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HORIZONS

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN OUTDOOR LEARNING

IN THIS ISSUE

CALLS FOR ACTION

CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY
EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

FINDING JOY
THINKING DIFFERENTLY ABOUT
CLIMBING, FEAR AND MARKETING
PLUS MORE

SCANNING THE HORIZON



Learning freedom

Resource:

OpenLearn website from the Open University.

Why it's useful:

I find it's a treasure trove of terrific information spanning many topics. I think it's fantastic as it allows you to learn at your own pace, in your own home or office. It delivers high quality, up-to-date and progressive learning opportunities suitable to all.

Where to find it:

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/>

Recommended by:

David Bamford

David shares tips on creating a marketing strategy from page 30



Listening to lived experience

Resource:

Outdoor voices: An anthology of lived experiences. A report published by the YHA (2021) and illustrated by Dr Pen Mendonça.

Why it's useful:

This inclusive project questions our sometimes narrow views of the Outdoors. Packed with stories of what the outdoors means to all kinds of people who are outside for work, play or just to exist. It gives insights on how to engage with those who don't always feel comfortable or safe in the outdoors.

Where to find it:

<https://livemore.yha.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/outside-voices-report.pdf>

Recommended by:

Geoff Cooper, Fellow of the Institute for Outdoor Learning



Resourcing ideas

Resources:

The Essential guide to Forest School and nature pedagogy by Jon Cree and Marina Robb (2021). Published by Routledge.

Why it's useful:

This new book is inspiring as well as informative, written in an engaging and accessible style. It is full of useful models and theories that we can use to underpin and to explain our teaching in nature, which are accompanied by a wealth of ideas and tips for practice.

Where to find it:

Good bookstores.

Recommended by:

Tracy Hayes

Tracy shares the first of three articles exploring different ways to connect with the Outdoors from page 12.

Resource recommendations
by readers for readers

Making space

Resources:

1. *Creating space: Why all-women's expeditions matter* by Brooke Ortel (2020). Published by NOLS Blog.
2. The invisibility cloak: Women's contributions to Outdoor and Environmental Education by Denise Mitten, Tonia Gray, Sandy Allen-Craig and TA Loeffler (2017). Published in *The Journal of Environmental Education* 49 (3): 1-9.

Why they're useful:

1. The blog discusses why women-only expeditions are important.
2. This paper discusses some of the problems that women face in the outdoors and some of the prejudices and limitations that can render women invisible.

Where to find them:

1. Visit the NOLS Blog: <https://bit.ly/NOLS-blog-all-women>
2. Go to: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320253695_The_invisibility_cloak_Women's_contributions_to_outdoor_and_environmental_education

Recommended by:

Grace Hookway (resource 1) and Dr Clare Dallat (resource 2)

[Go to page 35 to see Grace and Clare's contributions to the article 'Concerning gender'.](#)

Facing fears

Resource:

What can fear teach us, a TED talk by Karen Thompson Walker.

Why it's useful:

Karen Thomas Walker discusses the narratives of our fears, equating the stories we tell ourselves in our minds to great literary works.

Her talk not only encourages us to think about how we 'tell' our own fears, but also how our fears have a beauty, take place in our imaginations, and can be a powerful source of change.

Where to find it:

<https://youtu.be/OwgWkUIm9Gc>

Recommended by:

Jack Reed

[Read Jack's article discussing research about fear in *Outdoor Learning* from page 27](#)

Mapping beauties

Resource:

OS Maps online. Subscription and app by Ordnance Survey.

Why it's useful:

I love OS maps, I read them like books, and having all of them on my phone feels magical. For my work, with primary school children, it's wonderful to have a printed OS map of every venue we visit to show them.

Where to find it:

Website: <https://shop.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/apps/os-maps>. Apps: OS Maps app is available on Android and Apple.

Recommended by:

Pete Hubbard

[See Pete's article about taking a new perspective of climbing from page 9.](#)

IMAGES

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**KEEP YOUR
EYES PEELED!**

There are plenty more useful resources as you go through the magazine.

FINDING JOY AND HOPE

Taking time to ask and making time to listen



This article is written in a reflective, autobiographic way that aims to raise questions rather than provide answers. It is a gentle provocation to consider our roles within Outdoor Learning: I hope that this will resonate and you will respond. But this is not ‘armchair philosophizing or abstract theorizing’, my words are grounded in Outdoor Learning practice (1).

This discussion piece follows on from a webinar facilitated with Elspeth Mason in January 2021, which was linked to the IOL Spirituality in Outdoor Learning special interest group. The idea for the webinar emerged from an impromptu conversation – one of those serendipitous, unplanned moments – that followed on from a planned session in the NW region annual conference. The planned session ended, most people left, some of us lingered. It seemed to me that something was holding us in that space, we couldn’t quite bring ourselves to leave. I was aware that I was uncharacteristically quiet, listening, lost in thought, reflecting on recent events. Then I heard a gentle voice ask,

“Tracy do you have something to say?”

And it seems that I did, although I hadn’t known it until that moment: until someone who was holding the space, noticed I was there and took time to ask and others who were there made time to listen.

The day before, I had attended the funeral of a close friend and colleague. She had deeply held Christian beliefs, as do her family and many of her friends. I could see, and feel, the comfort this gives them. I heard them talk about joy and hope. I have witnessed others who have found similar comfort from their beliefs. This is something that is not limited to religion; a deep belief in science can also be deeply comforting. I found myself wondering (not for the first time),

for those like me, who do not have a ‘formalised’, ‘structured’ way that guides us to find joy and hope, where and how do we find them? Do we need to? What do we mean by these words? What is the ‘solace in nature’ that so many people (including me) speak of and go in search of?

I can’t speak for others, nor would I want to, but I know that I need to find joy and hope. I have a deep desire to be comforted, especially in light of recent events, and I am aware that for me this involves being outside. For me, solace in nature is more than a clichéd caption for yet another photo I post on social media. It is something I actively seek, that I experience as therapeutic and healing. For example, choosing to go to a busy place when I need to be distracted from my thoughts and to quieter places when I need to think.

Watching the seasons change reminds me that life continues. Taking time out to be entranced by a murmuration of starlings reminds me of the importance of community, of being together. Others may find solace in more physically active ways.

In my academic practice, I embrace autobiographic approaches, with explicit and reflexive self-observation, and I draw on that here (2).

In the webinar, topics we discussed included what we mean by joy and hope and whether these can be found in our personal lives and professional practices. We explored this using three key prompts:

- How can we leave space for serendipitous moments, with time for ‘being not doing’?



- How may we ‘sell the spaces, not the activities’, perhaps through shifting the focus of what we promote?
- How can this form part of our response to current / ongoing / future challenges? (More than COVID-19.)

One of the key messages from these discussions was awareness of needing to communicate more clearly that Outdoor Learning experiences can be very local, can be urban or even ‘inside’ (for example, during lockdowns) and they don’t need to be ‘wild’. Most of all, we need more equitable access to local outdoor spaces that provide opportunities for learning and for supporting our health and wellbeing.

Another key message was around the importance of reflexivity, taking time to know and understand ourselves and to consider how this shapes our practice (3). I share the webinar prompts to encourage you to consider how they may relate to your practice in Outdoor Learning, and I move the conversation forward to explore:

- Joy, hope and solace as they may relate to Outdoor Learning.
- Creating space and comfort, with a gentle challenge to ‘stepping out of comfort zone’ approaches often used within Outdoor Learning practice.
- Learning to look out for, listen and respond to the impromptu, quiet, indeed silent moments in Outdoor Learning.

Historically, the word ‘joy’ has been used to capture a feeling of pleasure, delight, gladness, when we are full of ‘it’, we may rejoice in it (4). We add the letters ‘en’ to make ‘enjoy’ and use it to show that we find pleasure in something we are doing. Over time, this connection with pleasure has been lost; for example, we say that we enjoy something without stopping to consider the source of the emotion.

We may say that we enjoy watching TV, or eating a cake or reading a book. But we do not go looking for the joy in this, the focus is more on the object – the programme, cake or book.

Most of the time, we do not stop to consider what led to this sense of enjoyment – was it the taste of the cake, its smell, the way it feels in our mouth, or the way it satiates our hunger? It wasn’t necessarily joy that we looked for when we reached out for the cake – it was the cake. How may our outdoor experiences change if we said we were going out to look for joy, rather than going out for a walk, or a paddle or a climb? How may our practice change if we said we were facilitating joyful experiences, going out to look for joy together?

I wonder if joy is something that we can find by looking, or is it something that surprises us when we aren’t looking? Certainly, it can be a complex, complicated experience, which may lead to cognitive dissonance. This is shown in Wordsworth’s sonnet, ‘Surprised by joy’, in which the experience of feeling joy highlights a sense of loss, of grief (5):

“*Surprised by Joy— impatient as the Wind
I turned to share the transport— Oh! with whom
But Thee, long buried in the silent Tomb.*”

As we move through the poem, the challenge of balancing negative emotions (grief, loss for people and ways of being) and more positive emotions, such as joy, is apparent. This poem, written more than 200 years ago, captures feelings I have as I adjust to life without my friend. I feel sure I am not alone in this.

In his autobiographical book: *Surprised by joy: The shape of my early life*, C.S. Lewis (more famed for his Narnia books) shares how he moved from atheism to Christianity, which he explains as experiencing ‘joy’ (6). His reasons for sharing are similar to mine: awareness that others may feel a similar way; reaching out, to offer/ receive comfort. I paraphrase Lewis here as I respond to him and Wordsworth,

FINDING WELLBEING IN NATURE

Go to page 25 to see
activities to promote
wellbeing in nature
for children

“What! Have you felt that too? I always thought I was the only one.”

However, unlike Lewis, I have not found comfort this way. His way is not for me.

I go outside. I walk. I look and listen, and pause. I take my time. I may talk to those I meet along the way, sometimes people, more often horses, donkeys, cattle, sheep, birds, bees – and trees. I find comfort in noticing seasonal changes. I find joy in small things and I find comfort in larger things: pausing to take in the view, to notice the sky, clouds, the sun, mountains, trees (7). I experience this as a way to find perspective, to see that life carries on, that we find a way to carry on. I think joy and hope are things we can include in tacit, less overt ways, to enable opportunities for being surprised, through thoughtful planning, tactful practice and tuning ‘...into what each learner is feeling, thinking and wanting to express’ (8).

Being outside – in whatever way we choose, whatever ‘flavour’ we most enjoy – can be more than a pleasant way to while away a few golden hours (3). It can be a source of comfort, peace, relief from everyday stresses and strains – solace (9). As Rachel Carson reminded us more than 50 years ago,

“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts ... there is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature...” (10)

Living with/ beyond Covid-19 has highlighted how important it is for our health and wellbeing to have access to local outdoor spaces, resulting in a surge of interest in the links between Outdoor Learning and wellbeing (11). This research needs to inform our practice. It needs to be shared. I respectfully request that before asking someone to ‘step outside your comfort zone’, we pause and consider that they may already be doing that, simply by being there – by stepping outside of their home. And remember that the joy they/ we find, may be complicated by grief.

We need to look out for, take notice of, and respond to impromptu, quiet (potentially silent) moments within our outdoor practice. To be

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IMAGES

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able to do this, it is important we make time and space for reflexive practice.

Conclusion

When preparing for the webinar, Elspeth and I found we were using the metaphor of a river, which reminded me I had used a similar metaphor within my doctoral research. I share it here, revised and updated, in the form of a poem:

Relationship with nature like a river?
Sometimes walking beside it,
Other times plunging in,
We may ride, swim, paddle or bathe in it.
Sometimes we turn away,
Ignore it, deny it, distractedly
Focusing attention elsewhere.
It is still there, waiting for our return.
For some it remains in the shadows,
Unknown, un-noticed, un-remarkable.
For others, it gives purpose,
A lifeline, lifeblood, life itself,
Wholly there, may be holy there.
But it is still there, waiting to be seen.
There is no right. There is no wrong.
Connection, dis-connection, mis-connection? No.
No one way of knowing, of doing or being,
A constant ebbing and flowing.
Running deep, then shallow, then deep again,
Sometimes fast, sometimes slow,
Quietly trickling, then breaching the banks,
An overwhelming, overflow.
Yet it is there because we are there,
The river is in us. It is us. We are river.
Rain enables us to grow.

The river has changed course and will continue to do so. Whilst we may grieve for what we have lost, we also need to find a way to let go of old ways that no longer work, to go with the flow and look for gaps – to be responsive to the world around us and find comfort and joy where we can.

I invite you to respond to this article by sharing ways that you have found to do this. Contact me via email: tracy.hayes@live.co.uk or Twitter @hayes_tracy to share stories, poems, photos of ways you have found joy and/or hope outdoors ■



AUTHOR

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A qualified youth worker and community development professional, Tracy takes a playfully narrative approach to her work. She is lead editor of the book *Storytelling: Global perspectives on narrative* (Brill, 2019) and is convenor of the British Educational Research Association’s (BERA) Nature, Outdoor Learning and Play Special Interest Group, and Social Media and Website Officer for the Royal Geographical Society’s (RGS) Social and Cultural Geographies Research Group (SCGRG).