often means support is available for those still competing for a place in the meritocracy that has, in part, replaced our previous class system. For example, in European Union policy, young people are categorised as student, worker or problem. In the last five years the English statutory youth service has been transformed from an advocacy and support agency for young people and their issues into a career guidance service.

A number of problems arise from this project of constructing the self, often emerging as the dark side of the apparent benefits. These include underachievement at school, bullying and truancy (16 year olds are now paid £30/week if they stay in school);

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unemployment; delinquency, and criminality; health problems including drug use, underage pregnancy, self-harming (up six fold amongst young women) and suicide (up ten fold in as many years amongst young men).

Parents, even when parenting is available and constructive, are often unable to help. Young people post sixteen are seeking to distance themselves from parents and home in order to define themselves as distinct. The same can apply to schools and teachers. This gap in support has given rise to funding that has financed a range of interventions including informal education responses using, in part, the outdoors.

Some of these problems stem from the process of choosing a set of values and from living in a culture with an increasing plurality of values. This applies to all young people whether they are still on the ladder to success or have already fallen by the wayside. However, funding inevitably targets the issues and the people that are experienced by the electorate as anti-social (roughly 17% of young people at age 15 according to one source). Even the problem is understood as a failure by the individual and not of the community supporting that individual into adulthood. Youth work organisations have even been known to 'problematise' a group of young people in order to attract funding that would otherwise be unavailable.

Many commentators have written about the problems as well as the privileges of modernity. In short the enlightenment and urbanisation have liberated us socially, economically and politically. At the same time they have disconnected us from the local landscape and culture. This has led to a recklessness that, some argue, damages the individual, our culture and nature. Putting this disconnection to rights is what some call sustainability. Others, who deal with the consequences of this situation, call it therapy (Richards et al., 2001). What education can contribute to this project is education for sustainability. So this is not only about a relationship with nature but also a relationship with oneself and with others.

Of course nature is already honoured. We have parks, national parks, recreation policies, bio-diversity plans and nature reserves. We see nature as, variously, an art gallery, gym, assault course, museum, zoo, classroom or therapist's couch. Of course, we are not completely disconnected. People still breathe, they are delighted by the first snowdrop or swallow, they pick blackberries in the autumn, they talk about the weather and they garden. It is not only urban landscapes that exclude people from nature. The intensive farming of modern agribusiness makes the countryside a mono-culture and as accessible

to the people that live in it as a military base. There is a greater diversity of wildlife in sub-urban London than in the farmland next door.

I am going to assume that the need to reconnect people with their communities and landscapes is accepted. I will also be assuming that you agree that, to some extent or another, you think our current rates of consumption of the world's resources, the growth in population and the pollution that results from making and moving people and goods around the world are, at best, undesirable, contribute to the uneven distribution of the benefits of the modern world, threaten initiatives of peace, justice and democracy and could be a major threat to many species of plants and animals including our own.

What have these problems of alienation and rampant growth to do with maps and the art of navigation? To begin making the links I would like you to consider that disconnected people and unchecked growth rates could be understood as people and economies that have 'lost their way.' My intention is to explore this title at three levels.

Throwing the literal map away

The first level at which I would like to discuss this title is the relationship between maps and the art of navigation. I think this relationship is important because the way in which a navigator finds his or her way makes a difference to how he or she encounters the places he or she is exploring. Actually, what I really want to do is put the map away rather than throw it away. It does still have some uses!

Part of the culture of outdoor life in the UK involves linear routes, time plans, journeys, expeditions, destinations and self reliance. This latter quality is particularly British. It means to be independent of others when finding your way probably in a landscape that is considered to be wild and remote. I should note here that this approach is not common to journeying in other European countries but has, I believe, crossed the oceans to North America, Australia and New Zealand. The plans are also significant to my argument. They imply a high degree of control over what is essentially a dynamic situation engaged in by, hopefully, a dynamic and lively imagination. These twin values of independence and control have consequences. In order to exercise this control groups spend a great deal of time learning to use maps. The key skills are those of planning a journey from a map and using the map to keep to a linear route and a time plan once embarked on a journey.

This all sounds sensible and worthwhile. However, groups are unable to respond creatively to the landscape of the day except to control for their safety. An unexpected

moonlit night or an alluring extra summit are off limits because they are not in the plan. The knowledge of local people and even other walkers is excluded because the group are independent without a guide and discouraged from encounters with others.

However, let's consider an alternative approach. There was a time when climbing courses taught primarily rope work and belaying. Little was offered to help the aspirant climber move on rock. Nowadays it is the other way round. Movement is at the centre of the classes. The rope is seen as an important safety device and taught in secondary workshops that allow the climber to climb safely. Rope work is not climbing. It is simply a safety device. If the map and compass were treated as safety devices how would this affect the art of navigation? Navigation would become the skill of reading a landscape and responding to it with the idea of a line to take or point to reach or a place to spend time. The navigator would also respond to the weather and the imaginations of the others in the group. A plan would emerge and yet remain open to adaptation as conditions, aspirations or information about what lies ahead changes. If conditions do not allow the navigator to navigate then, unless some imperative dictates otherwise, the group can simply stay put until circumstances change. If the group still need to keep moving then out come the safety devices, the map, compass and, these days, the GPS.

This is how I sail. Our plans emerge out of our desire to visit certain places we have heard of or that we can see, together with an assessment of the weather that could take us there. We check the charts (nautical equivalents of maps) for submerged rocks and dangerous currents and set off. If fog or night overtakes us we choose whether or not to carry on with our various safety devices or to anchor nearby until conditions improve. For preference we choose the latter because it is the engagement with the place with all its whims that we value.

So, does this approach to land navigation work in practice? I could tell you many stories to support my approach. Here is one. We were visiting an unfamiliar and medium sized island with a group of students. They were invited to explore the island to see what it might have to offer us. One small group set off along the beautiful seashore. They met a local fisherman collecting seashells and asked him about the coastline ahead. They got talking to him about his work. He invited them to his home where his wife cooked the group local food and gave them tea. As the conversation unfolded they learned about the way of life and the place from these friendly people. Meanwhile the word went around that there were visitors and neighbours dropped in for a chat. Someone got out a fiddle and started up a tune. Someone else began a long saga about the dramatic history of the island. Before they knew it the chat had turned in to a dance, the whisky had come out,

the sun went down and then, before they'd even thought of sleep or returning to our camp, the sun had come up again. Bleary eyed they eventually made it back to base. There stories about the island and it's people provided the basis for many walks, a football match, several more 'ceilidhs' (visits) and another dance. Educationally I think that was arguably more valuable than following the values of independence and control. Indeed the opposite values of interdependence and serendipity led to the benefits we experienced. Whether you agree with me or not I think this approach certainly offered more of value to a curriculum of sustainability. The students learned a great deal about a landscape they discovered was rich in history and culture and not wild. More importantly they learned a great deal about people who were still in touch with that history and landscape and living with it still.

The problems with the metaphorical maps of outdoor education

I have argued that following maps, that is following an abstract and partial representation of a landscape, is a different experience to that of navigating a landscape. Map work gets in the way of an engagement with a place, the people and the moment. It is, as Ringer (2002) put it, algorithmic. By this he meant it is like following a programme or being on a production line. It is hard to deviate from the plan. The person is challenged to keep in control and stay on course.

The second level of concern intended by my title is to consider the case for navigation as a metaphor and critique of much of what takes place in the UK in the outdoors. I have made this case in a different way (Loynes, 1996) when I likened trends in outdoor education to the McDonaldisation of Society, a phrase used by Ritzer in the title of his book on globalisation. My point was that, like Ritzer, I saw trends that sought to make everything the same wherever it was experienced. Ritzer used the burger to make his point. I used the ropes course to make mine, adventure in a bun. I could have used skiing, rafting, bungee jumping, mountain biking and many more activities that lend themselves to this closed, algorithmic and globalised treatment.

O'Sullivan (1999), in one of the few books from the environmental movement that addresses education, argues that we do need a global vision of one world and one species. However, he points out that to make this vision active in the lives of everyday people it needs many and diverse interpretations at local level. Andrew Brookes, a previous speaker here in Japan, has made a similar point (Brookes,). He reminds us that a landscape is a living landscape brought to life by the interaction of a particular nature and culture. Yet often we import practices from other cultures and environments or take our

students to those other landscapes because our local setting is thought to be lacking in the necessary resources for these standard activities.

Another of my predecessors here in Japan, Robbie Nicol, discussed the claims made by outdoor adventure education for environmental learning (Nicol, 2000). The rhetoric, often convincing to policy makers, clients and even staff does not, in his view stand up to scrutiny. Education 'in' the environment does not lead to education concerned with the environment unless it gets some additional curriculum or pedagogic support. A recent review of research on outdoor learning (Rickinson et al., 2004) concluded that education about the environment, often called field studies in the UK, also does not lead to education concerned with the environment. Bowles (pers comm) points out that education in the environment and education about the environment are not education with the environment. He reminds us of Geddes, the Scottish educational philosopher, who coined the educational values of 'head, heart and hands'. 'In', that is the hands, 'about', that is the head, leaves out the 'with', that is the heart. Or at best feeling is left to it's own devices. Mortlock (1984), an influential British adventure educator, sensed the importance of this emotional world when he wrote of love and respect for the environment as one of his driving educational values.

The problem is that even the serendipitous encounters of the heart with the landscape are squeezed out by the map work approach to the outdoors. It might be tempting to assume that the rigour of the scientific method adopted by field studies is the antipathy of anarchic outdoor adventure. The truth is both are prone to following a predetermined, outcome driven path that leaves those who follow it unable to turn to the side or take a pace measured in their own time. Both the activities that engage us with a place and the theories and curricula we have mapped out to help us work in that place to good effect in fact close the practitioner and the student down to the possibility of a creative engagement with a living landscape.

Why do we allow this to happen? I'm not sure. It could just be, as the feminist eco-psychologists would have it, that the masculine controlling and dominating values of the enlightenment are manifesting themselves in this domain. It could be that activity in the environment, the doing, gets in the way of being in or with the environment, the being. It is true that simple activities to enable people to make journeys, cycling or canoeing for example, have been replaced by more technological ones that focus more on the ego of the participant than the aesthetics of the place, mountain biking or play boating for example. It may be that outdoor practitioners want to look like their school based cousins adopting strategies better suited to classrooms (but perhaps not to pupils in those

classrooms!). It is clear that an outcome based school curriculum has rubbed off on those practitioners determined to make the value of outdoor education apparent to school teachers and policy makers. Certainly the spectre of risk has caused many to be overly concerned with risk management to the extent of avoiding or controlling activity unnecessarily. Another possibility is that policy makers from the institutions representing order in society have seen how effective outdoor experiences can be at instilling certain values in people. This may have led to the preponderance of courses concerning teamwork and leadership. It may also have led to their willingness to fund outdoor approaches to many of the social ills I identified above in my opening remarks. The algorithmic, closed approach works if what you want to achieve is citizens modelled to your own vision.

Some times, of course, we do. We need a certain order in society. One generation needs to hand on what has been learned to another for it to make its own. Perhaps part of what I am arguing for is some kind of balance and that the outdoors is a place where the more generative, transforming and creative aspects of education could and should be practised. However, this politicking is only partly relevant today.

The part that is relevant is that part that has been arguing for an aliveness in our relations with our culture and our landscape. I have stated above that we have lost our links with our surroundings and that restoring these links in some way is vital for our own health, the health of our societies and the health of the planet. Yet, by treating the landscape as a backdrop for other social enterprises, we lose the potential to engage with it actively.

Even when this is addressed, the setting in which it is tackled is often removed from the neighbourhood of the people receiving the lessons. The group on the remote island learned to value the landscape and people they were visiting. They did not learn to value their own neighbours or neighbourhood. At best they were frustrated because they could not exercise these newly discovered values. Mostly they saw the lessons from one place as irrelevant to the other. This is a waste of effort.

It's time to be pedantic about the meaning of certain words. By place I mean the physical reality of a place. By landscape I mean the cultural and historical meaning emerging from the interaction of people (culture) with a (natural) place. Outdoor education in the UK has been good at creating spaces where people can explore themselves and discover relationships with other people and the land that have been dormant. These opportunities provide a breath of fresh air. They do not engage people with their own back yard. To interact with a community and its relationship with its landscape means to become

political. This cannot be done in a remote national park. It happens on the doorstep. What are needed are programmes that engage people through their communities with their own landscapes. People need to feel that their neighbourhood is their natural environment. This means that it must be more than a nice view, a reserve for endangered wildlife or a gym. It must provide a livelihood, at least for some people, and, ideally, for all people for at least part of the time. Only strategies that allow people to engage creatively with their surroundings will reconnect people with the importance of community and place. The bad news is I don't know what these strategies would be. The good news is that I shouldn't know. That's up to the people.

Constructing landscapes

Now I must close the circle. Navigation as I have described it, in which maps are only safety devices, is, as Hodgkin (1976) put it, generative. It allows the person to be an explorer, creatively responding to a living landscape and culture. The context acts as a perceived but not fully understood world that illicitly curiosity and motivates the learner intrinsically. This, I hope, sounds something like a way of working that might support our new youth and their projects of constructing their identities and, I have suggested, their neighbourhoods.

My third level of exploration of this title is philosophical. The constructivist approach to understanding the world I live in is both a philosophical belief about the nature of reality and an educational and political value about the way in which people should be encouraged to learn. As Allison (2000) suggests, I also support the view that good experiential education is a personal enquiry into the being and the knowing of a person. Having been largely constructed by the culture in which he or she grew up the student seeks a place, a natural place, in which to experience themselves more authentically. The personal awareness that results, some would say spiritual development, allows the student to reflect on the culture that nurtured him or her. This perspective allows the student to gain some agency in his or her relationship with that culture. In mythic terms the young person can move from the essentially internal fantasy phase of the hero essential to late adolescent development and so well supported by the adventure experience (Loynes, 1999), and into the adult phase of the warrior engaged with the everyday world. It is this step from hero to warrior that many believe is increasingly hard to make in our culture (Moore and Gillette, 1990).

My experience teaches me that young people resist attempts to construct them either overtly or covertly and however benign the intention of the person offering help. It is

possible to oppress, coerce or trick them. Our own field still claims to ‘impel’ them into experience as Kurt Hahn put it. Perhaps the days of impelling are over. Teaching colleagues, parents and faith leaders tell me the same story. The step from hero to warrior cannot be made with a push or a pull. It must be taken. For better or worse our time is a time in which young people have taken this project on for themselves. Yet, as I have indicated, I believe there is a need for a handrail to help them especially those who are struggling and may get hurt. This project is not an easy task. I also do not want all that my generation has learned to value silenced by an uncrossable divide between us and ‘them’.

The projects I am studying believe this also and have set out to practice a very different outdoor education. This is an approach intended to transform individuals and communities in a way that can be considered more rather than less sustainable. As such these are educational projects worth reflecting on. They can teach us about new pedagogic approaches and they can put the spotlight on the weaknesses in our current practice. I have appended details of the Stoneleigh Project and ECO for you to consider.

Is it possible to influence some changes? This sounds idealistic but if you were to ask any outdoor educator they would, I believe, give you many accounts that support my view. Despite their commitment to ‘maps’ many allow in and value the dynamics of the situations they use to educate young people. However algorithmic you are the place and the people find ways to express their uniqueness, aliveness and spontaneity. Secretly and often with a sense of guilt that they too are deviating from the plan the leaders will adapt and respond and be warmed by the enthusiasm and delight of the group.

The UK system does give us a chance to experiment with these possibilities although usually on the margins of our culture where the consequences will not be embarrassing or threatening politically. It has proved impossible to influence most existing practice. Too much is invested in the values and practices of these established and successful projects. A few are open as this is their way of being. However the most fertile grounds are the new initiatives. This is your opportunity. Japan, like many other countries, has yet to develop extensive programmes of education and community development of this kind. At one level I believe it is the same project we are engaged in; one world, one species. But you must not copy us. It is not a matter of learning from our mistakes. It is your neighbourhood. Throw away the maps and find your own way! We can all then learn from the path you create.

Chris Loynes

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