
Outdoor education in senior schooling: Clarifying the body of knowledge.

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Abstract

Australia has a state-based educational system. In some of these states, outdoor education exists as part of the formal accredited secondary school curriculum. In this paper I analyse the content of these senior secondary school outdoor courses as a means to help delineate and describe the body of knowledge of outdoor education. I suggest outdoor education's body of knowledge reflected in these courses fall into six different content categories or areas. Only two of these areas, outdoor pursuits knowledge and skill, and journey based knowledge and skill are common to all courses reviewed. The remaining four content categories each provide a pathway to extend outdoor education into the conceptually more rigorous realms of senior schooling. I conclude with reflective comment on these four pathways and the future of outdoor education in senior schooling.

Introduction

Australia has three levels of government: federal, state and local. Both the federal and state governments have influence over what happens in schools. School education in Australia is legislatively the province of state governments, although the federal government does exert influence on state education ministers using a variety of mechanisms including the provision of national curriculum materials, and more recently, by funding compliance incentives (Brady & Kennedy, 2007). What results therefore is a state-based education system where state education authorities initiate and construct school-based curriculum, albeit with the availability of national incentives and resources. Mainstream areas seen to be of national interest have been most targeted by successive federal governments, areas such as science, mathematics, languages, vocational education and citizenship, have all 'enjoyed' federal support and scrutiny. For less mainstream areas, such as outdoor education, there are no national educational policy incentives, national assessment benchmarks, or reporting processes of compliance. As a consequence, outdoor education has developed in schools from local initiatives and state-based lobbying. This results in different conceptions and practices of outdoor education in the different states and territories of Australia.

1. In the late 1970s the Victorian government reformed senior school curriculum. More traditional disciplines remained as group 1 subjects. Innovative offerings, group 2 subjects, were accredited to help cater for an increasingly diverse student population – the result of a tightening employment market and increased ethnic diversity of Australia’s population. Students could graduate year 12 with a mix of group 1 and 2 subjects.
Outdoor Education examines ways in which experiences in the outdoor or natural environment influences human development. The primary focus of outdoor education is on understanding people’s relationships with the outdoors. (VCAB, 1990, p. 1)

The focus of outdoor education in senior schooling changed again in 2000 when it was reconceived and renamed Outdoor Environmental Studies. This name reflected the change in content that occurred when the Victorian Board of Studies, after a review of enrolments and educational outcomes, recommended Environmental Studies merge with Outdoor Education (Lugg, 1999). This was part of another significant redevelopment of senior school curriculum within Victoria in the late 1990s. As Annette Gough recently reported, she and others believed that Outdoor Environmental Studies was “intended to give an academic orientation to complement the perceived skills basis of the Outdoor Education study design” (Gough, 2007, p. 29). However, I believe two other factors were more potent in reconfiguring the outdoor education subject in this way. First, the student enrolments in Environmental Studies and Environmental Science were low and declining (VCAA in Gough, 2007). Second, vocational education was increasing Australia-wide as a consequence of direct federal government intervention and financial incentives. In Victoria, the newly accredited National Outdoor Recreation Training Package enabled development of subjects called VET in VCE, of which Outdoor Recreation (Certificate II) was one new offering. The merger of Outdoor Education with the less popular Environmental Studies course and the emergence of the vocational education outdoor recreation certificate course, therefore gave students in year 11 and 12 a more differentiated choice between Outdoor Recreation and Outdoor Environmental Studies.

A key signpost to a profession is a clearly defined body of knowledge (Martin, 2001). However, as this brief potted history of outdoor education in senior schools of Victoria illustrates, what constitutes outdoor education doesn’t exist in a vacuum. Schools shape educational experiences in a wider social and political context. Subject content and therefore the body of knowledge teachers must develop, evolves with social enlightenment but also as a consequence of political forces. The forced marriage of Outdoor Education and Environmental Studies in Victoria effectively expanded the knowledge base that was required by outdoor education teachers to continue to teach in the area. It also, by default, drew environmental educators into teaching outdoor education. The Victorian Outdoor Education Association has been pro-active in developing professional development opportunities for teachers of the new merged course since it commenced in 2000 and a new text (Gough, Pleasants, & Black, 2006) has helped teachers understand the expanded scope of the course. Inevitably however, the new course remains a combination of two subjects. But, what might now constitute the body of knowledge in outdoor education reflected by such course changes and current political and cultural priorities? In this paper I seek to describe the body of knowledge of contemporary outdoor education in Australia through content analysis of the various state-based outdoor education courses, either currently accredited or emerging at the senior school level.

Senior school outdoor education

Senior level outdoor education curriculum is in transition in several states of Australia at the present time. Victoria has undergone the changes summarised above and the Outdoor Environmental Studies design was re-developed and re-accredited in 2005 (VCAA, 2005). In Western Australia a new outdoor education course is to be implemented in 2008 (Curriculum Council, 2006), while in Tasmania a new outdoor leadership course was also available to students for the first time in 2008. The development of new courses of study is a social construction, reflecting particular values, politics, power and opportunities at any particular point in time (Goodson, 1997). The writers of each of these new courses have had to make choices about outdoor education’s body of knowledge – about what to include and what to leave out, about what fits the educational ideology of the state government that employs them as well as the professional outdoor education milieu in which they are emersed. In my view, the senior secondary school level is potentially an ideal place to examine outdoor education’s contribution and evolution in schooling simply because it’s in years 11 and 12 that a study’s social contribution, duplication and distinctiveness are most scrutinized, particularly by central, state curriculum authorities.

Outdoor education, particularly in junior levels of schooling, is often conceived as a process of learning. Early definitions of outdoor education suggested that it “is a means of approaching certain educational objectives through guided direct experience in the out-of-doors” (The Alternatives Report, 1981, p. 11). As a process of learning, outdoor education is mostly personal development education. Research results from teachers of outdoor education in South Eastern Australia indicates that promoting self esteem and group co-operation are considered the primary educational outcomes from involvement in outdoor education (Lugg & Martin, 2001; Polley & Pickett, 2003). While personal or group development outcomes from outdoor education are worthy achievements, they do not help distinguish the contribution outdoor education makes to schooling. By contrast, in senior levels of education, year 11, 12 (or in tertiary
programs) outdoor education must be more specific about its contributions beyond personal and group development.

In this paper I have chosen to analyse outdoor education’s body of knowledge rather than educational outcomes. I have found that while all curriculum documents include descriptions of objectives or desired outcomes, these outcomes don’t give the reader a sense of the relative weight or emphasis applied to them. Analysis of the content and assessment however, enables the reader to more clearly understand how the course writers intended students to spend their time and concentrate their learning”.

My intent in this paper therefore, is to describe the various content areas that appear to contribute to senior secondary outdoor education courses in Australia. In so doing I aim to clarify commonalities in outdoor education’s body of knowledge across the country and begin to articulate future directions and emphasis. I have not looked at the content of the Vocational Education and Training outdoor recreation certificates that are available in schools. The content of the outdoor recreation certificates tend to be well described and are commonly developed from the national training package. The courses that I have reviewed are listed in table 1. In closing this paper, I seek to propose a way forward for outdoor education curriculum that is both distinctive and future oriented.

2. A comparative study of the intended outcomes of outdoor education curriculum would be a worthy pathway to determine the social/educational contributions curriculum writers have envisaged for outdoor education, but that is not the focus of this paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Course name</th>
<th>Year level</th>
<th>Current Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Outdoor and Environmental Studies</td>
<td>11 and 12</td>
<td>Accredited 2006-09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outdoor Education (grp 2)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Lapsed.  Accredited 1983-1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>Outdoor Leadership</td>
<td>11 or 12</td>
<td>Draft only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adventure Education</td>
<td>11 and 12</td>
<td>Expires Dec 31, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Capital</td>
<td>Outdoor Education</td>
<td>11 and 12</td>
<td>School developed</td>
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<td>Territory</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Outdoor and Environmental Education. Stage 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>11 and 12</td>
<td>Accredited 2005 until</td>
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<td></td>
<td>further notice</td>
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<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>D608 Outdoor Education</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Accredited 2006 - 2007</td>
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<td>11 and 12</td>
<td>Accredited 2004 - 2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>Personal Development, Health &amp; Physical Education</td>
<td>11 and 12</td>
<td>Amended 2001</td>
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Outdoor pursuits in outdoor education

The first obvious inclusion in the body of knowledge of outdoor education is that of outdoor pursuit activities, evident in all studies of outdoor education. This usually involves content such as skill practice, planning and safety. This is the understanding of outdoor education implied by the Australian Council of Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACPER). The Victorian branch of ACHPER includes outdoor education as one of eight components of physical education (see Figure 1), along with ball handling, athletics, aquatics, gymnastics, sport, games and dance (ACPER, 2004), recommended as suited for both junior and senior physical education programs. ACHPER’s view of outdoor education as another set of activities is unhelpful for those seeking to understand outdoor education’s body of knowledge, not least because it frames outdoor education as a minor activity subset of physical education rather than something more diverse and alternately focussed.

In New South Wales a choice of 47 subjects is available to students completing their Higher School Certificate at year 11 or 12; outdoor education is not one of them. However, immersed within the Personal Development, Health and Physical Education subject is an option called outdoor recreation at year 11 (Board of Studies, 2001). This is similar to the case in Queensland. The Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) offers 64 senior school subjects. Within the Physical Education syllabus students and teachers select a minimum of four activities from a list of 99 possibilities (QSA, 2004).

Several outdoor pursuits are listed among the options. In this conception an outdoor pursuit is another activity option to enable learning goals in physical education, rather than being called, or contributing to, outdoor education. In both Queensland and NSW there is no formal mention of outdoor education at the senior curriculum level although the practice of school camps, particularly for junior levels, is common.

The current Tasmanian Adventure Education courses consist of several syllabi with varying emphases (Tasmanian Secondary Assessment Board, 2007). An Outdoor Pursuits syllabus is one possibility and it emphasises practical knowledge and skills in two adventure activities and the assessment reflects this.

Throughout Australia I found no evidence to suggest that any of the senior outdoor education courses existing today restrict themselves to outdoor pursuits knowledge. However, every course, whether called outdoor education, outdoor recreation, adventure education or outdoor environmental education or studies, had as a key central component, content that enabled students to learn skills of outdoor pursuits, either as an end in itself or as a means of travel in natural areas. Although, unlike the VET competency-based outdoor recreation courses, assessment of outdoor pursuit skill learning was, at most, a minor component of assessment in outdoor education courses. The South Australian stage 1 course, for example, has some assessment based on outdoor activities that includes skill proficiency and equipment choice in activities (SSABSA, 2005), as does the current West Australian year 11 course (WACC, 2006a). The Victorian Outdoor and Environmental Studies course deliberately excludes skill tests or levels of practical competence measures (VCAA, 2005).

Journeys or expeditions in outdoor education

The second content area evident through senior curriculum is that concerned with effective participation in outdoor expeditions or journeys. The current West Australian outdoor education courses at year 11 and 12 and the South Australian stage 1 (yr11) Outdoor Education course are typical of this. Tasmania’s adventure education courses also have expedition options.

Figure 1. ACHPER’s (2004) components of physical education include outdoor education.

3. Both Queensland and NSW sponsored development of the VET outdoor recreation training package. Both education systems offer courses either in schools or in collaboration with registered training providers for the Outdoor Recreation certificate II.
The content included in these studies combines the skills and knowledge important to outdoor pursuits participation together with the environmental knowledge of minimum impact practices and reading the weather. These courses also include content important for participation in self-reliant expeditions, such as personal organization skills, understanding group dynamics, first aid and risk management. Organization and planning of expeditions is a central focus for some studies, as is outdoor leadership.

Both of the current West Australian courses, the new Tasmanian Outdoor Leadership course and the South Australian stage 1 and 2 courses have a sequence of content that includes student outdoor leadership development and assessment. The current WA year 12 Outdoor Education course, for example, expects students have learned how to conduct a briefing and debriefing session, and displayed leadership outdoors (WACC, 2006b). Performance criteria then help teachers of these courses to assess and report this learning. It is interesting to note that a progression into teaching students about outdoor leadership and outdoor teaching is one pathway curriculum writers have taken to extend outdoor education in the senior curriculum. The inclusion of theory in: outdoor leadership, communication, decision making, problem solving and search and rescue, for example (TQA, 2006) clearly indicate a senior level course intent on a more vocational outdoor leadership end as part of the Tasmanian Certificate of Education.

Outdoor education as learning around effective participation in outdoor journeys has dominated formal curriculum in Australia to date and is probably the historical origin of outdoor education as a subject separate from physical education. The outcome summaries from these journey-based courses reflect the frequently cited view of outdoor education as being about self, others and the natural world, and the outcomes reflect this.

Most studies, such as the South Australian courses and the West Australian courses list outcomes related to self-management and interpersonal skills. What is less well described is what content students will learn in order to be able to attain such outcomes. The new West Australian course seems to tackle this most directly. For example, the content section of the draft includes material for both personal skills and working with others. While some of what is described could be considered content there is, inevitably perhaps, a slide into paraphrasing outcomes, as the following extract from the personal skills draft section illustrates.

**Personal skills**

Experiential learning through participation in outdoor activities provides opportunities for the development of self-awareness and is fundamental to understanding personal development through outdoor experiences. This course introduces and provides opportunities to develop personal skills. Methods used to enhance personal growth are learnt, including those where experiencing challenging activities is the focus. This requires students to step outside their comfort zone, tackle fear and experience unexpected outcomes. Personal limitations and personal goals are recognised, personal experiences reflected on, creating pathways to self-actualisation that help develop skills to cope with the unknown. Self-esteem is enhanced and values related to self-acceptance and self-respect are pursued. (Curriculum Council, 2006, p. 5)

Consideration of what students must learn to enable the personal and group development outcomes that have long been associated with outdoor education remains a problematic area it seems. While there is reason to consider personal and group development theory and practice as a separate content area in outdoor education curricula, I found only scant evidence of what this content may actually be. Consequently, I have listed it here under the journey and expedition content heading. Interestingly, the Victorian Outdoor Environmental Studies design has no mention of personal and group development content, although does refer to reflection on outdoor participation.

The extent to which content related to the natural world is incorporated into studies with a journey focus varies, but seems more easily described. The dominant example tends to regard the natural world as a universal. In other words, content relates quite generically to outdoor participation, rather than the specific place to be visited. In this journey-based conception of outdoor education, environmental content seems to be limited to predicting the weather and minimising impact rather than learning about the environment in which the journey takes place. However, in the on-the-ground reality of teaching these courses I would suggest that the local conditions must influence how teachers include specific material on both weather and impact.

**Place-based knowledge in outdoor education**

The third content area in outdoor education subjects is an extension of that related to expeditions and is the second pathway used to extend learning in senior outdoor education courses. Some studies include the ecological knowledge relevant to the regions or places that students visit during coursework.
The South Australian stage 2 (yr12) Outdoor and Environmental Education course is a good example of this. In this course students are assessed on skill acquisition and personal organisational aspects, but are also assessed on an environmental investigation project related to the region or place in which the journey occurs. This type of content is present also in aspects of the Victorian Outdoor and Environmental Studies course. In year 11 of the Victorian course students undertake case studies of two different types of natural environments in which they participate in outdoor activities. As well as material related to the activity itself, content also includes, for example, environmental landform characteristics, environmental management strategies, relevant activity codes of conduct, impacts of technology and urbanisation on the environments selected.

The place-based knowledge included in outdoor education studies is that related specifically to the places students visit as part of their course. The places therefore define the actual content. While this makes sense and is easily envisaged, the text that supports the Victorian course (Gough et al., 2006) perhaps inevitably drifts into more generalised abstract environmental knowledge, suggesting at one point a learning activity for students to describe environments that they have not visited (p. 68). Place based knowledge therefore, often merges with and relies upon, environmental science content.

**Environmental science in outdoor education**

Some of the senior outdoor education subjects include content that is best described as environmental science. The Victorian Outdoor and Environmental Studies supporting text for example, contains material about differing ecosystems, the biosphere, carbon, nitrogen, phosphorous and water cycles (Gough et al., 2006, pp. 71-73). The textbook also suggests students ought complete scientific investigations, such as vegetation transects or investigate species migratory patterns (p. 83). While learning environmental science content can be applied to enhance the place-based education referred to above, a strong link between outdoor experiences and the scientific investigation and content is not always evident in either the study design or teacher support material. Inclusion of environmental science, both as specific content and as a way of knowing and being in the outdoors, is a significant shift from traditional outdoor education knowledge and practice. This seems to have arisen most in the Victorian subject, no doubt as a consequence of the marriage between outdoor education and environmental studies.

In Victoria during 2007 the year 11 and 12 subject Environmental Science had only 301 students enrolled and, according to Gough (2007), it is likely this subject will be discontinued. If this is the case, the current Outdoor and Environmental Studies may well be under pressure to adopt more scientific content in the future. Increasing the environmental science content of outdoor education is the third pathway available to raise the academic content and rigor of a senior school outdoor education subject. But if this content is coming from a subject that students have successively demonstrated as unpopular, the wisdom of expanding outdoor education in this direction seems questionable, if only from a subject survival perspective.

**Human/nature relationship critique in outdoor education.**

The final area of content evident in reviewing senior outdoor education curriculum is perhaps best described as social and cultural critiques of human/nature relationships. While the formal content in this area is most evident in the Victorian Outdoor and Environmental Studies and the new West Australian outdoor education courses, the underlying ideas are common in much outdoor education. When teachers encourage students to reflect on their life outdoors in contrast to that at home, or their dependence on television, take-away food or a shower every day, they are potentially engaging students in a social – cultural critique of human/nature relationships. This sort of content has long been part of the discussions that have arisen from outdoor journeys in particular. In the senior outdoor education syllabi I reviewed, extending student thinking into more careful consideration of human/nature relationships is the fourth pathway option by which senior curriculum can extend the conceptual difficulty of study in outdoor education.

One of the more common content aspects in this area is the inclusion of indigenous perspectives of the land. The South Australian stage 2 (yr12) course includes a comparison of environmental perspectives, as does the Victorian and new West Australian courses. It appears that indigenous perspectives of the environment are often considered along with changing historical perspectives, such as those of early European settlers, early adventurers, conservationists and contemporary outdoor recreation enthusiasts. What seems implied by this is that indigenous perspectives to land are unchanging, which is problematic, although this is also potentially fertile content for consideration. Avoiding the indigenous good, non-indigenous bad dichotomy seems to be one particular problem outdoor educators have noted with this area of content (Bucknell & Mannion, 2007). As this evolves with successive teaching and debate, it ought enhance the capacity of outdoor education to make effective contributions to students’ knowledge of complex issues related to, for example, contemporary society and ethnicity as well as knowledge of nature.
The Victorian Outdoor and Environmental Studies (VCAA, 2005) and West Australia’s new outdoor education courses (Curriculum Council, 2006) offer many examples that have potential for social-cultural critique of human/nature relationships including: motivations for outdoor participation, media responses to adventure and risk taking outdoors, the role of technology in mediating outdoor adventure (from the Victorian course), and ethical and moral issues related to outdoor activities and the broader impacts on society in political, economic, cultural and environmental terms (Curriculum Council, 2006, p. 5). How well teachers are able to realise these outcomes and teach such content effectively, is an ongoing question to be asked of professional development and teacher training organizations and the education departments that support teachers’ access to such opportunities. As a distinctive pathway open to extend the academic and conceptual rigour of outdoor education into senior schooling, a social-cultural critique of human/nature relationships has considerable merit, but only if supported by appropriate pre and in-service education.

The evolving body of knowledge in outdoor education

Figure 2 summarises the six contributing content areas evident in senior outdoor education curriculum documents, including the expanded leadership content evident particularly in the Tasmanian Adventure Leadership syllabus. In a recent edition of this journal, Chris Bucknell and Andrew Mannion (2006) described outdoor education’s body of knowledge from their perspective as outdoor education teachers in Victoria. They concluded outdoor education consisted of four content parts: knowledge construction, outdoor environments, living and travelling outdoors and ecological sustainability (p. 41). In my content analysis of courses around Australia I have chosen labels that are evident in course documentation, however, an alternative analysis using Bucknell and Mannion’s labels would be feasible. I have chosen to represent the curriculum content areas shown in Figure 2 in a hierarchical manner, as I believe this best represents the way in which such content is developed within courses. As mentioned previously, all outdoor education is based on outdoor pursuits knowledge and skill, it is the first defining area of content for outdoor education senior curriculum Australia wide. In addition, all senior outdoor education courses also include the content relevant to journeying outdoors, in particular the organisational aspects, and the environmental knowledge necessary for minimising impact and reading the weather. Outdoor pursuits and journey-based knowledge therefore collectively provide the basic foundation content for all formal outdoor education programs at this level. There are then four additional areas of content that provide four different pathways to further extend the content of outdoor education, and courses at the senior level have embraced these options to varying extents. These are the pathways I have described as outdoor leadership, place based knowledge, environmental science and a critique of human/nature relationships. None of the current collection of senior outdoor education related programs across Australia draw from all content pathways.

In Figure 2, and in the text, I have suggested that additional content extends from the basis of outdoor activities and journeys. This seems true hypothetically. However, there is considerable evidence from the various study designs that the extension pathway chosen ought be the principle influence upon the way in which outdoor experiences are themselves selected and conducted in the first instance. For example, the rationale from the Victorian Outdoor and Environmental studies design clarifies this intent.

In this study both passive and active outdoor activities provide the means for students to develop experiential knowledge of natural environments. Such knowledge is then enhanced through theoretical study of natural environments from perspectives of environmental history, ecology and the social studies of human–nature relationships. As a consequence of the importance of the experiential components, Outdoor and Environmental Studies also provides students with the skills and knowledge to safely participate in activities in natural environments and to respect and value the environment. The blend of direct practical experience of natural environments with other more theoretical ways of knowing, enables informed understanding of human–nature relationships. (VCAA, 2005, p. 7)

Similarly the South Australian curriculum statement explains:

Outdoor activities are used as a way of achieving good health and personal development, as part of a process in which students reflect critically on environmental practices and are introduced to employment options in outdoor and environmental activities. (SSABSA, 2005, p. 1)

The content and the way courses are taught are therefore quite correctly in support of the rationales that underpin the differing State outdoor education related syllabi, although as one reviewer of this article noted, there has been very little research into what outdoor educators actually do in outdoor education.
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However, it is the course rationales that detail the ultimate motive of service or curriculum contribution of outdoor education in each state system.

**Outdoor education’s rationales in senior secondary school curricula.**

While not all of the senior school study designs or syllabi include detailed rationales, there is sufficient evidence from the content and assessment to support my conclusion that there are three differing rationales for outdoor education operating in schools today. Most courses embraced more than one rationale, although there does tend to be a dominant notion of outdoor education perhaps underpinned with a specific educational ideology or worldview in each course. The three rationales or notions of outdoor education evident from my review include: outdoor education for knowledge and skills of outdoor activity, outdoor education for personal development, and outdoor education for sustainability.

The first notion of outdoor education is as a contribution to students’ skills and knowledge for outdoor activity, recreation or leisure. What flows from that is developing outdoor leadership, so it

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**Figure 2. Outdoor education’s body of knowledge in senior secondary education.**
is a potentially vocational view of education. The current West Australian year 12 course rationale is one example.

There are an increasing number of individuals and groups utilising the outdoor environment for education, recreation, therapy or exploration purposes.

A number of the users of the natural environment have little knowledge about survival in the natural environment and also lack leadership and decision making skills relating to this survival. As a result there is a growing demand being made on limited rescue and emergency services provided by society.

The Outdoor Education Year 12 subject not only attempts to redress this growing problem by increasing the number of responsible users of the natural environment, but also to develop leadership skills to assist others in the natural environment. (WACC, 2006b, p. 85)

The second conception of outdoor education's contribution is that of personal development education through outdoor involvement. As such, outdoor education is here more supportive of a liberal education ideology (Martin, 1998), an ideology that "sees education as preparation for life rather than work" (Fien, 1993, p. 19). Interestingly, while personal development outcomes have dominated junior school outdoor education material to date, and are the main outcomes teachers think important from outdoor education (reported earlier), its prominence diminishes in senior schooling. However, personal development claims are still evident in some rationales at the senior level. As part of the extensive South Australian course rationale for example, "... by participating in outdoor journeys, students will develop knowledge and skills, and reflect on their personal, group, and social development” (SSABSA, 2005, p. 1).

The third conception of outdoor education possible to derive from senior curricula is as education for sustainability. The rationales from both the new West Australian course and the Victorian VCE provide specific examples of this.

Through interaction with the natural world, outdoor education aims to develop an understanding of our relationship with the environment, others and ourselves. The ultimate goal of this course is to contribute to a sustainable world. (Curriculum Council, 2006, p. 3)

Outdoor and Environmental Studies is a study of the ways humans interact with and relate to natural environments. ... Ultimately, the study is directed towards enabling students to make critically informed comment on questions of environmental sustainability and to understand the importance of environmental health, particularly in local contexts. (VCAA, 2005, p. 7)

It is wrong to suggest that both these courses are the same; they are not. But they do deliberately embrace critical analysis of the social and cultural aspects of human to nature relationships as key aspects in the study designs. They both include, in fact mandate, direct personal outdoor experience and they both seek to enable students to understand the ways in which contemporary society responds to and treats natural environments. The South Australian course rationale also mentions critical reflection on environmental practices, indeed the South Australian course has aspects of each of the three conceptions of outdoor education in its course rationale. However, the Victorian and new West Australian course rationales each have an ultimate goal towards environmental sustainability. Each are examples of “critical outdoor education” (Martin, 1999, p. 463) underpinned by a socially critical education ideology.

In Tasmania a new outdoor leadership course is being developed and is in draft format only (2007/8). The draft includes a statement about the outdoor education learning area.

A fundamental aspect of Outdoor Education is the development of a positive relationship between students and the natural environment where the primary aim is to foster an awareness of the natural environment and build responsibility for its care and conservation. This understanding empowers students to contribute towards achieving an ecologically sustainable world. (Unpublished Outdoor Leadership Senior Secondary 5C draft syllabus, p. 1)

However, the Tasmania course is titled Outdoor Leadership, rather than outdoor education. It has a primary content focus on leadership development and is vocationally positioned, so despite the socially critical statement about outdoor education empowering students towards an ecologically sustainable world, this appears not to be what this particular Tasmanian course has as its content focus.

It's useful to muse at this point about the potential relationships between the content of outdoor education courses and underlying educational ideologies. One possibility is summarised in Figure 3. But ultimately,
how a teacher envisages outdoor education’s contribution to schooling will shape what happens in the classroom and on the hill.

**Concluding thoughts and future directions**

It seems that outdoor education has evolved in differing forms throughout Australia, although the core similarities based on outdoor pursuit knowledge and skills, and promoting effective participation in journeys are common. As I undertook the research necessary for this paper, I was interested in how different pathways were used to extend outdoor education into the conceptually more rigorous world of upper secondary education. I have summarised four such pathways, namely: outdoor leadership development, place based education, environmental science, and human/nature relationship critique. Each of these pathways are viable avenues for curriculum development. Naturally perhaps, I am left musing on which of these pathways holds most promise for the future of outdoor education, and the profession, in schooling. It is not my purpose to address this, but I have a bias towards a combination of place based education and human/nature relationship critique. My rationale is overly simple perhaps.

Outdoor leadership theory and practice is a necessary pathway in the development of an outdoor educator, but I wonder about its relevance and suitability at the year 11 or 12 level. I have a preference to defer leadership theory until students have opportunity to develop a stronger personal outdoor experience base, perhaps then pursue leadership studies in a tertiary course, or via other vocational education and training pathways and outdoor recreation leadership certification options.

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**Figure 3. Educational ideologies and content relationships between differing conceptions of outdoor education?**
Environmental science as a means to extend outdoor education is a vexed pathway and content area for me. While I value environmental science, it is not something that I consider ought be dominating outdoor education except as it informs lived experience of place. I think outdoor education ought to critique a scientific way of knowing, not just embrace it. Alternatively, I think outdoor education ought to foster environmental knowing around the model of an inquisitive naturalist. Knowing nature, as a naturalist is fundamentally located in a specific time and place based relationship that foregrounds observation and personal experience. Being a naturalist is certainly supported by the environmental science that underscores field guides and the like, but it is not driven be a need for the separatist rationalism and objectivity of science⁴.

The future directions and prospects for outdoor education will remain driven by such biases, differing personalities, political circumstances and resultant educational ideologies of individuals as well as different education authorities around Australia. As professionals, aided by information technology and a national journal and conference, we can increase the dialogue and sharing of ideas that helps ensure we provide the best and most suited future options for children in schools. It is to that end that I embarked on this project and to that end I invite and encourage future contributions on this topic.

See for example (Wheeler cited in Orr, 1992, p. 87).

References


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About the author

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