



**GRIFFITH
UNIVERSITY**

CONTENTS - Volume 6 Number 2

EDITORIAL

Tonia Gray _____ 1

VIEWPOINT - Might Outdoor Education Help Develop Intelligence?

Rob Hogan _____ 2

REFEREED ARTICLES

On The Construction, Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Experience in 'Critical' Outdoor Education

Phillip Payne _____ 4

Ethical Adventures: Can we justify overseas youth expeditions in the name of education?

Pete Allison & Pete Higgins _____ 22

Investigating the Inward Sounds of Outward Bound

Andrew Martin & Stephen Legg _____ 27

Wages And Conditions Of The Victorian Outdoor Education Profession

Sandy Allen-Craig & Bettina Moonen _____ 37

Exploring Expedition Research Methodology: A Personal Reflection

Eric Brymer _____ 44

Experiential Learning: Using comic strips as 'reflective tools' in adult learning

Colin Beard & Toby Rhodes _____ 58

A List of Previous Publications in the AJOE _____ 66

NON-REFEREED ARTICLES

The Crux Of Risk Management In Outdoor Programs – Minimising The Possibility Of Death And Disabling Injury

Rob Hogan _____ 71

Outdoor Education and the Reinforcement of Heterosexuality

Annie Dignan _____ 77

Book Review: Climbing Lessons – Inside Outdoor Education

Bertie Everard _____ 81

Book Review: The Power Of Experiential Learning: A handbook for trainers and educators.

David Mephram _____ 82

Subscription information _____ Inside Back Page

Ethical Adventures: Can we justify overseas youth expeditions in the name of education?

Pete Allison & Pete Higgins

Abstract

In the UK an increasing number of young people go on overseas expeditions which vary in length from one week to three months. In recent years a number of accidents and fatalities have led to media coverage questioning the educational value of such experiences. This paper examines some of the issues arising from increased participation in such expeditions. A brief contextualisation is offered prior to raising a number of questions and issues regarding ethical issues associated with overseas youth expeditions within an educational context. These include issues associated with acclimatisation to high altitude, cultural sensitivity, pedagogy, finances, and drugs. The second part of the paper considers certification and accreditation of youth expeditions in light of these ethical issues and examines some of the complex issues associated with the multidimensional nature of both expeditions and any such accreditation or screening process. The paper concludes that a forum to address ethical issues raised demonstrates some of the traits of becoming a profession and could help to contribute to either a sound justification of practice or changing practice to be justifiable.

"...an intelligent society recognises that the benefit (and fun) that children gain from outdoor encounters outweighs the risks."

Furedi (2001: 48)

In the UK an increasing number of young people go on overseas expeditions which vary in length from one week to three months. Some involve a "gap" year, usually between school and university. This article examines some of the issues arising from increased participation in such expeditions.

Observations are anecdotal but initial responses to these issues suggest that they may be applicable to a number of outdoor providers world-wide. Comments and discussions are welcome.

Some have suggested that we live in a postmodern society, some prefer the term "high modernity", regardless of preference few could disagree that the nature of the societies and communities in which many people live has changed (Edwards, 1994). International travel is increasingly accessible to more people and as a result a globalisation of outdoor education is taking place. In some respects this is positive and has led to sharing of ideas, perspectives and diversification of outdoor education philosophy and provision. Some of the rich discussions as

well as experiences to come from this will potentially shape future directions of outdoor education. The increase in international travel opportunities has led, in the UK, and some other countries, to youth expedition providers springing up to meet the new found trend of exploration and adventure overseas. While there has been a long tradition of youth exploration in the UK (since 1932 when the British Schools Exploring Society was founded) the last twenty years has seen a boom of commercial and "non-for-profit" organisations. These providers vary in their claims, objectives and areas of operation. From the Arctic to the Antarctic, Mongolia to Chile—few countries in the world have not been "youth expeditioned".

Before going any further a note on terminology is necessary. Outdoor education is a phrase used purposefully as most of these overseas youth expedition organisations state overtly educational objectives. In addition to these organisations there are a number of outdoor recreation providers and such like, to whom these issues are also applicable. This paper concentrates on

outdoor education—it seems axiomatic that organisations promoting themselves as educational should be able to articulate and provide evidence of the educational processes and outcomes the young people are engaged in. The subject of educational accountability is one for further exploration.

The summer of 2001 was notable for press coverage of fatalities during such expeditions. Seventeen year-old Amy Ransom was a member of a World Challenge expedition to Vietnam involving trekking. While descending from a mountain in wet conditions she tripped over a tree root, stumbled and fell down the mountainside to her death. Other deaths in different contexts have also raised public awareness of the risk of youth expeditions. Questions will again be asked regarding the value of youth expeditions in general and whether we can justify the risks involved. For Amy's family and the community at large these are very real questions and ones which expedition providers must face.

In 1993 four school pupils lost their lives as a result of a supervised canoeing tragedy, this led to government legislation in 1996 requiring the licensing of outdoor education in the UK. This licensing resulted in a clamping down on safety issues but, as such, does not include most youth expeditions. Despite evidence of the relative safety of expeditions (Anderson & Johnson, 2000) it seems only a matter of time until the development of a licensing scheme specifically for youth expeditions will be needed. We are left wondering who will "drive" such a process? The government or the field?

These events triggered us to consider some of our personal involvement in youth expeditions. During the summer of 2001 questions have come to the forefront of our minds. One of us recently returned from leading an expedition to Ladakh, high in the Indian Himalaya witnessing several other youth expeditions pausing in their journeys to visit various parts of Ladakh, Zaskar, Lahaul and the Himachal Pradesh. The large number and behaviour of people on these expeditions (both leaders and participants) was striking

and raised many ethical questions. This raised yet further questions for us regarding whether we can really justify youth expeditioning of the magnitude it has now grown to. Some of these questions are as follows.

In terms of environmental sustainability can we really justify flying half-way around the world? Could equivalent experiences be offered with considerably less travelling? What are the underpinning environmental values that we are portraying? What are we trying to teach/facilitate—the cliché of Personal and Social Development (rarely explicated past this amorphous term (Nicol, 2001)), mountaineering and expeditioning skills or some other sport specific skills? Greenaway (1998) argued that we should be providing high quality adventures for all and suggested it is especially important for first experiences to be developmental. Is this happening?

Are we guilty of cultural (in)sensitivity in the countries visited? It was shocking in India to observe both leaders and young people wearing shorts and skimpy tops when this is clearly offensive to the local population. Is this an indication of a patronising western worldview ... ignorance ... sheer arrogance ... perhaps involving treating the Himalaya and the wilderness as a playing field, not a sacred space (Hogan, 1992)?

Considering that a surprisingly large percentage of young people return from treks due to acclimatisation difficulties is it justifiable to take young people to altitude? If so on what grounds? With so many young people returning early due to difficulties from treks we are left wondering whether Dewey would have considered these as educative or miseducative experiences?

Can we ethically justify giving young people diamox prophylactically to speed acclimatisation? If so, can we really justify a policy that all participants must take diamox if going above a certain altitude? What kind of messages does this send to young people? Is this temptation to use diamox another

part of the consumption culture of "do more in less time" ... "we can only spare 3 weeks to pack in this expedition so we will need to manipulate the natural physiological processes and take diamox to get to the summit" ... rather than teaching young people that some things take time. How does this diamox climbing culture "sit" with the drug culture and problems of drugs in society? What value does this promote to young people? Can we differentiate between taking diamox to aid acclimatisation and anti-malarials—are there separate ethical issues at stake here or one and the same? How is taking diamox to enhance mountaineering performance different to blood doping or the taking of anabolic steroids / amphetamines, for example?

Further, can we justify the acclimatisation timetables that we "put" young people through? Given that for the vast majority of participants on youth expeditions this is the first visit to high altitude, should we not model responsible behaviour and treat the mountains and altitude with the respect they deserve? Can we sleep at night (double meaning intended) knowing that we have contradicted the well-tested guidelines of a maximum 300m ascent from campsite to campsite? Surely, in this culture of litigation not doing this puts one in a vulnerable legal position. And, we would suggest, a morally "questionable" position (understatement intended!).

Can we really justify the prices that are charged for youth expeditions? Where is this money coming from, where is it going, and could it be better spent? Bedell (2001) recently reported an example of someone being denied any explanation of where money paid was going. Would we not make steps towards professionalism if we volunteered this information? We recently heard of a girl (under 18) who raised money for an expedition by getting a job as a pole dancer in a "gentlemen's" club. Is this acceptable? Is this beyond the responsibility of youth expedition "providers"? Perhaps we cannot "police" the way in which people raise money for youth expeditions and school trips but pushing guidelines for good practice

would help—having them and promoting them are very different things!

Can we justify the gender balances that are involved in some of the leaders of groups? We recently heard of nine girls been led by one male with numerous local porters, all male. What are the implications for this type of situation for role-modelling and mentoring? What are the implications for health and medical issues? Thinking through all of the "what ifs." of a risk management plan is uncomfortable. Are there further issues in terms of motivation, responsibility and accountability as a result of a leaders' status as paying, voluntary or paid?

On what educational basis are youth expeditions organised? Research (Rubens, 1999) and common pedagogical sense indicates that most learning takes place when we / young people take responsibility for our own learning rather than being led, instructed or guided. Should we not, therefore, encourage young people to undertake exploration on their own, with friends when they have "served an apprenticeship" and learned themselves? It is not difficult to construct an argument to suggest that youth expeditions are a commodified adventure (Loynes, 1996) bought before young people have developed the skills and judgement required to do it for themselves (Higgins, 2001). Thus, it can be suggested that youth expeditions are a product of modernity, globalisation, capitalism and exploitation, a postmodern finishing school, a rite of passage or holidays for the wealthy upper-middle classes dressed up to be "educational" to ease social conscience.

There is little doubt that adolescence is a critical developmental stage. There is little doubt (for us at least) of the powerful experiences expeditions *should* offer. This leaves us, and we believe the field of outdoor education in general, with some food for thought. While we are both keen to see young people involved in outdoor education we are concerned about these ethical issues and believe we must discuss "what is an

ethical adventure?" both nationally and internationally. Further, we must discuss the issue of licensing and certification for youth expeditioning before it is "put upon us".

In the remainder of the paper we offer a UK focus as an example. As mentioned earlier, the UK has a long history of youth expeditions and from our understanding these issues are also effecting, or beginning to effect, various aspects of outdoor education in other countries around the world. Anecdotal observations suggest that an increasing number of countries are developing trends of taking young people overseas for numerous purposes, perhaps some lessons can be learned from the experiences of the UK.

We think it is thoroughly impractical and undesirable to introduce an "expedition leadership certification" given the complexity of the different destinations and aims of youth expeditions. In the UK the Young Explorers Trust (YET) do an excellent job in screening youth expeditions and very sensibly take a holistic view of organisations and systems in place in combination with leaders experiences and competencies. Is this enough? Should we be looking for an internationally recognised screening process, after all this in an international issue? Could this incorporate ethical issues concerning cultural and environmental sensitivity? If this were to be the case perhaps this approach would not only protect local cultures, environments and ways of life (part of the beauty attracting people to these expeditions) but also act as an educational tool to develop knowledge and understanding of these issues, thus contributing to the quality of the educational experience.

At a time when so many different people and organisations are in discussion surely it is time that we present a united front and are proactive in this situation. A few examples of such discussions from the UK follow. The Professional Association of Teachers almost voted to ban school trips at their annual conference. Charles Rigby, chief executive of World

Challenge Expeditions is campaigning for tighter regulation of overseas expeditions! Peter Smith, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers Union is urging a review of current guidelines governing school trips. Learning Minister Ivan Lewis recently promised to improve existing guidance which will be focused on schools but also relevant to those working in the statutory and voluntary sectors. There is talk of extending the Adventure Activities Licensing Act (AALA), could this be in collaboration with YET? How many expeditions could run if the current validation requirements of AALA were extended and being strictly adhered to for youth expeditions? Are the implications of this something we want to be imposed on us? Surely we should be talking and moving forward with a course of action.

Perhaps one of the difficulties we face is that youth expeditions have broad aims and objectives. Some involve science, some community service, some adventure and most a combination. But these are only the beginning of the ingredients. How big is the expedition, how long is it for and who are the leaders? This diversity is exemplified by US based research (Freise, Hendee & Kinzinger, 1998) which identified nine different categories that could each be rated in any one of a further nine choices on a continuum. This is illustrated in the press, it is not uncommon to see terminology being freely interchanged—trips, holidays, expeditions, field-trips, "gap" years, walking, climbing, mountaineering—most of these terms are used in a very loose sense that make many outdoor educators cringe! Perhaps this very diversity which is so enriching also complicates finding a way of "accrediting" or "approving" youth expeditions and outdoor education.

What can we do? What should we do? How can we improve the quality of what is actually "delivered" in the field? How can we improve the public image of what we do? What would the perfect

situation be? How would it look and how can we get there?

It is our belief that addressing ethical issues like this demonstrates some of the traits of becoming a profession. We firmly believe that by addressing these issues we can provide ethical adventures and be clear on either justifying what we do or change what we do so it is justifiable. We would like to hear others views and we would like to explore these issues further.

References

- Anderson, S. R. & Johnson, J. H. (2000). Expedition health and safety: A risk assessment. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 93(1), 557-562.
- Bedell, G. (2001, April 15). Who's minding the gap? *The Observer Review*, p.4.
- Edwards, R. (1994). Are you experienced? Post-modernity and experiential learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 13(6), 423-439.
- Freise, G., Hendee, J. C. & Kinzinger, M. (1988). The wilderness experience program industry in the United States: Characteristics and dynamics. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 21(1), 40-45.
- Furedi, F. (2001, August 24). Brave parents who do not look for someone to blame. *The Express*, p.48.
- Greenaway, R. (1998). In search of respectable adventure. *Horizons*, 14(4), 24-26.
- Higgins, P. (2001). Experience without limits? Risk, reality and the role of outdoor education. In: F. Paffrath & A. Ferstl (Eds.) *Hemmungslos erleben? Horizonte und Grenzen* (pp. 120-134). Augsburg: Zeil.
- Hogan, R. A. (1992). The natural environment in wilderness programmes playing field or sacred space? *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership*, 9(1), 25-31.
- Loynes, C. (1996). Adventure in a bun. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership*, 13(2), 52-57.
- Nicol, R. (2001). *Outdoor Education for Sustainable Living?: An investigation into the potential of Scottish local authority residential outdoor education centres to deliver programmes relating to sustainable living*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Edinburgh, Scotland.
- Rubens, D. (1999). Effort or performance: Keys to motivated learners in the outdoors. *Horizons*, 4(1), 26-28.

About the authors

Pete Allison lectures in outdoor education and environmental studies at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. He also edits the *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* and leads youth expeditions, primarily in the Arctic and Himalaya.

He can be contacted via E Mail:
Peter.Allison@education.ed.ac.uk
www.education.ed.ac.uk/outdoored

Dr Peter Higgins is head of outdoor education at the Faculty of Education, University of Edinburgh. He holds a wide range of high level national and European governing body awards and has taught at several UK outdoor education centres as well as in New Zealand and is a member of a number of national and international panels and advisory groups on outdoor and environmental education.
www.education.ed.ac.uk/outdoored

**University of Edinburgh
Moray House School of Education
Outdoor Education Department**

We offer the following programmes:

Postgraduate Certificate in Outdoor Education

Postgraduate Certificate in Personal and Social Outdoor Education

Postgraduate Certificate in Environmental Education

Postgraduate Diploma in Outdoor Education

MSc in Outdoor Education

PhD by research

If you are interested in information on the courses of study we offer please take a look at our web page at <http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/outdoored/>

You can also email us at:

Prof. Pete Higgins, pete.higgins@ed.ac.uk

Dr. Peter Allison, peter.allison@ed.ac.uk

Dr. Robbie Nicol, robbie.nicol@ed.ac.uk

Dr. Simon Beames, simon.beames@ed.ac.uk

Further publications by the Outdoor Education faculty can be found in the Research section of the web page as well as in each faculty's biographical page under the heading publications.