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# OUTDOOR EDUCATION



*Friends by Emma Jackson*

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# Editorial Themed Issue: Relationships With Others

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*Robyn Zink*

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Welcome to this themed issue of the *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*. All of the articles in this issue examine the question of relationships with others. The scope and the breadth of articles is indicative of the complexity of how relationships with others work, why developing positive relationships with others is important and how outdoor education can contribute to this.

Dewey (1938) argued that learning occurs through interaction. Learning, in this sense, is not something that happens in isolation, it is something that happens in relation to the individual who has the experience, the others involved, and the environment in which it occurs. According to the way Dewey conceptualises learning the relationships learners have with others is fundamental to the process of learning. This runs counter to the way learning, particularly experiential learning, is construed as an individual experience by many contemporary authors. For example Beard and Wilson (2006), point out that learning is personal and the filtering of experience is an individual process. The picture of learning that Beard and Wilson draw here appears to have little to do with interaction. If learning is such a personal and individual process, interaction may in fact “get in the way” of learning. Fenwick (2001) suggests that a major conception of experiential education presumes “an independent learner, cognitively reflecting on concrete experience to construct new understandings, perhaps with the assistance of an educator, toward some social goal of progress or improvement” (p. 7). Here learning is still seen as an individual process, but Fenwick suggests there may be a place for interactions with a teacher or instructor to assist with that learning.

The shift from learning occurring through interaction to learning being a personal and individual experience has occurred in a broader context where neo-liberal political and economic ideologies have come to the fore in many Western countries. The rise of neo-liberalism has seen the promotion of the logic of the market-place in all aspects of our lives. This works on the assumption that individuals make rational choices based on their best interest and that this is “more ‘efficient’ at directing the social distribution of goods and services than the political institution of the state” (Hales, 2006, p. 55). Numerous writers within the field of outdoor education have made links between neo-liberal ideologies and contemporary outdoor education practices. In 1998 Chris Loynes wrote about adventure in a bun. He was commenting on how adventure has come to be seen as a commodity like any

other commodity in a capitalist society. He argued that capitalist markets have stripped outdoor education of its transformative potential and it is like any other commodity that can be packaged and replicated in a standardised fashion. Connection and relationships are lost in this process of the commodification of outdoor education.

Like Loynes, Jay Roberts (2012) also utilises the work of Ritzer (1993; 2001) in drawing parallels between contemporary practices of experiential education and the processes of McDonaldisation that are replicated in so many aspects of our lives. The dimensions of McDonaldisations that he particularly focuses on are efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. Roberts illustrates how these dimensions shape contemporary outdoor education practices, particularly in relation to ropes courses. He argues that in this neo-liberal complex “the individual is not located socially, transformatively, or critically... but rather *consumptively* as a decontextualized and depoliticised individual consumer” (Roberts, 2012, p. 95, original emphasis). Learning in this environment is not only an individual process, but the individual who learns is disconnected from the social world and the environment in which they are located.

Robert Hales (2006) extended this argument by suggesting that outdoor educators have to think carefully about how they respond to the rise of individualism. Just putting young people together in a group is not enough to counter this as the subjectivity that emerges through the neo-liberal complex is that of the autonomous individual who meets their needs through the rubric of free choice. Hales warns that young people may not see the relevance of the group or of community, let alone of the environment, and therefore, may be resistant to pedagogical strategies that endeavour to bring the group to the fore.

This themed issue of the *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education* explores relationships with others. Do relationships with others still matter, and if so is outdoor education a space where relationships with others can develop? Given Hales (2006) contention that young people may de-value relationships with others, how do young people who participate in outdoor education experiences conceptualise relationships with other participants and, if they do value them, how are relationships with others important?

The articles in this issue of AJOE certainly suggest that relationships with others are important for both teachers and for students in outdoor education contexts. Genny Blades and Lucus Bester open this issue by exploring a pedagogy of attunement, which they suggest is a relation-responsive pedagogy. They use the work of Martin Buber, particularly his philosophy of dialogue expressed as the "I-It" and "I-Thou" principles. They explore this in relation to the disconnected world in which we live and are seeking a more connected "self" that teaches. Buber's work provides Blades and Bester with a way of opening up their senses and opening up to relations with others.

Whereas Blades' and Bester's work is a philosophical exploration of relationship, Jeremy Jostad, Jim Sibthorp and Karen Paisley offer a methodological approach to mapping relationships that form during an extended outdoor education experience. They use Social Network Analysis to map relationships which give insight into how different group members interact with each other. The main aim of the paper is to explain Social Network Analysis as it is a methodological tool that has received little attention in the outdoor education field. They highlight the contribution that this tool can make to understanding how relationships form and work in groups with an example from the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) and groups of different compositions of students receiving scholarships.

Murray Henstock, Katrina Barker and Jorge Knijnik examined the role that relationships play in re-engaging disengaged youth in further education. Five people who participated in an extended voyage on the sail training ship *STS Young Endeavour* were interviewed. One of the themes to emerge from the data is the role social networks play in making the participants feel more positive toward further education. This enabled participants to feel more confident about contributing and also gave them a greater sense of belonging. Participants clearly identified activities such as climbing aloft, watch interactions, group debriefs and taking command of the ship as contributing to their sense of belonging and connection with the other crew members.

Graham Scott, Margaret Boyd and Derek Colquhoun shift the focus on the relationships between teachers and pupils and between pupils in outdoor experiences. They worked with a group of teachers who had little experience teaching in outdoor environments. The teachers were nervous about losing control over their students and about losing their expert status as teachers. Scott, et al., report that teachers generally found their students more engaged and better behaved in the outdoors and that not being an expert in the subject matter opened possibilities

for quite different relationships with students. The blurring of roles between expert and student contributed to shared positive learning experiences for both teachers and students. Students also reported communicating with one another more effectively than they do in class settings.

In the final article in this issue, Tony Robinson reports on the relationships that emerged through participation in a Year 9 experiential education programme. Like Scott, et al., Robinson explores how teacher/student and student/student relationships shift and change through the programme. He found that for the students the most significant parts of the programme were those that allow for relationships to develop with their teachers outside of the classroom.

All of these articles point to the importance of relationships that emerge and develop with others through outdoor education experiences. They highlight the link between positive relationships and learning. The work of the likes of Loynes, Roberts and Hales does paint a rather bleak picture of education that is formulaic and focused on the autonomous individual to the detriment of community and connection, but the articles in this issue complicate that picture. There is no denying the pressure on outdoor education programmes to deliver pre-determined outcomes in increasingly shorter time frames with an attendant privileging of learning as an individual process. The work in this issue suggests that teaching and learning does occur through interaction and when those interactions are positive, both teaching and learning can be enhanced.

There are also two book reviews in this issue. John Quay reviews *Outdoor adventure and social theory*. This book is edited by Elizabeth Pike and Simon Beames and the series of chapters explores how the work of different social theorists and different social theories can contribute to our understanding of Adventure Education. Peter Martin reviews *Outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand: A new vision for the twenty first Century*. This book is edited by David Irwin, Jo Straker and Allen Hill. The various contributors examine what outdoor learning could or should look like in the changing world we live in.

Finally two Ph.D theses are profiled in this issue of the journal.

Once again I would like to thank all of the people that have contributed to making this issue possible. I would like to particularly welcome those authors who have not published in AJOE before. It is heartening to see so many new authors in this issue.



Robyn Zink  
Editor

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# Relationships within the shattered rainbow: A search for a pedagogy of attunement

*Genny Blades & Lucas Bester*

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## Abstract

This paper explores “relationships with others” in outdoor environmental education through a search for a pedagogy of attunement, which we propose is a relational-responsive pedagogy. We have primarily drawn from Martin Buber’s philosophy of dialogue and its pedagogical significance. Buber offers insights into articulating the presence of “I” in relation to “other”, that makes valuable contributions and provides new meanings to outdoor environmental education. The authors integrate Buber’s view of relationship with the work of other educators, particularly David Jardine and Parker Palmer. Within the contemporary backdrop of modernity and the associated disconnection and fragmentation akin to a “shattered rainbow” we seek out relationships with others. It is the nature of relationship we explore and provide interpretations of “I”, “self” and “other” drawn from these theoretical and philosophical dimensions. This is not a performative endeavour or a how to manual for a relational-responsive pedagogy. It is a twofold exploration for the educator that involves both a personal endeavour of self, a “self-in-relation” along with a self-in-relation with other. Where the lines of relation meet between the educator, the student and the natural world and how they are discerned by the educator we posit is the work of attunement. Ultimately this paper wants to suggest that a relational-responsive pedagogy called attunement fosters encounters that enable our students to witness and experience fulfilled human lives that can contribute to healthy and sustainable relationships and communities.

Keywords: attunement, pedagogy, relationship, reflexive practice, outdoor & environmental education, I-thou, Buber

## Introduction

*Once upon a time, the world was black, without any colour. The only exception was during rainstorms when the sun shone and two perfect, parallel rainbows would appear. Now, of course, the animals and plants were intrigued by this brilliant colour and so one day Raven decided to investigate and flew off toward the rainbows. Raven ended up flying too close and managed to fly into the upper rainbow shattering it into an infinite number of pieces which cascaded all over the earth transforming everything they landed upon. This is why there is colour on the earth, why raven remains black, and why on some perfect, rainbow days you can see the remains of a second rainbow just above the first.*

The above Native American Creation story, the Ojibwa story, provides a vivid scene of an “infinite number” of shattered pieces of the rainbow covering the earth. This choice of story is not to provide a mythic tale of how the earth got colour but to provide a way into the work of Martin Buber an Austrian-born philosopher in order to consider his contribution to education and for the purpose of this paper, how his philosophy may contribute to “relationships with others” in Outdoor and Environmental Education (OEE). The shattered rainbow underpins Buber’s understanding of reality, which included that “no thing can exist without a divine spark” and these sparks fell down from primal creation covering the earth (Buber, as cited in Blenkinsop, 2005, p. 289).

From Buber’s view, these sparks are associated with the divine and exist in all phenomenon. This is in the image of “shekina”. However in humans they can be obscured or hidden in some way. As Blenkinsop (2005, p. 290) states, this represents two important aspects of Buber’s God drawn from Hasidism<sup>1</sup>: the first is the intact rainbow which is God’s own “eternal completeness,” and the second is the shattered rainbow, or shekina, “the exiled glory of God.” Importantly in our search for an attuned pedagogy, Blenkinsop (2005, p. 250) makes the significant point that in “Hasidism people are responsible for finding, drawing forth, and ‘re-connecting’ these scattered pieces, and they must approach each object with the intent of uncovering that spark and uniting it with their own.”

This aspect to Buber’s work is important to recognise and to see it not as a religious education project, but rather as a means to appreciate a much greater community that goes beyond our social and political boundaries. “Buber sees an individual life as a progression of one-to-one relationships developing in concert with a growing awareness of a larger connection to the world around” (Blenkinsop, 2004, p. 81). It is this process that we will elaborate upon in this paper. It is about uncovering the nature of relationality of the relationship (Biesta, 2004).

In this elaboration we not only consider key aspects of Buber’s work but also work by other educators, particularly David Jardine and Parker Palmer from which a search for a pedagogy of attunement emerges. The word attunement has many

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# Understanding groups in outdoor adventure education through social network analysis

*Jeremy Jostad, Jim Sibthorp and Karen Paisley*

*University of Utah*

## Abstract

Relationships are a critical component to the experience of an outdoor adventure education (OAE) program, therefore, more fruitful ways of investigating groups is needed. Social network analysis (SNA) is an effective tool to study the relationship structure of small groups. This paper provides an explanation of SNA and shows how it was used by the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) to understand the relationship patterns among different course compositions with students receiving and not receiving scholarships (course compositions included two students, 50% of students, and all students receiving scholarship). Data were collected from three 30-day courses at three different time points throughout the course and were based on two dimensions of cohesion (social and task). The findings suggest that the most homogeneous group (in regard to scholarship recipients) possessed greater social cohesion and the least homogenous group possessed greater task cohesion. Social network analysis should be used more frequently in OAE because it offers a flexible approach to understand groups and group processes.

Keywords: Small groups, relationships, cohesion, NOLS, group structure

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## Introduction

The small group nature of outdoor adventure education (OAE) plays a critical role in the types of experiences students have during a course. Interpersonal relationships are a critical component to the student experience on OAE courses (Goldenberg, McAvoy, & Klenosky, 2005; McKenzie, 2003). Many students participate in these experiences to develop new relationships and to feel a sense of belonging to a community (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011). Others have suggested that the experiences and the learning that can be achieved is moderated by the relationships students generate with others (Sammet, 2010; Sibthorp, Paisley, Furman, & Gookin, 2008). The quality of relationships between members of a group ultimately affects the social climate which in turn, affects how well the group functions. Furthermore, interpersonal relationships operate at the individual level, but play an important role in producing group level outcomes such as teamwork, cohesion, and communication. Social network analysis (SNA) is a tool that can offer a representation of the interpersonal relationships within a group and show how relationship structures can produce group level outcomes.

The purpose of this paper is to explain the methodological foundations of SNA and show how it can be used in OAE for both research and application. While SNA is not uncommon in other fields such as sociology, education, or economics, it has not been widely used in OAE research. Because small groups and relationships are so central to the OAE experience, SNA can inform applied questions as well as provide researchers in OAE a new and versatile tool to examine group processes. To provide a context for how SNA may be used, we first explain why one

OAE organization chose this method to answer an applied problem. Specifically, the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) was interested in how to provide the best experiences for students who received scholarships to attend courses. Second, we present an overview of SNA and show how it differs from traditional survey methods. Third, we return to the NOLS example and show how the data were collected, the results of the data, and how this method provided answers to this problem. Lastly, we consider how SNA can be used for both practitioner and research purposes.

## Applied Example of Social Network Analysis

The National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) wanted to better understand the social and relationship dynamics experienced by groups on its courses with varying compositions of students receiving scholarships. Social network analysis was used because the interest was in seeing the interpersonal connections between students and to see how these connections produced group level outcomes such as cohesion. In addition, social network analysis also provides a visual component that maps these connections and generates a set of statistics based on mathematical algorithms, which both provide an understanding of individual positioning within the network and group structure. Others have used SNA to understand relationships and group structure among adolescents, such as to understand peer relations among groups with varying compositions of race and ethnicity (Bellmore, Nishina, Witkow, Graham, & Juvonen, 2007), the stability and change of social standing among early adolescents (Lansford,



# 2, 6, heave! Sail training's influence on the development of self-concept and social networks and their impact on engagement with learning and education. A pilot study

*Murray Henstock, Katrina Barker and Jorge Knijnik*

*University of Western Sydney*

## Abstract

It is difficult to provide disengaged youth, who are at risk of not fulfilling their potential, with the social support necessary to remain active contributors to society. They are more likely to fail and drop from education greatly reducing the prospect of becoming constructive, productive community members. Consequently strategies to promote engagement with learning and education need to be investigated. This study explores the impact on an individual's self-concept and social networking skills through participation in an experiential learning program at sea conducted in Australia's national sail training ship *STS Young Endeavour* and how this may influence student engagement with learning and education. Using qualitative interviews, engagement with learning and education of five participants from different educational backgrounds was examined pre and post voyage. The results suggest participation in the *Young Endeavour* program had a positive effect on development of social relationships, general self-concept, motivation to study, and sense of purpose for learning. Key contributing factors appear to be experiential learning activities specifically designed to support the development of greater self-concept and social skills such as climbing aloft, working together as a 'watch' and taking control of the vessel.

Keywords: Sail Training, , Self-Concept, Learning, Engagement, Education, Social Networks, Experiential Learning.

## Introduction

Youth disengaged with learning are at risk of not fulfilling their potential and often become very difficult to be provided with the social support necessary to remain active contributors to society. Similarly, disengaged youth who do return to study are more likely to fail and drop out greatly reducing the prospect of creating constructive productive community members (Henry, Knight & Thornberry, 2012; Kirjansson, 2007). Consequently there is a need to identify strategies to promote engagement with learning and education. One such strategy is the use of experiential education.

Successful experiential learning is described by Priest (1993) as an approach to training and development utilising activities involving some form of perceived physical or emotional risk to bring about positive changes in individuals. Here learning is based in real world situations with both a social element and immediate consequences that in turn allows for future learning to occur (Wojcikiewicz & Zachary, 2010)

Among many experiential learning proposals that might be useful to reengage students with education – such as sports, project-driven programs, outdoor education - this paper analyses sail training as one potential avenue to provide disengaged youth students with tools to pursue further learning.

An experiential learning voyage aboard Australia's national sail training ship *STS Young Endeavour* requires youth aged 16 to 23 to live at sea

in close confines with up to 36 other people they have previously never met, aboard a 33 meter tall ship for 11 days. During this time they engage in a number of experiential activities including; climbing a 30 meter mast, participating in teamwork activities such as sail-handling, conducting regular ship duties, steering the vessel and taking control of daily operations. *2,6, Heave!* is a common call requiring all members of a sailing team to heave together to complete a task one person cannot accomplish alone. This becomes synonymous with the ethos of a sail training voyage which is - working together achieves more than working alone. Participants are also involved in a number of targeted debriefing scenarios which provide opportunities for both reflections on behaviours, feelings and attitudes, as well as how these informed thoughts can be related to life beyond the voyage. This paper shows how, by increasing opportunities to '2'6' heave together, sail training is likely to transform young people's lives in ways they could not imagine at first. We use the term experiential education rather than outdoor education in this paper as the ship and the marine environment appear to provide a context for the experiential elements of the program participants identified as being influential in their learning.

Burns, Collin, Blanchard, De-Freitas and Lloyd (2008) argue engaging and connecting young people in the broader social life is one of the key issues for Australian contemporary society. The authors believe that engaged young people are better prepared to become healthy adults with a greater potential to contribute to the society. They affirm that "young people, who are provided with opportunities

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# Changing spaces, changing relationships: the positive impact of learning out of doors

*Graham Scott and Margaret Boyd*

*University of Hull*

*Derek Colquhoun*

*Independent Consultant*

## Abstract

We have used the experiences of teachers and their pupils to explore the impact of participation in a shared outdoor learning experience upon specific aspects of both the teacher/pupil and pupil/pupil relationship. Prior to their taking part in an out of classroom lesson the teachers involved in our project were relatively inexperienced in teaching out of doors. At that stage they expressed a view that the children in their class would respond to the novelty of being outside by misbehaving and that they would in effect "lose control" of some of them. They also shared anxieties about losing their expert status as a result of being asked to teach outside of their comfort zone. After taking part in an outdoor lesson the same teachers described their pupils as being more engaged with learning and better behaved whilst outdoors than when in the classroom. They also expressed the view that through learning together and to some extent blurring their expert/pupil roles teachers and pupils had shared a positive learning experience. The children themselves expressed the view that they had enjoyed working together (with one another and with their teacher), that they had engaged with the tasks at hand, and that they had communicated with one another more effectively whilst learning.

Keywords: Fieldwork, learning outdoors, primary science, children's behaviour, teacher confidence

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## Introduction

Our interest in outdoor learning is particularly focused upon the value of an authentic experience of animals and plants in their natural environment as part of formal (or informal) education related to nature, ecology and environmental studies (e.g. Scott, Churchill, Grassam, & Scott, 2011; Scott & Boyd, 2012 and Scott et al., 2012). Through these cited studies we have sought to demonstrate a positive relationship between cognitive learning and learning in the outdoor environment. This learning may be discipline specific as in the case in Scott et al., (2012) where we showed that the acquisition of laboratory skills needed by ecologists can be enhanced if undergraduate students are provided with an outdoor context to their learning. Or it may be learning at the interface of traditional discipline areas as in the cases of Scott, et al. (2011) and Scott and Boyd (2012) where we demonstrated both short (weeks) and medium (months) term improvement in aspects of literacy amongst children (8-10 years old) who were involved in experiential learning activities related to ecology/biodiversity topics in an outdoor setting.

Similarly Drissner, Haase and Hille (2010) have shown that a positive outcome of learning in an outdoor setting, a green classroom, was that children demonstrated higher levels of motivation and interest in learning about the environment than children who did not have an outdoor learning experience. For younger children the emphasis might be upon learning

about nature through outdoors play (Dowdell, Gray & Malone, 2011). Older children and young adults on the other hand have been shown to develop an improved relationship with the natural world through participation in outdoor based adventure activities and physical challenges (Martin, 2004). Waite (2007) has suggested that actual contact with plants and animals in an outdoor setting interacts strongly with memory and as a result enhances subsequent retention and recall of learned material and fosters motivation to learn. Chawla (1999) and Ballantyne and Packer (2002) have shown that direct interaction with nature during childhood significantly influences the development of positive attitudes towards environmental issues that are likely to be maintained into adulthood. It is significant that learning in any setting involves an interaction of place, body, mind, culture and society (Waite, 2011) and the act of moving learning from an indoor classroom setting to the outdoors has the potential to enhance and/or shift the focus of these interactions and to therefore be a key episode in personal development.

We agree with authors such as Barker, Slingsby and Tilling (2002) and Rickinson et al. (2004) that evidence based evaluations of the value of outdoor education such as those that we have cited are important given the pressures faced by providers of outdoor education. In the United Kingdom, as in other areas of the world, there has been a decline in the provision of fieldwork and outdoor learning in recent decades (Fisher, 2001; O'Donnell, Morris & Wilson,

# Relationships that emerged through participation in a Year 9 experiential education program.

*Tony Robinson*

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## Abstract

Outdoor Education (OE) and Experiential Education (EE) programs are becoming increasingly popular in Victorian schools. This article is derived from findings that emerged through the interpretation of case study data gathered for my doctoral thesis of a three-phased, non-residential, EE program. This interpretation process highlighted five themes, one of which involved the notion of relationships. Phase one of the program involved expeditionary learning bushwalking trips. Phase two included urban learning trips to the Melbourne CBD, while the final phase focused on a two week service learning camp to a regional centre and three more service days in locations in the community near the school.

Interpretation of the data pointed to respondents reporting improved relationships with their fellow students, their teachers, both within the program and with teachers later in their schooling, and their own learning. The data was gathered in a case study method and the study itself lies within the interpretive paradigm.

Keywords: Experiential education, Year 9, case study, interpretive paradigm.

## Introduction

In my recent doctoral studies into the way organised personal development learning experiences outside the classroom may lead to changes in the way Year 9 students engage in their classroom-based learning, three main themes were explored: organised personal learning experiences outside the classroom; Year 9 students as a cohort having special needs; and adolescent learning engagement. Interpretation of the data gathered for this study led to the emergence of a thread referring to the building of relationships between students and their teachers, students and their peers and students and their learning. Other threads to emerge included such themes as personal development, experiential learning, metacognition and transference of learning and are beyond the scope of this article.

## Literature

Mention is made here of literature relating to the three themes that emerged from my doctoral studies focus. A more detailed discussion of the themes is found in my thesis, *Experiential education and learning engagement for year nine students: a case study* (Robinson, 2013).

### Personal development learning experiences outside the classroom

The discussion of personal development and its relationship to outdoor and experiential education is ongoing. Proponents suggest there is significant personal development (Allen-Craig & Miller, 2007; Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; Hewison & Martin, 2010; Martin & Fleming, 2010; McLeod & Allen-Craig, 2007; Neill, 2008; Robinson 2013). Some

critics suggest that such claims may be assumed rather than actual, having more to do with the beliefs of the researchers and respondents and, even if they were real the likelihood of them being transferred to other contexts, is debatable at best (Brookes, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Brown, 2010; Harmin, 2002; Web, 2003; Zink & Dyson, 2009) and “should be treated cautiously, if not sceptically” (Brookes, 2003a, p. 49). This debate is ongoing but should be seen as a ‘both/and’ rather than an ‘either/or’ discussion with the best of both arguments included into OE and EE programs at every opportunity for the best possible outcome for participants.

### Year 9; a significant time in adolescent development

Dealing with adolescents around fourteen years of age is known as a difficult time for parents and teachers (Bissett, nd.). From my experiences as a teacher of adolescents for over 30 years it could be said to be a difficult time for the young people as well. Major changes are occurring in their physical, emotional and social makeup (Cole, Mahar & Vindurampulle, 2006a). The desire to find the limits of both themselves, and context in which they find themselves, sometimes pushes them to participate in what might be seen as dangerous, risky, or socially unacceptable behaviours (Brown & Knowles, 2007).

An important contributor to special needs of this age group is that the brain of young adolescents is undergoing huge changes with “blossoming” and “pruning” occurring in cycles across the development cycle (Brown & Knowles, 2007; Cole, et al., 2006a; Dahl, 2004). The resultant turmoil this causes is often expressed in unexpected behavioural exchanges and are responsible for the discovery of this second upsurge of brain development during adolescence

# Outdoor adventure and social theory

*Reviewed by John Quay*

*University of Melbourne*

Pike, E. J. C., & Beames, S. (Eds.). (2013). *Outdoor adventure and social theory*. Oxon: Routledge.

ISBN: 978-0-415-53267-9 (pbk)

Outdoor adventure is a social practice, or a collection of various social practices (as are all human endeavors). When individuals engage in outdoor adventure activities they may claim to be trying to get away from society, yet they are still engaging in practices which are socially defined. Even solo wilderness experiences are socially defined, in that they adhere to norms that others comprehend. Accepting this position is a starting point for embracing social theory as a way into better understanding what outdoor adventure is. So one aim of this book is to showcase various interpretations of outdoor adventure through the lenses of social theories. But the editors of this book also had a reciprocal aim in mind. In order to better understand outdoor adventure through social theories, one needs to have a grasp of the many and various social theories that abound, especially those that have been applied in attempts to further illuminate what outdoor adventure is. This book provides an excellent overview of these theories as they are applied to address concrete concerns that center on the social practices that we gather together under the banner of outdoor adventure. In this reciprocal way the book delves even deeper, beyond outdoor adventure per se, "to enable readers to more rigorously interpret why people think and act in certain ways" (p. 1). In a sense this aim describes the more basic question that social theories have been formulated to contend with. And it raises as an issue the ways in which outdoor adventure is positioned in the broader social milieu.

The group of people who would most benefit from reading this book (my opinion) are those who are seriously raising questions about outdoor adventure; in other words those who are engaged in, or interested in engaging in, research centered on outdoor adventure (which is in itself a social practice!). Central to this research task is to find some congruence or coherence around three things. The first is the problem, issue or question to be investigated. If this problem/issue/question concerns some aspect of the various social practices that constitute outdoor adventure, then we are in business. The second is the specific phenomenon to be investigated, the more specific social practices in question (as addressed by the method). Here, of course, these social practices have some connection to outdoor adventure, and yet outdoor adventure

is a very broad banner, so the editors confine it by acknowledging that "most of the adventures to which we are referring are those that can be considered outdoor 'lifestyle sports' (see Wheaton, 2004)" (p. 2). The third is the lens or theoretical framework through which the issue pertaining to the phenomenon will be looked at in an analytical sense (see Figure 1).

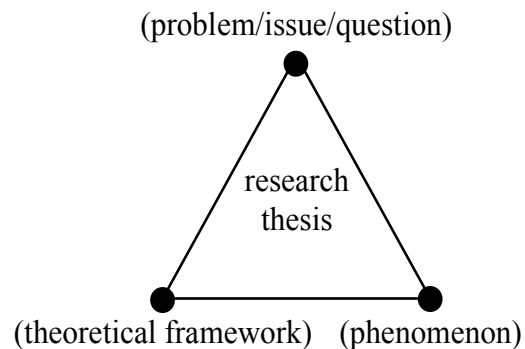


Figure 1. My rendition of the three aspects of the research task all cohering around the thesis.

While I have ordered these three aspects of research practice for the sake of explanation, there is no prescribed order in the actuality of research practice (although when we write the thesis we follow certain conventions in trying to communicate a circular process in a linear way). All three swirl around, co-influencing each other in the play that occurs whenever we think through an investigation. One aspect of this is that "social theories help us to ask questions that we may not have otherwise considered" (p. 159). Shifting and changing conceptualizations of the question, the phenomenon and the theoretical framework contribute to the eventual way in which a position is settled upon (with the maturation of the thesis) that involves a coherency amongst all three. It is this coherency amongst problem, phenomenon and theory that is expressed by each author in this edited collection, thus enabling the reader to gain an understanding of all three in situ. At the same time this strategy showcases the research work of a range of experts in this area, rendering the book a quality collection of recent approaches to issues concerning outdoor adventure and social theory.

# Outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand: A new vision for the twenty first century

*Reviewed by Peter Martin*

*University of Ballarat*

Irwin, D., Straker, J. & Hill, A. (Eds.). (2012). *Outdoor Education in Aotearoa New Zealand: A new Vision for the Twenty First Century* Christchurch: CPIT

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The purpose of this work, as outlined by the editors in their opening chapter is “to provide a practical, insightful and innovative reappraisal of outdoor education theory and practice” (p.13). Big claim, big task. Each reader will no doubt form their own view as whether these challenges are met. Largely this will depend on the reader’s own background, beliefs and practices of outdoor education - “alternative visions” (p. 14) assume a common starting point.

What the book does well is pull together ideas about outdoor education and examines these in light of contemporary educational, social and environmental thinking. The book is an edited series of chapters from well-known New Zealand academics and outdoor educators. The contributions vary in focus and academic analysis. This is good – it provides differing readership with plenty to chew on.

The new vision in this collective work is that of outdoor education based upon a socio-ecological perspective. Such a perspective challenges the traditions and basis of outdoor education in adventure pursuits and renders it inherently political. As a New Zealand publication this also foregrounds the importance of Maori culture, and such perspectives are prominent throughout.

Outdoor Education, despite its diversity of interpretations and defiance of definition does have a sense of history and practice. Perhaps, in work that seeks to critically examine and shift outdoor education practices, we might expect some overshoot or false lead. For me, some of the examples read more like geography excursions rediscovered, than a new vision for outdoor education in schooling. Some of this arises from the broader embracing Kiwi notion of education outside the classroom (EOTC) as a term more inclusive of a range of curricula than outdoor education might be in other countries.

That said, there is much in this work that encourages the reader to carefully scrutinise existing sometimes taken for granted assumptions about what

outdoor education can contribute to schooling. There are some excellent examples of innovative teaching, linked to local context and culture. Maintaining integrity of a book that advocates a more place based approach to outdoor education rightly means that much material is specific to New Zealand context, sometimes specific sites, but it is written thickly enough for the reader to make their own judgements about application to other settings.

Overall I really liked this book. There is a risk in a review of an edited work to highlight one contribution over another – and there were many that expressed well how educational experiences can contribute to ameliorating environmental and social challenges confronting western cultures into the 21st Century, however. The next to last chapter relates a slow journey over the Southern Alps, a trip of four days done in eleven. It acts as a fitting summary of the book by illustrating how the leader’s outdoor wisdom, deep personal affinity and love of the outdoors, blended with critical educational insight informed by scholarship, can produce an educational experience that I felt confident was highly significant for the young people who participated. Would this slow journey have occurred a decade ago and been celebrated, I doubt it. This then, is the new vision and it shouldn’t remain new for long.

## About the Reviewer

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