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## Introduction

[Heather Prince](#) & [Barbara Humberstone](#)

### Abstract

**Providing an overview of the book, this chapter expounds the stimulating and critical context of outdoor studies research through a range of perspectives, methods and methodologies. Drawing from theory and practice through a variety of disciplinary and epistemological backgrounds from international researchers, it illustrates contemporary, creative and innovative research approaches and applications. It defines the importance of responsiveness of a rich, diverse and fast expanding area and its impact on policy agendas. This introduction explores the rationale for the content of the book, the terminology therein and challenges and opportunities of contested viewpoints and different axiologies in outdoor studies research.**

Research in outdoor studies has grown significantly, particularly since 2000 as the number of researchers and outputs have increased (Humberstone, Prince & Henderson, 2016; Prince et al., 2018) and this increase in research is arguably having influences on policy (see Chapter 5.3). Drawing together international researchers, this volume brings a variety of perspectives and methodologies to outdoor studies research. Each chapter provides diverse approaches to enable the exploration of questions, issues and hypotheses. These perspectives and approaches come from a variety of disciplinary and epistemological backgrounds. The chapters draw upon a wealth of theory and practice

from research in social sciences some of which utilise applied research methodologies that are embedded in other disciplines whilst other chapters show the ways in which combinations of approaches provide for creativity in, and innovative approaches to, research. These chapters offer the reader valuable knowledge and understandings to explore research perspectives and to address realities emergent in the key threads of education, leisure, physical culture, sport, the outdoor environment and practice. We continue to maintain that, “The ‘outdoors’ may be perceived, in one sense, as an ideological space where people alone or together engage actively or passively with their ‘environment.’” (Humberstone, Brown & Richards, 2003, p. 7).

In 2016, Humberstone et al., (2016, p. 2) conceptualising ‘outdoor studies’, emphasised that, “terminology in any sphere ... is governed by culture, policy drivers and history, with political, temporal, institutional, chronological and marketing determinants”. This fluid and responsive stance has proved critical in examining the manifestation of research methods in the field and its derivatives three years later where emerging research includes drawing on mobilities and place-based approaches, embodiment and sensorial methodologies, narrative and stories. Research methods in outdoor studies span the cultural, political and social contexts through which diverse outdoor traditions have emerged.

Research methods are techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to research questions or hypotheses (Crotty, 1998; Wahyuni, 2012); it has been suggested that these are a-theoretical (Sarantakos, 2005). However, like Sparkes (2015 p. 50) we argue that a “researcher’s ontological, epistemological and methodological commitments will constrain which methods can be used”. These philosophical positions involve

epistemological beliefs (on the nature and construction of knowledge) and ontological assumptions (assumptions about the nature of reality). These give rise to methodological considerations (the approach to, and process of, gaining knowledge – a framework in which to conduct research within a particular paradigm, where a paradigm is a “basic belief systems or world view that guides the investigation” Guba & Lincoln (1994, p. 105)). Further as Coates, Hockley, Humberstone & Stan (2016, p. 69) suggest, “Approaches to understanding and making sense of material and social phenomena are changing continuously through critical reflection and practice”, not least in outdoor studies research.

As research methods are practical tools for carrying out research, they can be underpinned by different methodologies. Methods that are replicated in this way are illustrated in this compilation to facilitate deeper understanding and to demonstrate a range of applications in outdoor studies research in international contexts to “...fruitfully encompass(es) a broad range of approaches, foci and methods ...” (Humberstone , Prince & Henderson, 2016, p. 3). However, research design is frequently driven by context and potential outcomes, and in some cases will encourage particular methodological perspectives and so incorporate an appropriate range of research methods to explore the research questions, issues or hypotheses (Wahyuni, 2012).

Cutting-edge research in outdoor studies continues to be interdisciplinary and it is also transdisciplinary. “Transdisciplinarity has emerged in order to meet the promise of transcending disciplinary knowledge production in order to more effectively address real world issues and problems” (Leavy, 2016, p. 24,; Humberstone, 2016). This encompasses important emerging research methods/methodologies in socio-cultural and socio-environmental areas of outdoor recreation, leisure and sporting activities Thus, research may be intrinsic within disciplines but should have wider meaning, significance,

reach and impact. Knowledge building and dissemination may be seen as holistic processes, which require innovation and flexibility (Wickson, Carew & Russell, 2006). Thus, *Research Methods in Outdoor Studies* includes chapters on publishing and dissemination, the research-practice nexus and concludes with a narrative around research influence and impact in respect of policy.

Our aspiration for this book is to provide a stimulating and critical contribution to outdoor studies research. The contributors here challenge and/or develop traditional approaches to research and in so doing highlight a diversity of research methods, underpinning methodologies and philosophical perspectives. The book is appropriate for established researchers wishing to refresh their knowledge and those contemplating undertaking research that may challenge conventional methodologies; It is also aimed at final year undergraduates embarking on an extended research project for the first time, taught postgraduate students, postgraduate and early career researchers. The volume comprises a range of methodologies and methods with contextual application across the globe balanced by more 'process' (how to) chapters.

*Research Methods in Outdoor Studies* is organised into five sections. The balance of the text is weighted in respect of qualitative approaches, a reflection, we feel, of the research output in the field, supported by a smaller section on quantitative and mixed methods, couched by contributions on the research process and disseminating research.

The first section, 'Conceptualising and initiating the research process' comprises research design, ethical issues and practicalities and debate on appropriate philosophical and methodological dimensions. Normative process is deliberately upended and challenged in the first Chapter 1.1, which examines contested theorisations and dualisms and seeks new and alternative ways of onto-ethico-epistemological thinking in outdoor studies.

Ethical issues are central to all human and more-than-human interactions, not least in research. The second chapter 1.2 considers the complexity of ethical practice and provides four scenarios that highlight dilemmas surrounding particular outdoor research. Codes of ethical practice are referred to and the workings of ethical panels are considered. Chapter 1.3 provides guidance on how to go about undertaking research in outdoor studies, reflecting upon research design and underpinning conceptual, philosophical and theoretical frameworks.

The next section is concerned with choosing an appropriate approach using qualitative methodologies. Phenomenology is explored as a philosophical tradition and a research methodology in Chapter 2.1. The challenges of data collection from individuals and groups in remote places and spaces for extended periods of time where participants are on the move are explored in chapters 2.2 and 2.3. The pragmatics of authentic and naturalistic data collection necessitate a re-thinking of the ways in which methods are applied towards complex new materialisms. Chapters 2.4 and 2.5 are exemplar case studies concerned with capturing the complexities of human interaction and the environment in two very different contexts. Chapter 2.4 focuses upon outdoor play and learning that involve children and young people actively moving through space and time whilst Chapter 2.5 uses an ecosocial framework for researching outdoor sustainability education practice with teachers, which allows for uncertainty, emergence and collaborative interactions.

The next Chapters (2.6- 2.9) have their roots in interpretative, phenomenological paradigms (as does much qualitative research), which emerged in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as alternative narrative approaches to positivistic dogma then prevalent in much social science research (Humberstone, 1997). Chapter 2.6 takes a traditional ethnographic approach highlighting the processes involved in exploring teaching and learning with 9-

11 year old children in a small outdoor education centre. Chapter 2.7 focuses upon autoethnography as methodology, highlighting theoretical underpinnings and the significance of the senses and memory in outdoor research. The authors use different forms of narrative to engage the reader in place-based research. The early challenge to positivism largely spawned the reflexive researcher, whose research developed in different countries using diverse terms and terminology as chapters 2.8 and 2.9 show. Chapter 2.8 based in Australian sociology draws on feminist theory and practice and demonstrates through research in surfing cultures “that we (might usefully) think the social through ourselves, and explore the productive critiques of what it means to centralise our own subjectivity in our research”. Chapter 2.9 is concerned with autobiography as research methodology, shown to have its roots in UK education and feminist theory and practice. Critical self-reflection is one way of knowing self and provides for reflexivity in research, which is crucial in interpretative, narrative research.

Section three, ‘Contemporary creative qualitative methods’ comprises chapters that examine relatively unexplored methods and methodologies in outdoor studies research. Chapter 3.1 exemplars creative nonfiction as a way of (re)-presenting research. The authors use their own story about the juxtaposition of parenting and ‘serious’ climbing to elucidate the ‘what’, ‘why’, and ‘how’ of creative nonfiction. Chapter 3.2 explores shared-story approaches as ways in which research experiences can be analysed critically, understood and conceptualised to give ‘testimony’ to otherwise complex and unvoiced situations/narratives. In Chapter 3.3, digital narrative methodology is considered to explore human/nature interaction and the aesthetics of nature. Narrative theory is drawn upon and multisensory ethnography enables transformation of (becoming) researchers' sensorial, material and social engagement in outdoor field research. Feminist reflexivity underpins the collaborative letter writing and thematic analyses explored in chapter 3.4.

In a similar approach, through dialogue, but from a different theoretical perspective, chapter 3.5 provides narrative between the authors through which they encourage the reader to write and think creative scholarship. Chapters 3.6-3.8 draw to varying degrees on mobilities methodologies conceptualised initially in social geographical research (Ingold, 2004) and perhaps less understood in outdoor studies. Located within this paradigm, Chapter 3.6 explores praxis as an approach to engagement in outdoor research through the outdoor journey. The walking interview as a mobilities methodology is presented in Chapter 3.7. The outdoors provides immense, varied and complex sensoria pungent for understanding and exploration. In Chapter 3.8 creative multimodal and mobile technologies with sensory-based methods provide for alternative methods of exploring human relationships with the more-than human. Creative artistic methods are used in chapter 3.9 to deprivilege language and draw upon more aesthetic forms of understanding experience.

The fourth section provides readers with quantitative and mixed method approaches to case examples in the field. The first chapter 4.1 responds to the call by many stakeholders and policy makers for evidence of the effectiveness of activities and interventions in the outdoors through the provision of metrics and measures. The second chapter 4.2 focuses on scientific investigations through fieldwork in outdoor environments. Mixed method approaches are considered in the next two chapters. A call to reflect critically when considering a mixed method approach to research is made in chapter 4.3. It cautions against “failing to adequately consider how different research methodologies present different ways of knowing” and argues that for credible mixed method research “accompanying evaluation, quality, and evidentiary criteria” should be “integrated in careful and respectful ways”. Chapter 4.4 provides a framework for researchers interested in combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to explore



phenomena and the practical implications of mixed method approaches in outdoor studies. Although this volume is short on quantitative research examples, Chapter 4.5 presents ‘pure’ quantitative analyses. This is provided through illustrated application to small samples where a hierarchy of analysis can represent the data in a better way and result in evidence being understood in constructivist terms. Section five focuses on disseminating, communicating and sharing research in outdoor studies. Dissemination through publishing, including a scaffolded approach for practitioner research and early career researchers, is examined in Chapter 5.1 together with detail in respect of metrics and evidence for the quality of research in the expanding outdoor field. Chapter 5.2 provides a model of research and practice based in the UK that involves practitioners, researchers, stakeholders and policy makers in sharing and communicating research for maximum influence and impact. The closing Chapter 5.3 is a professional narrative case around bringing research knowledge to the understanding of policy makers, particularly those in Scotland and provides an exemplar of how researchers in outdoor studies might go about influencing and shaping future policies in the various dimensions of outdoor studies.

Here, we present a collection of critical perspectives from a range of disciplines and geographical areas. Chapters in this book highlight the broad scope of contexts, understandings and approaches that comprise outdoor studies and cutting edge research seeking to progress understanding and make contributions to knowledge. The compilation allows readers to identify ontologies and epistemologies relevant to their particular contexts and disciplines and to develop methods and methodologies that are relevant for their research questions. This research methods book hopes to encourage further research that enhances understanding of human transformation within and with the environment /more-than-human world. It points to co-constructed research in outdoor

learning, outdoor education and outdoor experiences that identifies best practice and participatory research in nature-based physical cultures that may reveal practices that lead to increasing ecological sensibilities and praxis.

Research in outdoor studies presents challenges and opportunities together with tensions, debates, contested viewpoints and a range of axiologies and in this respect, is no different from other disciplines. It is a rich and diverse area that is fast expanding as it seeks to respond to public health and wellbeing, educational, cultural, social and environmental agendas. This book establishes the foundations of exciting research in outdoor studies, which is necessarily creative, critical, responsive and apposite.

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