

LASMUIGH

Issue 1, June 2022



Professional Practice Journal for the Outdoor Sector in Ireland

In this issue...

Metacognition: thinking about our thinking

Empowering Young People

Research Review

The Power of Journeys



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We are always on the lookout for images and photographs of Ireland's beautiful landscape. We invite you to submit photographs/images to be considered for future publications. Images can emailed to lasmuighjournal@gmail.com

Front cover image: Ballykine Woods, Clonbur, Co. Galway
Photographer: Mairéad Cluskey

What does the word *Lasmuigh* mean?

The word means on the outside or outdoors or without. We chose the word for the title of this publication because we thought it was inclusive of the broad outdoor sector and also as an acknowledgement that the publication is based in Ireland.

The Lasmuigh Team (so far....)

Stephen Hannon, editor, is a lecturer on the BA (Hons) in Outdoor Education and upcoming MSc in Outdoor Education, Sustainability and Wellbeing on the Mayo Campus of the Atlantic Technological University.



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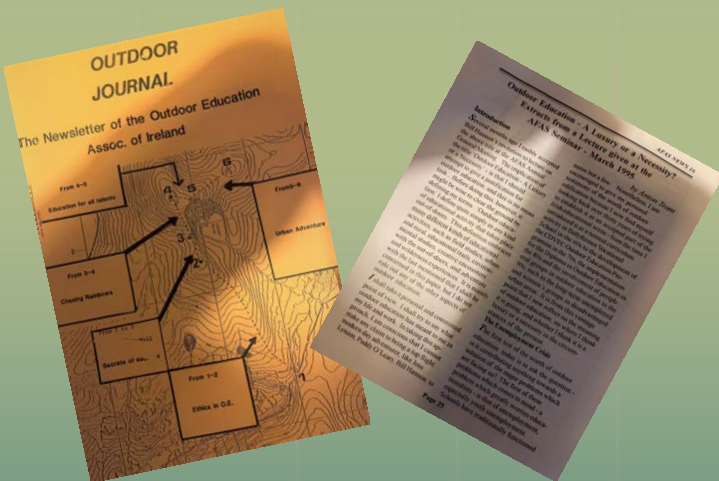
Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of Lasmuigh – a professional practice journal for the outdoor sector in Ireland.

Why now?

The idea of a publication that would help connect and celebrate the outdoor sector in Ireland has come and gone over many years with each consideration bringing forth many intriguing questions, online or hard copy, academic journal or newsletter, free or membership funded... and then the idea would fall off the radar again for a few more years.

Previously there had been an Outdoor Journal edited by the late Niall Smyth and Trish Walsh in the 80's. In the 90's AFAS (Association for Adventure Sports) News facilitated communication in the sector but more recently a perfect storm of factors has made the emergence of a new publication very timely.



These factors include the publication of both the Review and Strategic Framework for Outdoor Education Provision in the Education and Training Board (ETB) sector in Ireland, the current Outdoor Recreation Strategy consultation and the establishment of a M.Sc. in Outdoor Education, Sustainability and Well-being at Atlantic Technological University (ATU) Mayo Campus. The sector is increasingly diverse with more adventure therapy providers, more outdoor preschools and an exciting range of outdoor youth projects. The last two years of COVID resulted in an exciting array of online seminars, conferences and workshops focussing on the outdoors and increased communication and networking within the sector. These factors along with an increase in Irish outdoor related research has made now a great time to launch a journal that aims to provide a means of communicating practice for those who share the outdoor setting for their work.

“a perfect storm of factors, has made the emergence of a publication very timely”



Aren't there enough publications out there, why a publication based in Ireland?

There has been an increasing recognition of the importance of place in the outdoor practice. Outdoor practice connects to the rich and unique cultural, social and landscape that each country or region offers and increases the opportunity to engage with and protect your local patch. Publicising examples of good practice and research that is based in Ireland can develop an understanding of what works best in an Irish context and could be useful in providing an evidence base for policy makers and funders.

What have we here for you to read?

In this issue we have examples of practice from early childhood, outdoor youthwork, expeditionary learning, reviews of research, thinking about our thinking, reviews of policy, and an exploration of how personal and professional journeys intertwine. Whilst it sounds varied we know that we have barely scratched the surface of what is happening in the sector and this leaves us with so many other ideas for subsequent publications. We would like to sincerely thank all those who have contributed articles.

Come join with us?

There is a saying attributed to Voltaire which suggests that the 'Perfect is the enemy of the Good' and it has influenced the approach to this first publication of Lasmuigh. The intention in producing this first publication is to reach out and engage with the outdoor sector here in Ireland seeking your involvement to enable the publication to grow. In order to get this first publication out we have relied heavily on contributors that were familiar to us - in subsequent publications we would like to be far more representative of the broad outdoor sector. The first article seeks to outline the scope and aims of the publication and describes the values it wishes to promote. We hope you enjoy the publication, and we would love to hear your views and ideas for how it could continue to develop.

All the best,
Stephen and Mairéad

Lasmuigh - Our Values

What is Lasmuigh?

Lasmuigh is a professional practice journal that aims to both inform and reflect the field of outdoor education in Ireland by reporting on and sharing good practice in Irish outdoor education. The publication serves as a commitment to the ongoing development of practice, to sharing ideas and innovations, and to promoting an awareness of Irish and International research on outdoor practice. Lasmuigh seeks to engage with and be inclusive of all those who share the outdoor setting for experiences be they recreational, developmental, educational, or therapeutic.



“Lasmuigh seeks to engage with and be inclusive of all those who share the outdoor setting for experiences be they recreational, developmental, educational, or therapeutic.”



Values

We thought it was important to outline what we are about in terms of our values and what we are hoping to promote through this publication.

- Our values in Lasmuigh are rooted in exploring encounters in nature that facilitate empathy and connection, which inspire engagement, challenge existing assumptions, and foster activism that is beneficial to nature and society.
- These values are borne out of a respect for and understanding of our interconnectedness and dependence on nature.
- These values encourage a shift away from an emphasis on the economic and unsustainable benefits humans derive from engagement with nature and a move towards a more eco-centric view of the world.
- Lasmuigh values place and outdoor experiences that interrogate our sense of place and sense of connection to place. It seems important for an outdoor journal that is based in Ireland to value the power of place and the deep connections it can bring.
- Lasmuigh values making meaningful outdoor experiences available to all.
- Finally, Lasmuigh values critical reflection to develop understanding and improve practice.

Call for Submissions

What are our aims?

Lasmuigh aims to:

1. Provide a means of communicating good practice for those who share the outdoor setting for their work.
2. Explore how outdoor practice can be place-based in an Irish context by sharing programme examples that celebrate place.
3. Provide a platform for Irish Outdoor Education research that will publicise an evidence base for practice in all areas of outdoor practice.
4. Create opportunities for connection and discussion between those who work in the increasingly rich and diverse outdoor sector in Ireland and beyond.



In keeping with our values at Lasmuigh we aspire to publish content that engages with the broad range of those who work in the outdoor sector and encourage submissions ranging from ideas for practice to submissions that seek to expand the evidence base for outdoor interventions. In keeping with the inclusive values of Lasmuigh artwork, poetry and book reviews related to the outdoor sector are also encouraged.

Lasmuigh will be published twice each year, in the Spring and in the Autumn. If you are interested in submitting to Lasmuigh here are submission recommendations:

- We recommend 2/4 images per submission.
- Recommended word count – 1000 - 2000 words.
- Please include personal bio – 50 words.
- Submissions for the Second edition should reach the editors by 1st November.
- The second edition will go Live in mid-November.

There are many different ways to become involved in this publication

- Submit a book review, poem or artwork.
- Submit an article on some research you have conducted.
- Submit a story of your professional journey.
- Submit an account of a project or an example of good practice that you are responsible for.
- Apply to be a member of the editorial board.
- Send in ideas for the further development of the publication.

"we aspire to publish content that engages with the broad range of those who work in the outdoor sector"



All change - The Killorglin Outdoor Education and Training Campus

Aodhnait Carroll



Aodhnait Carroll is the campus manager and adult education officer for the Killorglin Outdoor Education and Training Campus in Kerry College. Aodhnait completed an Outdoor Activity Traineeship in Kerry in 2010 and since then, has continued to complete numerous leadership awards alongside a Masters of Science in Outdoor Education. She has been involved in teaching and coordinating outdoor programmes for both commercial operators and the City of Dublin Education Training Board for the past twelve years before returning to Kerry to work with Kerry ETB in January 2022.

Introduction

Many people will know The Killorglin Outdoor Education and Training Campus as Capanalea Outdoor Education and Training Centre, or even more recently as The National Centre for Outdoor Education & Training. However, in September 2020, the centre became the fifth campus of Kerry College as part of the Kerry Education and Training Board's (Kerry ETB) new integrated model for Further Education and Training (FET). This integrated model, the first of its kind in Ireland saw the amalgamation of all specific skill, community training, traineeships, apprenticeships and post-leaving certificate programmes available in Kerry delivered through one unified and single entity, Kerry College. An integrated model such as this, allows an ETB to meet the needs of learners across their entire county and aids in the promotion and creation of a society of lifelong learning "so that all who live there have access to the education and training required to fulfil their potential and to meet their personal, social, cultural, economic and civic needs" (Kerry Education & Training Board, 2018, p. 12). With one hundred and eighty courses available across five campuses, Kerry College is hoping to illustrate a model of best practice for the concept of the "FET College of the Future" (SOLAS, 2020) as envisioned by SOLAS in its National FET strategy 2020-24 for other ETB's to mirror.



Changes

These changes became a motivation to reorient our service outputs and reconceptualise our pedagogical aims. Previously, our main source of income came from a clientele which predominantly consisted of primary and secondary school students availing of a selection of school tours focused on recreational outdoor activities. Now however, we are fully funded through the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science to deliver nationally recognised educational programmes to adults across a variety of courses, thus, a shift in pedagogical strategies is required. One obvious example of this is understanding the way in which people learn. For instance, we know that adults learn differently to young people (Knowles, 1984), therefore, the way in which we teach and deliver our lessons and training needs to shift from a controlled and predictable environment (Pierce, 2021) to a more autonomous and inclusive structure. This will be important for us and our philosophical shift because "in order for students to engage deeply in learning, for their sake, not ours, they need opportunities for ownership and responsibility" (Fraser, 2008, p. 9). These pedagogical shifts in Ireland's outdoor educational practices are essential if we are to respond to the needs of our learners today (Glancy, 2020) and align with the Future of FET's three main pillars. These core pillars revolve around building skills, fostering inclusion and facilitating pathways for all learners engaged in our programmes.

Practice

In 2017, I undertook research as part of my Masters that exposed some confusions between the theoretical underpinnings of outdoor education practices and the facilitation of these experiences such as a lack of authentic autonomy provided for learners in outdoor experiential contexts. More recently, in 2021 brought with it the publication of PhD research that examined and interrogated the practices of outdoor education and training centres (Pierce, 2021). The innovation and bravery of Kerry ETB supports us in the Killorglin Campus to examine these recommendations from research and take action to see them applied to practice.

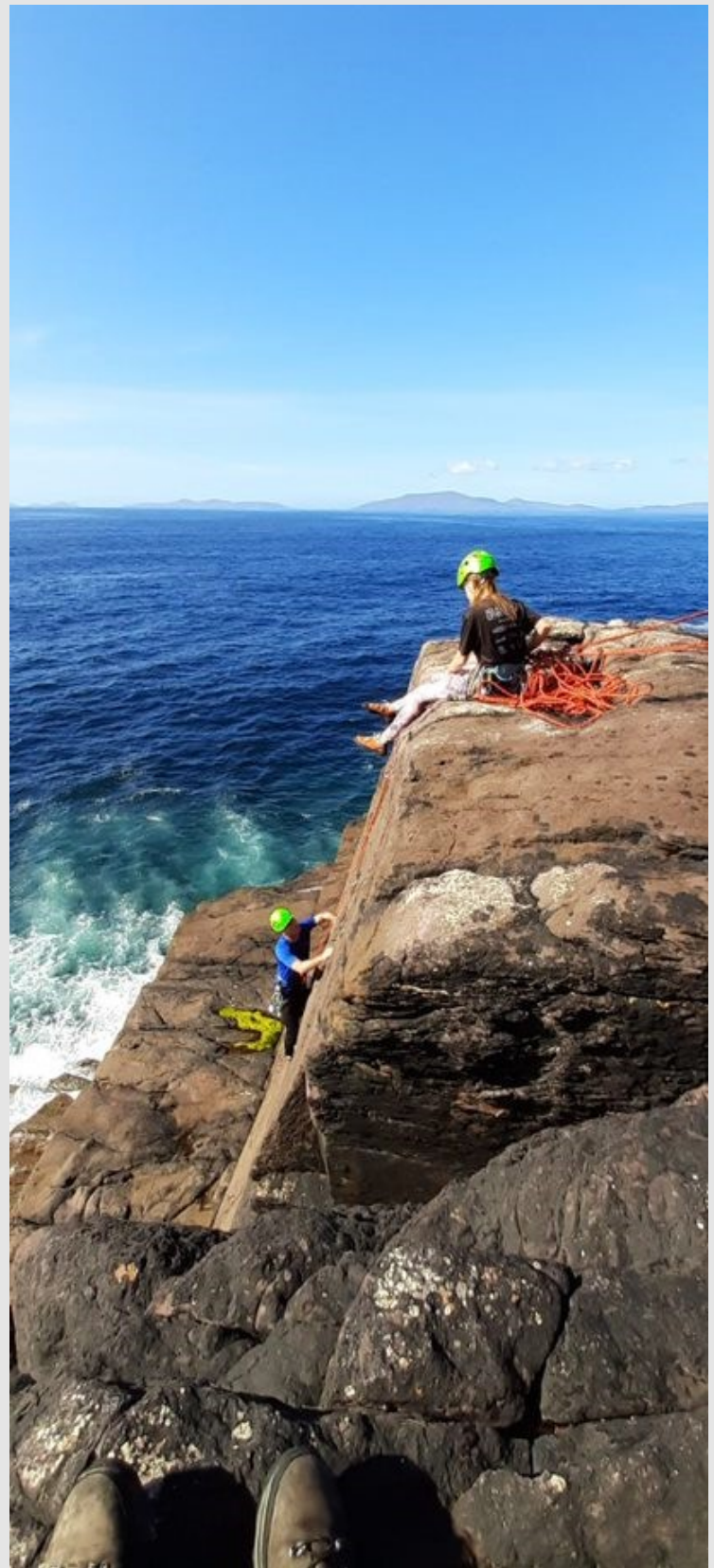
As a staff team of outdoor educators, we need to understand that our content knowledge and the pedagogical strategies we use to teach is extremely important, therefore, we need to remain informed on effective educational developments (Hill & Zinmeister, 2012). This will help guide our practices away from what Brown (2010) describes as the 'Achilles heel' in outdoor education and avoid making unsubstantiated claims and assumptions about our programmes. We strive to provide authentic educational experiences that commit to reflective practices in a shared and open workspace.

The centre, which is also tasked with overseeing a provision of services in the Killarney National Park Education Centre (KNPEC), is now responsible for the delivery of all outdoor and environmental education and training FET courses in Kerry College. In addition to these courses, a Wellbeing programme for all FET learners is provided through the campus, as well as an Environmental Education service for the public from KNPEC and for a transitional period, a small schools programme for the primary and post primary schools of County Kerry.

This is an ambitious departure from previous practice however I am very fortunate to have joined a team of dedicated and professional outdoor educators. The staff team in Killorglin Campus are passionate about working with learners outside and connecting them to their natural surroundings. Their passion and expertise will hopefully create a ripple effect which will then get passed on to our learners and so on to their learners in the future. Thankfully, staff at the centres are willing to engage in courageous conversations that tackle the challenges of revising and adapting teaching and learning strategies in such a fundamental shift in practices for our courses.

Current Courses

Courses available to learners on our campus offer opportunities for employment in the broad outdoor and environmental sector. Our courses provide clear routes to employment, further study and university progression. Currently, we deliver a QQI Level 5 Ecology and Practical Fieldwork (Applied Ecology) course in Ireland's premier Killarney National Park. This is a highly practical course focused on the key skills and knowledge needed to carry out a range of ecological field survey methods. Learners will be able to demonstrate strategies and practices to help foster a more environmentally-friendly society. We also deliver a one-year traineeship in outdoor activity instruction which is an ideal starting point for anyone who is interested in developing a career in the outdoor sector. A pathway has been created from the outdoor activity instructor course to our QQI Level 6 advanced outdoor activity instructor programme which supports learners in gaining up to eight national governing body awards for employment. Again, this is the perfect programme for anyone who is interested in developing a career in the outdoor sector or thinking of progressing on to Higher Education. Additionally, we deliver a scuba diving instructor course which is internationally recognised by the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI). Finally, we deliver a surf instructor and beach lifeguard training course which helps our learners develop knowledge, skills, competencies and recognised qualifications in surfing, lifeguarding, first aid and ...



... instructing with the view becoming a surf instructor or beach lifeguard. All our courses in Kerry College are fully funded and there are no application fees, tuition fees, examination fees or certification fees. All top of the range equipment to engage in our courses is provided for the learner as we believe that this equips the learner best for success in the sector. The learner becomes the owner of much of the personal protective equipment, such as harness, helmet, wetsuit and buoyancy aid upon successful completion of their course to ensure they are equipped to join the workforce directly following achievement.

The Killorglin campus provides a bespoke 'Connect Outdoors' well-being service for all FET students across Kerry College. The programme is grounded in theory and is evaluated with relevant metrics to improve it. Evidence on promoting well-being indicates how incorporating the following five actions; Connect, Be active, Take notice, Keep learning and Give are all important components for well-being (Aked, Marks, Cordon, Thompson, 2008). Our 'Connect Outdoors' offers a participant the opportunity to slow down and journey through nature while connecting in the five ways to well-being. These well-being days are also used as an opportunity for our tutors to share with participants, Kerry College's emotional and psychological support services available to them.

Finally, with a supportive staff team, I am so excited and genuinely look forward to being a part of such a dynamic change in how we deliver outdoor and environmental education in Kerry. The only constant is change, and so long as we are changing, we are improving.

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**Sustainable
Development
Goals (SDGs)**

The draft **SDG National Implementation Plan (NIP) 2022-2024** has been published. It is available to download [here](#).

The **Final Consultation** on the draft has also commenced - details [here](#). If you would like to share your views on the draft Implementation Plan and actions due for delivery from 2022 to 2024, please email SDGs@DECC.gov.ie before **5.30pm, 14 June 2022**. Please note, submissions by post will not be accepted.

My Outdoor Education Journey to Early Years

Joanne Fitzpatrick

Jo currently works at Willow Den, a fully Outdoor nursery in Edinburgh with 3 - 5 year olds. She is working towards an Early Years qualification at a local college, runs Duke of Edinburgh expeditions with young people and is an Associate with Thrive Outdoors. Jo is passionate about sharing the benefits of outdoor play and learning, along with increasing opportunities for connection to nature for young people, through incorporating more outdoor learning in the school day. She is interested in the holistic benefits the outdoors can bring to people's mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

As a Forest Kindergarten trainer, Bushcraft Instructor, Lowland Leader and NNAS Tutor she is eager to equip others with skills to embrace outdoor learning, and in turn help more young people engage with, and benefit from, the natural environment.

In her free time she enjoys photography, travelling, hiking, sea swimming along with good coffee and cake!



Originally from Dublin and now living in Edinburgh, I graduated from GMIT Castlebar with a BA in Outdoor Education and Leisure in 2004. After graduating I travelled around the world and worked in a variety of outdoor based jobs in Ireland, UK, New Zealand, Canada, Switzerland, Austria, Borneo, Costa Rica and Sri Lanka. I've worked on environmental education programmes in Central America, with international schools running their Outdoor Education programmes in Switzerland and their service-learning trips in Asia, and taught climbing in New Zealand and Austria. From this wide variety of experiences, I have seen what outdoor education, environmental education and experiential learning can offer to young people, the many benefits it brings and the personal insights and challenges it offers. Wanting to continue my own learning and develop deeper understanding, I completed an MSc in Outdoor Education at the University of Edinburgh in 2016. I now work part time as an Outdoor Early Years practitioner and a freelance outdoor instructor here in Scotland. I love the close proximity to the sea and the mountains and how beautiful and wild Scotland is, offering so many opportunities to connect with nature whilst still living in a city!

How *Early Years* found me...

After spending the last 20 years teaching a variety of outdoor activities including kayaking, rock climbing, navigation, bushcraft, archery, abseiling, nature studies and biking, how did I switch to early years education? Well, it was not a premeditated career move, but something that evolved over the last few years out of my experiences. I had just come back from running a school trip in Borneo and I took a part time job here in Edinburgh to see me through winter, as many outdoor instructors do! It was with a charity [Thrive Outdoors](#) whose vision is for a sustainable Scotland where children and young people can play, learn and thrive outdoors. Thrive Outdoors is a fund within the [Inspiring Scotland](#) charity, a unique organisation which uses philanthropy investment along with government and other funding to identify and solve deep-rooted social problems, to tackle poverty and disadvantage across Scotland.

What was initially a 4-month temporary position morphed into an amazing 2.5 years, and it was through this experience that I realised the potential for outdoor play and learning in the Early Years. Thrive Outdoors had a variety of projects which we worked on, focusing on the promotion, delivery and development of outdoor play and learning. It was great to be involved in such a breadth of topics such as development of sector guidance, supporting and developing communities of practice and generating commitment to Outdoor Learning in the Early Years sector. One project was supporting the Scottish Government on their Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) expansion, working with local authorities to help them improve and grow their outdoor provision as funded hours were increased. Here in Scotland, children from age 3 years to school age, are entitled to 1140 funded pre-school hours per year, so our aim was to help make more of those hours, outdoor based. A lack of guidance on how to access outdoor spaces to create safe, nurturing and inspiring outdoor learning experiences was identified, so we were asked to facilitate the drafting and publication of [Out to Play](#), a national guidance on creating outdoor play experiences for children. This is a step-by-step guide for those settings that wish to improve or increase their access to the outdoors, so that more children can access quality outdoor play and learning experiences every day.



We also brought together a round table coalition to draft [Scotland's National Position Statement on Outdoor Play and Learning](#), to harness the energy and commitment from signatories to work together to embed playing and learning outdoors for all children and young people in Scotland. In January 2020, on behalf of the Scottish Government, we created a series of films that showcased the benefits that outdoor nurseries can have on early years development. Take some time to watch these short clips, although a warning ... you may want to change jobs and work outdoors in early years after watching them!



[Click here - Outdoor ELC for practitioners; what's it like to work in a fully outdoor nursery? - YouTube](#)

Becoming the change...



After years of promoting the benefits of outdoor ELC and supporting more outdoor nurseries to open, [Inspiring Scotland](#) decided to use the knowledge gained from the Thrive Outdoors team and set up our own Outdoor Nurseries, and so [Willow Den](#) was born. After working from home over lockdown I really missed working outdoors and engaging with nature and people. So, I decided to make the switch, working part time at the outdoor nursery whilst also gaining a childcare qualification, and on the side running Duke of Edinburgh expeditions as a freelancer. Willow Den in Edinburgh is an outdoor nursery open from 8am to 4pm, where the children spend their whole day playing and learning outdoors, in our garden area, mud kitchen, or woodland area. People often comment that the weather is too cold/bad/wet to be outside all day, but once dressed appropriately the children thrive in this environment and build resilience and self-confidence...and also have a lot of fun!

The Outdoor Nursery sector here in Scotland, although not yet the norm, making up less than 2% of all ELC provision, is definitely a growing sector. I feel lucky in the fact that outdoor learning is valued enough that it is in the Scottish curriculum, from early years through to secondary school, and all children are entitled to outdoor experiences during their educational life. I wish that this had been my experience growing up in Ireland and I wonder what the potential is for Ireland to also engage with Outdoor Learning in the Curriculum? The Scottish Government are quite committed to supporting this, and although experiences and provision can vary across locations, the fact that it is identified as an [entitlement](#) is wonderful.

'the children spend their whole day playing and learning outdoors'

In the Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning document, Scotland's vision for outdoor learning is that

- all children and young people are participating in a range of progressive and creative outdoor learning experiences which are clearly part of the curriculum
- schools and centres are providing regular, frequent, enjoyable and challenging opportunities for all children and young people to learn outdoors throughout their school career and beyond
- teachers and educators embed outdoor learning in the curriculum so that learning in the outdoor environment becomes a reality for all children and young people.



Holistic benefits: The importance of outdoor play and engaging with nature

There is abundant research showing the benefits of spending time in nature for both children and adults alike. I think if you work outdoors with young people, you will have observed how crucial nature experiences can be. The natural environment offers different opportunities for learning and thinking, and brings physical, social, emotional and cognitive benefits. There are also daily opportunities for risky and adventurous play which helps develop a child's self-confidence, resilience, executive functioning abilities and even risk-management skills. But it is not only children that can benefit, as adults, our mental, emotional and physical health improves when we spend time outdoors. I know during lockdown my mental health was challenged with stresses, isolation and desk-based work, sometimes not leaving the house on a day and I'm sure I am not alone in that experience. Returning to working outdoors has improved my energy, physical health and reduced my stress and anxiety levels. Listening to the practitioners in the video clip above, describing the positive impacts working outdoors has on their own mental and physical health is amazing and fully resonates with me.

The national practice guidance for early years in Scotland is [Realising the Ambition](#) and along with [My World Outdoors](#), a resource which highlights the benefits of outdoor play for children attending early learning and childcare, there is growing support for outdoor learning in the early years in Scotland, with the benefits clearly understood:

...daily, high quality outdoor play experiences have a direct and positive impact on children's physical, cognitive, social, mental health and emotional development...the direct link between a child's movement and coordination development and the development of fine motor and concentration skills must be made, valued and demonstrated in practice by us as early years educators (Realising the Ambition: Being Me, p54).

My main focus has always been sharing experiences outdoors, connecting with people and with nature. I lean towards the social and emotional benefits outdoor learning can provide, rather than the technical skills side of it. Creating opportunities to connect with nature not only has a long-term positive effect on human wellbeing but also has a positive effect on environmental sustainability. My MSc research looked at Connection to Nature in a primary school where the children partook in a gardening and environmental education programme. It was through this research that I uncovered the worrying statistics of how little time children spend in nature, rather spending their days learning indoors in a classroom and increasingly connected to devices. 'Connection to nature concerns the human-nature relationship and' can be described as "one's appreciation for, and understanding of, our interconnectedness with all other living things on the earth ... and an understanding of the importance of all aspects of nature" (Nisbet et al., 2009). It is a strong predictor of children's interests in environmentally friendly practices, which makes sense. Experiences in nature affect our relationship with the natural world and in turn how we feel about it and how we act in it. Some key affective influences on the development of positive environmental behaviours were identified by Christie and Higgins (2012) including connection to nature, a sense of place and direct contact with nature. If children love something, they will protect it, and looking to the future we need to protect our environment and live more sustainably. What better time to offer that experience in nature than in the early years, to inspire a love of nature at a young age and to create opportunities for connection, learning and development, which in turn can lead to positive environmental behaviours.

Providing these opportunities in our education sector from an early age, is crucial to cultivating an environmental awareness whilst also supporting the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) such as SDG 3: Health and Wellbeing, SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG 13: Climate Action. For example, the young people's leadership observed in Fridays for Future movement was inspired by their awareness and connection to environmental issues, demanding urgent action on the climate crisis because they had a care for, and a connection to, the planet.

“ No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced ”

David Attenborough

Working with young children, you may have observed that curiosity and sense of awe and wonder that children have for the natural world. Rachel Carson (1956) believed that a child's sense of wonder is rooted in the emotions and allows them to discover the "joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in", but opportunities for these experiences are dwindling. Modern lives are led increasingly indoors, either at home or school and with our reliance on devices, this means often we don't get to spend time outdoors. However, outdoors, in nature is where the passion for learning, the creativity, and the inquisitive nature of children can be cultivated, children can learn by doing and problem solve in an organic way. This is not a new theory to combat our modern life of screens, Fredrich Froebel introduced the concept of 'kindergartens' in 1850s. He saw the power of playing and learning outdoors and some of his principles such as **unity and connectedness, autonomous learners, the central importance of play and engaging with nature**, reflect the present day focuses in outdoor early years education. Utilising Froebelian theory in a modern setting, adapting theories of outdoor learning and applying it to our modern-day curriculum, can complement our educational provision and provide opportunities for learning and development that are often missing.

Having not worked in the Early years sector in Ireland I am not aware of the opportunities for the growth of outdoor play and learning, but I do wonder what Ireland needs to do to start this journey? The benefits to health and wellbeing are evident, but there needs to be policy and support from the top for grass roots to grow. Scotland and Ireland are similar in many ways but I am not sure if there is a national recognition of the power and potential outdoor learning can offer. Given the evidence that show the benefits to health, wellbeing and environmental sustainability, now is the time to tap into the opportunities to improve wellbeing, cultivate connection to and a love of nature in the early years.

Sharing my day with 3 to 5-year-olds I see the natural wonder and awe they have around nature; they are curious and eager to understand how things grow and why worms/spiders/bees are so important. They learn in a holistic way and they thrive in the fresh air. They move their bodies and use their muscles in a way they didn't know they could. They pick things up extremely easily because they are interested in learning and absorbing all of the information around them. When they sit quietly, they can listen to the birds, to the wind, and they know there is no such thing as bad weather! Why? Well because weather can make rain, and beautiful rainbows, and of course rain makes puddles and they LOVE puddles! Jumping and splashing and laughing...what sound is better to hear than a 3-year-old's peal of laughter as they jump in a puddle. They are not aware they are learning and growing, they are just being. The outdoor environment provides them with a space to discover and learn who they are and create a connection to nature and community.

I leave you with the wise words of Rachel Carson, an environmentalist who understood the need for connection to nature.

"If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow. The years of early childhood are the time to prepare the soil. Once the emotions have been aroused - a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and the unknown, a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration or love- then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response."

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The 2022 Outdoor Education Symposium will take place this October at Tollymore National Outdoor Centre.

This event will host a wide variety of workshops from outdoor educators and environmental organisations from across the Island, over two full days of learning, sharing, and networking.

Full information will follow via our mailing list shortly. Please pop us an email if you wish to be added

bookings@fieldstudies.ie

Outdoor Research in 2021

Kevin O'Callaghan

Kevin O'Callaghan is the coordinator of the New MSc in Outdoor Education, Sustainability and Well-being on the ATU's Mayo Campus. Kevin has over 30 years' experience in the outdoors ranging from education out of doors with young people and geoscientist to adventure sports curriculum design and provision. Kevin's main passion is journeying in landscapes preferably for more than a weekend.



Introduction

This article provides a brief overview of the research articles published in the Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning (JAOEL) in 2021. Within the journal there was a comprehensive cross-section of research that concentrated on different facets of outdoor and adventure education, ranging from education outdoors for the early years to the more traditional adventure education. The research is presented in a thematic format and concludes with a brief analysis of the most widely cited and accessed research articles from this issue of the JAOEL.

Adventure Sports and the role of the coach/instructor

Carson, Davies and Collins (2021) in their research article 'The hills are alive with ... Many different folk! Rationalizing and operationalizing a professional judgment and decision-making approach within mountain leadership', researched the increased demands on adventure sports professions due to the growth in participation in outdoor activities. This growth and evolution of the sector requires an adaptable and flexible workforce to satisfy the increasingly diverse range of participatory motivations. Using Mountain leadership as an exemplar, the researchers dissect the themes connected with motivations and social dynamics and contextualized these against pertinent environmental challenges. A decision-making process is proposed with its requisite planning and reflective skill set to assist mountaineers to negotiate the complexity of individualized service provision.

The topic of situational awareness reemerges again in 'A study of situational awareness in a small group of sea kayaking guides', (Collins et al., 2021). In this study of sea kayak guides operating in moderate water conditions, a novel approach was adopted by utilizing virtual reality technology. The findings suggest that the guides' recognition and understanding of key informational cues lacked both comprehension of their meaning and the ability to project their future impact on the situation. Their findings indicate that rather than guides focusing and dealing with situations, in training more emphasis should be placed facilitating guides to predict and anticipate, through enabling them to coach and be proactive in anticipating potential events.



Critical attribute for adventure sport coaches..."an explicit focus on developing the participant's confidence"

Another instructor related study researched, 'What do participants perceive as the attributes of a good adventure sports coach?' (Eastbrook and Collins, 2021). While a correlation between the attributes of good coaches in traditional sports identified within the literature, showed alignment with those of good adventure sports coaches, the researchers also identified three additional attributes that are critical for good adventure sports coaches: (1) in-depth knowledge of the adventure sports environment, (2) a very high degree of individualization, and (3) an explicit focus on developing the participant's confidence. The findings of this research should provide food for thought across all adventure sports.

Schools

Lohr, et al., (2021) investigated the social and emotional learning (SEL) in their article 'The impact of school gardens on youth social and emotional learning: a scoping review'. The rationale for the study was that because emotions impact upon how we learn it is imperative for schools and families to effectively address SEL to benefit all students. The study undertook a meta-analysis of 213 programmes with over 270,000 students. From these, eight examples were identified on how school garden programming can impact SEL among school age children and adolescents. They concluded that further research is needed, as from the three qualitative studies, only one found statistically significant results, (Lohr et al., 2021).

Svobodová, et al's., (2021) research 'A proposal of a concept of outdoor education for primary and lower secondary schools - the case of the Czech Republic'. The research analysed the way in which OE is implemented at selected elementary schools providing the primary and lower secondary education in the Czech Republic. All of the analysed school education programmes included OE in some form but with differences among the schools in terms of quantity and quality of learning. This analyses was followed up by interviews with teachers, which confirmed that schools have no concept of OE. The researchers then looked at Denmark, Australia and Finland and proposed an outdoor curriculum for introduction into the National curriculum. Looking closer to home there may be lessons that the Irish curriculum could potentially adopt to avoid the fragmentation and relegation of OE to a subservient role in the curriculum.

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Forest Schools

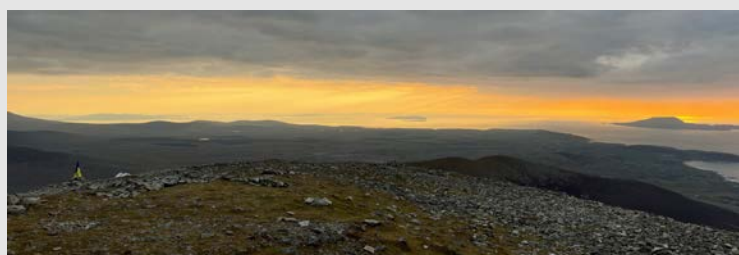
The paper on *'Articulating outdoor risky play in early childhood education: voices of forest and nature school practitioners'*, (Harper and Obee, 2021) is pertinent as we find ourself in an increasingly risk averse society. Forest and nature schools are one approach to encouraging unstructured outdoor play in natural environments with its inherent risks. There is recognition that outdoor risky play provides developmental and health benefits for children such as resilience, risk assessment skills, social competencies, well-being, and of course increased physical activity. The study involved interviewing practitioners who shared creative strategies for navigating risky play within confines of their licensing regulations. These strategies included: being firm in the rationale for and practice of risky play, keeping detailed documentation of risk assessment, engaging in constant risk-assessment involving children in the process, being transparent with licensing officers and conveying intent of practice, inviting the parents to risky play activities, engaging in offsite field trips, and looking for ways around unclear policies. These findings may provide food for thought and hope for Irish practitioners.

Nature

In the paper *'Finnish student teachers' conceptions and experiences of nature'* (Sarivaara, Keskitalo and Ratinen, 2021), focused on participants' backgrounds in order to explore their connection with nature and how that relationship developed. The premise of the study was that outdoor-oriented learning relies on students' perceptions of nature. To that end, three research questions were addressed.

1. How do student teachers conceptualize nature?
2. How do student teachers relate to and connect with nature?
3. How and when was their relationship with nature formed?

Almost every student teacher recalled how their parents would routinely take their children to the woods. At the same time, there was significant variation in the participants' conceptions of nature. Most had an unnuanced and romantic view, and the analysis suggested that teachers must learn to reflect to understand their pedagogical options. A key task emerges for teachers which is to help pupils to broaden their understanding of nature and secondly to consider how to act on nature's behalf. This raises opportunities for inquiry-based learning in schools. Using a student-centred approach to explore nature from different perspectives, pupils can widen their understanding of sustainability and natural phenomena. While focused on teacher education the linkages between forest school curricula and other forgotten outdoor spaces also appears pertinent.



Adventure and Wilderness Therapies

There is growing interest in the use of adventure therapy. The paper *'The phased model of adventure therapy: trauma-focused, low arousal, & positive behavioral support'* (Trundle and Hutchinson, 2021) describes the development of the 'Phased Model of Adventure Therapy'. The use of adventure therapy has been found to improve psychological wellbeing, self-esteem, and behavior in young people. This paper focused on a UK-based adventure therapy provider, the Creative Outdoors Group, who provides care to young people who are currently looked after by the Local Authority and display complex emotional and/or behavioral needs. This paper describes the theoretical underpinnings of the phased model of adventure therapy and how it was applied to an adventure therapy regime.



Cultural Perspectives

In the article *'Outdoor education in Canada: a qualitative investigation'* (Asfeldt et al., 2021), an attempt is made to define just what OE is in Canada. The country's large size, sparse population, varied landscapes, and diverse culture means developing a comprehensive understanding of the philosophies, goals and activities of OE in Canada is challenging. The study sought to describe the culture of Canadian OE programs in a bid to stimulate the development of a deeper understanding of Canadian OE. The researchers adopted a phenomenological analysis framework that explored OE programmes delivered by 22 different practitioners. Inevitably the findings indicate that OE in Canada is influenced by a blend of philosophies that include hands-on experience, integrated learning, and journeying through the land. Common goals include personal growth and building community integrated with place consciousness and environmental goals. Hiking, canoeing and kayaking, skiing and snowshoeing were the most common activities.

Another paper looked at research again based in the Northern latitudes; *'Sámi sports and outdoor life at the indigenous Riddu Riddu festival'* (Skogvang, 2021). The researcher contemplated how sports, physical and outdoor activities included in the festival create indigenous people's identities and cultural understanding. They found that activities facilitate the creation of ties between participants, networks and organizations and builds identities and bridges between participants. Participation claims to be crucial symbolic capital or polycapital in expressing indigeneity or connection by participants, staff and volunteers at the festival.

Higher Education

In 'A qualitative study of the perceived significant life impacts of a university summer outdoor education course' (Wigglesworth and Heintzman, 2021) an exploration of the significance of an OE summer course was conducted by interviewing 15 individuals who participated in a summer course 20 years earlier. The recognition of discussion around competence learned and transfer during the course to participants' family and work lives, rather than focusing on simply acquiring outdoor skills and knowledge is pertinent considering the focus on adventure sports within Irish OE. Another recommendation of this study is that outdoor pedagogues should recognise self-discovery and interpersonal skills development as valuable long-term impacts of an outdoor program that influence all dimensions of life, including work, leisure, and family. This research also provides useful insight into the long-term, transformative potential of outdoor experiences, especially in terms of participants' leisure style and environmental behavioral changes.

Technology in the Outdoors

'Smartphone use in outdoor education: a question of activity progression and place' (Bollinger et al., 2021) explores the controversial place of mobile phones in the outdoors, ranging from, their disruptive influences, to the potential for engagement and the promotion of access to resources. The research examined the perceptions of 151 outdoor instructors regarding appropriate student smartphone use during various activities. The results suggest that most instructors dislike smartphone use outside of commuting to and from events. However, when uses related to outdoor activities (e.g., GPS tracking, checking weather, locating relevant information), 50–65% of participants agreed that phones were appropriate. The exception was photography and video where there was 70–82% agreement on their appropriateness. An age and gender divide on the appropriateness of their use was also identified.

Other themes in research

'The article 'Norwegian teenagers' experiences of developing second language fluency in an outdoor context' (Myhre and Fiskum, 2021), explored how Norwegian teenagers experienced the development of spoken fluency of English as a second language through varied and sensuous learning in an outdoor environment. The results indicating that the students reported increased willingness to communicate in the target language due to increased confidence, real-life language use, and interesting ways of learning. The results are interpreted to be a consequence of a new and varied affordances in an outdoor environment.

Research on 'Hegemonic masculinity in outdoor education' (Kennedy and Russell, 2021), notes the increasing attention being paid to gender issues in OE. Scholars and practitioners are sharing experiences of sexism and heterosexism and noting the need for an examination of hegemonic masculinity in the field.

Within the outdoors typical hegemonic masculinity value, enactments of toughness, emotional stoicism and aggression, while femininity and alternative masculinities such as those of gay men, environmentalists and women are devalued. As this theory of masculinities is continually revised, indicating that multiple hegemonic masculinities may be possible. There has been so little research on masculinities in OE that there remains significant unanswered questions.

Prince (2021) researched 'The lasting impacts of outdoor adventure residential experiences on young people'. The researcher used evidence from four retrospective empirical research studies on lasting impacts (>12 months) of outdoor residential experiences for young people in the UK since 2015. Thematic and comparative analysis identified lasting impacts such as: self-confidence, independence, and communication. Respondents also identified confidence, teamwork, life skills, intra-personal skills and the take up of new opportunities / activities as the impacts of use in young people's lives since their residential experience. The intensity and challenge of the outdoor adventure residentials, and the power of groups, influence lasting impacts. These findings from large datasets across a range of contexts have implications for funders and policy makers for the provision of outdoor adventure residentials for young people, given the costs involved for residential group experiences.

Conclusion

The above overview identified ten different thematic areas, though the 'Miscellaneous' field may be contested. While some thematic areas have seen more publication than others in 2021 it is also worth reviewing the thematic fields that students and researchers are accessing and presumably reading within the field of OE. The three most accessed articles are:

1. *Losing our way? The downward path for outdoor learning for children aged 2–11 years*, Waite (2010)
2. *Characteristics of risky play*, Hansen Sandseter (2009)
3. *Mothers' beliefs about risk and risk-taking in children's outdoor play*, Little (2015)

While we would expect the older articles to be viewed more times the content and focus of the papers is worth noting – Children / outdoors / risky play. In this issue of JAOEL (21), in declining order the top 3 most accessed articles by author are; Tiplady and Menter (2021) with 5088 views, Harper and Obee (2021) with 3863 views, Almers et al (2021) with 1869 views, which further reinforces this research theme, i.e. Outdoor play and the role of risk in outdoor learning with children. Some in Ireland still perceive OE to be focused on adventure sports and outdoor centres, however the literature indicates a much wider sector. The data regarding those accessing and citing the literature may perhaps suggest that the more traditional adventure aspect of OE and the associated residential sector experience that many in Ireland still associate with Irish OE is not as topical. Another perspective could be that Irish OE has not evolved as much, however the growth in forest schools and outdoor play schools in Ireland would challenge that perception.

Cycling, Women and becoming an Advocate

Elaine Watters

Elaine was born in County Meath in 1983! A wife since 2009! A mum since 2015! Elaine was always one of those outdoor kids! Elaine fell in love with the west of Ireland after spending 2 summers in a North Mayo Gaeltacht! All these things led her to choosing to study Outdoor Education in GMIT Castlebar. She enjoyed her time in Castlebar and learned so much about herself and about outdoor education. She also met her husband on the course...



My Journey

In 2005 I started work in Petersburg Outdoor Education and Training Centre (OETC) and I've been there ever since! I enjoy the variety of work the centre gives. I have had lots of opportunity to design and lead new programmes.

However, in the past 15 years I have had two diagnoses that were hard to deal with. I was diagnosed with a malignant melanoma, which scared the life out of me! As someone who works outdoors every day, I was totally unaware of the value of sun protection. Thankfully now 15 years later most people know the importance.

I was also diagnosed with Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI). This really rattled me and has taken me years to come to terms with. Unfortunately, there is still very little known about the condition although it has massive effects on women. I lost all my confidence and my drive to do anything. I felt so many times that I wasn't being listened to and made feel as though I didn't know my own body. I found a doctor who helped me find my way back to me which included Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT).

Just as I was finding myself again, I also found cycling and I am now an official advocate for the 'IT'S NOT A RACE' campaign.

How cycling found me!

We planned to get cycling up and running at Petersburg so there were various days out on bikes and training courses. I didn't love it at first. This was until another local female kindly loaned me her bike and shared her enthusiasm for the sport. I was hooked!

Lockdowns came and I discovered all my local backroads! I encouraged other women to come with me. I decided to run a Women on Wheels (WOW) programme in my local area with the support of Petersburg OETC.

"Women on Wheels is essentially the [Bike for Life](#) programme aimed at beginner women where cyclists are brought through the various skills and techniques involved in cycling. The focus of the programme is on learning, meeting new people with the group cycle a prominent feature. The programme usually lasts between 4 and 10 weeks in length, this can be flexible depending on the group and availability of the ride leader, with a celebratory spin for the group to finish. Depending on group ability this could be anything between 20k - 50/60k (Cycling Ireland).

I knew what I felt like to be that person struggling at the back of the group, so I really wanted this never to be the case for anyone on my course. I put a lot of thought into each session to ensure it was varied and everyone had a strong sense of belonging.

While running WOW I also began studying a course on coaching midlife women. The course included Menopause & the Menstrual cycle, Training midlife women, Kit with women's bodies in mind & Nutrition. This opened lots of conversations while out and about on our WOW cycles.

Although at 38 years old I am not in "midlife", but because of my POI diagnosis I have experience of menopause and its effects on female wellbeing. I am passionate about sharing information about menopause with women of all ages. Knowledge is power!

My first WOW programme was a huge success, I continue to cycle with women from the group weekly and we have become great friends. We are gathering new women to join us all the time.

We are as much about coffee stops and conversation as the kilometres on the Strava! It's about the friendships & mental wellbeing. If we get a bit fitter and faster that's a bonus! Cycling side by side on bikes, is a bit like the conversations at the kitchen sink or in the car....you get a lot off your chest without any eye contact! As they say a problem shared is a problem halved.

Finding my Tribe!

The community bikes rides are a fantastic initiative by Cycling Ireland. People can join a ride lead by a local leader or join a solo ride. Each ride you complete brings you closer to a reward and it's free!

I recently completed my 100th ride. I am proud to say that one of my WOW students got to 100 rides the day before me!! Well done, Fiona.

The rides are a brilliant motivation to keep going. I fell off the cycling wagon for a while last year and starting the community cycles again helped get the motivation going.

In my opinion there is huge value in a women's cycling group. For me it's like finding my tribe. A group of people who I can relate to. To be listened to and to listen to others. To be able to offer advice or point someone in the direction of advice whether that be on bike fit or female healthcare etc. A sense of belonging and an understanding of busy lives. Flexibility. Friendship. A space to speak openly & honestly about life. Gaining fitness & confidence. Improved mental health and so so much more.

IT'S NOT A RACE*

This is a new campaign that "Celebrates the many female cyclists who make up the broad spectrum of women who participate actively in cycling across its many forms. As importantly, it celebrates the many reasons why women cycle. And yes, you've guessed it, it's not always a race"(Cycling Ireland - for more information, click [here](#)).

I love this campaign. I think there is so much fear for some women around trying something new because they might not be brilliant at it. This campaign encourages women to try for all the other beneficial reasons. While also celebrating those women who are leading the charge in competitive areas of the sport.

I think when you read the stories of the advocates you can see that cycling is a sport for everyone. Each of the advocates have different reasons for cycling. Each of them bringing something so important to the table. I am so proud to be part of it. I really have to pinch myself.



IT'S NOT A RACE*






IT'S NOT A RACE*

Remember that.

Cycling is freedom and fearlessness.

It's being fast for my age. For any age.

It's friends, family and fitness.

It's the school run. A convoy of confident young women.

Sometimes it's all uphill. But then it's downhill again. Fast.

It's a new start. Wind in your hair. Mud on your face.

It's a solution to problems. On a daily basis.

***Now sometimes it is a race.**

Ask Lara, national champion at 19.

Ask Orla, sprinting in circles at 1000 watts.

Ask Eve to see her gold medals.

Ask Summer, Katie and Lucy, fast & furious, beating the boys.

FIND YOUR RACE. EVEN IF IT'S NOT A RACE.

@cyclingireland #itsnotarace









Thinking About Our Thinking. Are We Developing Learners To Be Self-Directed Metacognitive Thinkers?

Seán Comiskey

Seán is a past graduate of the BA (Hons) in Outdoor Education Degree, GMIT Mayo Campus and has just completed his MA in Outdoor Education at the University of Edinburgh. Seán has worked and lived in Scotland for the past 15 years as an Instructor, Senior Instructor and Learning Adventure Manager for the Outward Bound Trust. Currently, he runs a self catering business with his partner Anna and does freelance work for the University of Highlands and Islands (UHI) on their Adventure programme.

Introduction

In the arena of formal education, there has been considerable research aimed at identifying what teaching and learning strategies have the greatest impact on student learning, achievement, and performance. Strong evidence suggests that explicitly teaching metacognitive knowledge and skills has a significant positive impact on academic learning and achievement. (Education Endowment Fund, 2018; Dignath & Buttner, 2008; Donker et al., 2014; Hattie et al., 1996; Perry 2019; Muijs & Bokhove, 2020). Hence, it seems logical to infer these findings could be replicated in an Outdoor Education (OE) context.

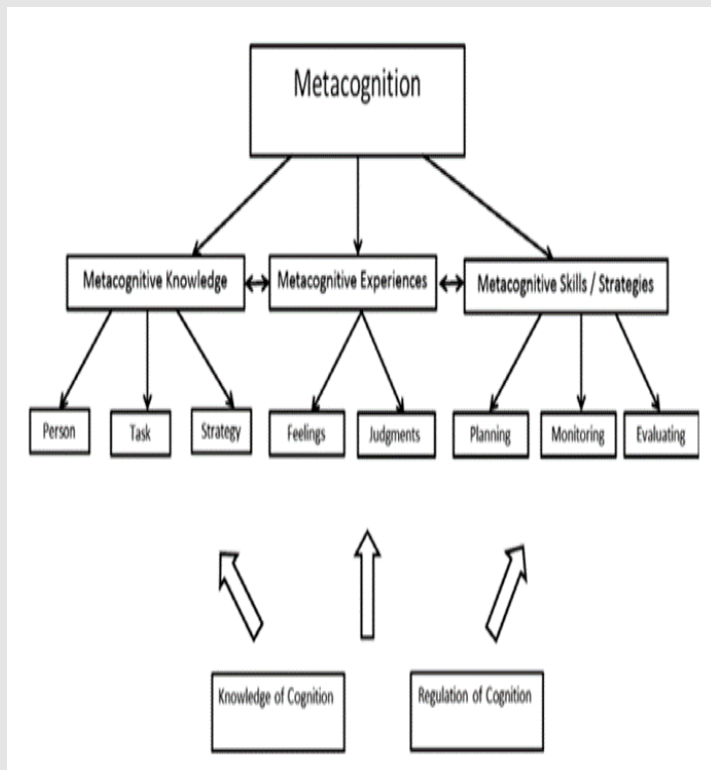


Figure 1. Elements of Metacognition. Source: Lee and Mak (2018, p.1087)

Understanding Metacognition

Metacognition is a 'higher' form of thinking that is defined as having knowledge and awareness of one's cognitive processes (Flavell, 1979). It is often summarized as, 'thinking about our thinking'. *Cognition*, on the other hand, is the knowledge, thoughts, and skills produced in our mind, whereas metacognition can be expressed as "thinking *about* the knowledge and skills that exist in the mind" (Ozturk, 2021, p.2).

In his book, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman (2011) gives a useful description of how our mind operates which sheds light on how metacognition is operationalised. He proposes the mind has two modes of operation: a relaxed, automatic, unconscious, and intuitive mode (System 1) and an effort averse, suspicious, focused, and analytical mode (System 2). In terms of preference, the brain favours operating in System 1 which equates to easy, comfortable, and effortless thinking.

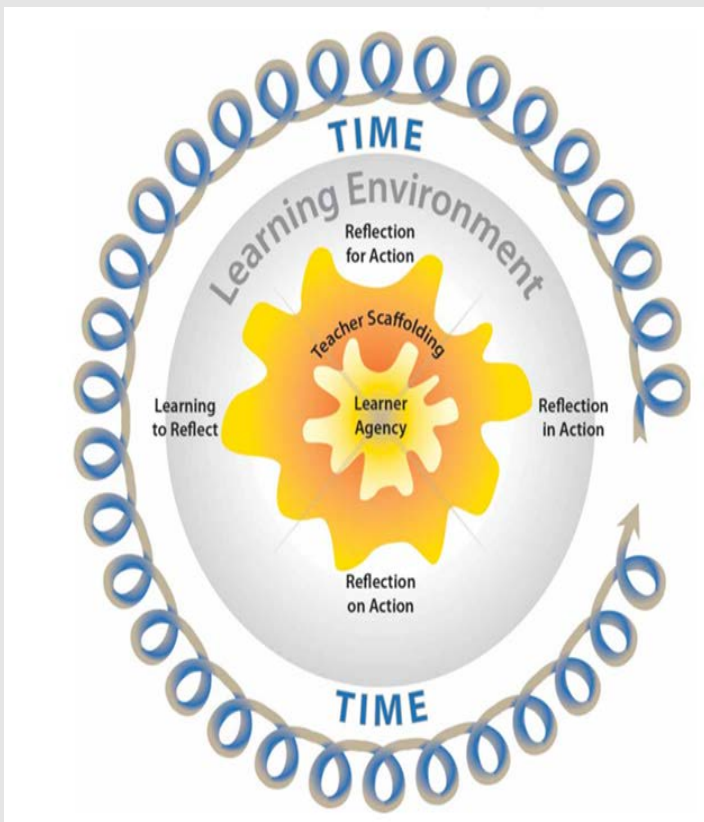
By definition, metacognition is a higher form of thinking (Flavell, 1979), therefore introspection, self-analysis, and evaluation of our thinking are processes that require effort. This connects metacognition to System 2. Linking this insight to 'cognitive strain' (Kahneman, 2011) suggests the brain is less inclined to activate metacognition if it requires excessive effort. Therefore, additional loads requiring lots of cognitive processing could diminish the participant's motivation to be metacognitive (i.e., dealing with anxiety at the edge of a rock face while also trying to remember instructions about how to abseil). Interestingly, "cognitive ease" (Kahneman, 2011, p.60) may also adversely affect metacognitive abilities. Kahneman suggests when we encounter familiar, safe, relaxed, happy experiences, our brain naturally defaults to system 1. System 2 switches off due to its lazy tendencies. Metacognition requires conscious effort to intentionally activate system 2. Hence knowledge of self, knowledge of strategies, and knowledge of when and why to use them matters. This knowledge of how our brain operates increases awareness, autonomy, and agency to self-direct our attention to engage system 2 when needed. Subsequently, the application and practice of this knowledge require the skills and habits of planning, monitoring, and evaluating.

Developing The Skill of Metacognition

Metacognition is a form of introspection, hence understanding the importance and value of reflection is necessary to develop the process of metacognition. Coulson and Harvey (2013) emphasise the significance of reflective practice for professional development and student learning and define reflection as a skill that can be taught and developed.

In an effort to support educators to develop the skill of reflection, Coulson and Harvey (2013) developed a framework for scaffolding reflection for learning through experience. By reviewing and synthesising research literature on reflective practices, Coulson and Harvey created a four-phase model that defines scaffolding practices that support students to be more reflective before, during, and after an experience.

Crucially, phase 1, 'learning to reflect', posits that time should be spent laying the foundations of reflection, creating a shared understanding and context to support declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge of its various functions. Additionally, phase 1 involves teaching students *how* to reflect. Saliently, the model emphasises the iterative process of reflection and how it is an ongoing process that occurs before, during, and after the experience. It also promotes the importance of student agency and the notion that scaffolding is added or removed according to the students' reflective capabilities. The aim is to support learners to self-direct this process.



In addition to acknowledging and developing reflective practice, educational research strongly indicates that teaching declarative knowledge of metacognition, as opposed to relying on tacit knowledge, enables practitioners and participants/students to be conscious, purposeful, and strategic about their thinking habits (Education Endowment Fund, 2018; Dignath & Buttner, 2008; Donker et al., 2014; Hattie et al., 1996; Perry 2019; Muijs & Bokhove, 2020).

Furthermore, greater declarative knowledge of metacognition promotes the ability to *skillfully* apply procedural and conditional metacognitive knowledge of intentionally chosen strategies. In other words, if we can consciously and explicitly direct our attention to 'system 2' and activate knowledge of self, strategies, and the task or challenge, to critically reflect on our thinking processes, we can subsequently coach ourselves and our participants to think strategically to promote curiosity and clarity about our thinking. The end result we are striving for is an increase in autonomous purposeful thinking that promotes motivation, self-efficacy, agency, performance, achievement, and self-directed learning.

The Disadvantages of Metacognition

Conversely, it is also important to recognise and be mindful of the negative aspects of metacognition. Norman (2020) articulates 3 potential disadvantages.

1. Metacognition may hinder task performance due to cognitive overload.
2. The cognitive effort required to engage in metacognition may outweigh the benefits.
3. Negative self-evaluations may detract from psychological well-being.

Considering the challenging environments (social, emotional, and physical) that accompany adventure education: experience, judgement, and awareness during potentially stressful situations are crucial when implementing metacognitive interventions.

In summary, *purposeful metacognition* is the ability to apply a 'self-coaching' inner voice that intentionally activates and prompts awareness to control, monitor, critique, evaluate and self-correct internal thought processes. Subsequently, it has the ability to strengthen effective performance, achievement, and learning during specific tasks or challenges.

Our Hidden Curriculum

Outdoor adventure education (OAE) researchers and practitioners may contend that ‘thinking about our thinking’ is not a new or revolutionary process and may argue that it is the very rationale of experiential education. In many ways, I agree. However, the discussion I wish to pursue is the hidden or implicit nature of metacognition within OAE and OE theory and practice.

Within education, there are 3 forms of curricula: the *explicit*, the *implicit*, and the *null* curriculum (Eisner, 1985). In OAE the explicit curriculum states that participants undertake direct experience of outdoor adventurous activities which provoke real or perceived physical, social, or emotional risk. The intention is to promote uncertainty to develop intra and interpersonal skills (Ewert and Sibthorp, 2014, Hopkins and Putnam, 2012). Furthermore, experiential learning coupled with a facilitative delivery style is used to stimulate active engagement to draw out learning (Thomas 2019). The traditional outcomes include the development of self-efficacy, self-confidence, resilience, problem-solving skills, group-related outcomes such as teamwork, communication, leadership, and team functioning (Hattie et al., 1997; Goldenberg, 2005; McKenzie, 2000; Richmond et al., 2017; Sibthorp et al., 2015, Meerts-Brandsma et al., 2019, Thomas, 2019).

A masculine narrative of adventure is an example of the underlying implicit curriculum within OAE. Its history, values, language, and ethos originate from the masculine perspective which is representative of the era and context in which adventure education was developed (Warren, Mitten, D’Amore & Lotz, 2019). Other traditional practices imply learning occurs outside our comfort zone when exposed to stress (Berman and Davis-Berman, 2005; Luckner & Nadler, 1997) or that reflection is only placed on tangible concrete experiences *after* the experience has happened (Kolb 1984). This narrow twentieth-century view of adventure, with its limiting application of reflection and learning is incompatible with our current context in the 21st century. Characterised by diversity, inclusion, uncertainty, and change, life in the 21st century needs OAE to equip participants with the habits of mind necessary to self-regulate and thrive in a world dominated by distractions, temptations, and uncertainty (Beames and Brown, 2016).

Concerning the null (absent) curriculum, twenty years of personal experience as an outdoor practitioner, coupled with a search of OAE literature relating to personal and social development suggests that metacognition is limited, hidden, or absent from research and practice. It is implicit in our curriculum due to its conscious or unconscious role in the learning process and part of our null curriculum due to an absence of participant and practitioner knowledge of metacognition. Participants of outdoor adventure experiences and outdoor practitioners are not taught explicit declarative knowledge of metacognition or why, how, or when to use it to enhance learning and performance. Here lies the rationale for this article. The primary purpose is to raise awareness of metacognition and to highlight the deeply intimate relationship it has to learning and therefore OAE pedagogy.

Metacognition and Outdoor Adventure Education

A cursory review of the Outdoor Adventure Education (OAE) literature relating to personal and social development, plus twenty years of personal experience as an outdoor practitioner, suggests knowledge and awareness of metacognition are scarce in OAE research and practice (Comiskey, 2022). This synopsis suggests a narrow application of the concept. The research primarily speculates on the benefits of metacognition to instructor judgement and decision making, situational awareness, adaptive expertise, self-reflection and attempts to apply self-regulation theory to OAE programmes (Collins et al., 2020; Collins et al., 2018, Collins and Collins, 2017; Collins, L., Carson, H.J., Collins, D., 2016; Collins & Collins, 2015; Mees, Sinfield, Collins, & Collins, 2020; Mees, Toering, & Collins, 2021; Morgan, Collins & D’Eloia, 2011; Schumann & Sibthorp, 2016; Sibthorp et al., 2015). This limited search of OAE literature suggests there is a gap relating to research examining the effect of *explicitly* teaching and coaching metacognition to scholars, practitioners, and participants on OAE programmes to enhance personal and social development outcomes.

The scarcity of literature and an absence of practitioner knowledge and understanding suggest there is an opportunity for OAE/ OE scholars and practitioners to explore the *explicit use* of metacognition to support and motivate OAE/OE participants and practitioners to develop a stronger awareness of their thinking processes.

Theory into Practice: Practical Suggestions To Promote Metacognition

Using Korthagen’s (2004) ‘Onion’ model of reflection, practitioners can think about their thinking in the following areas:

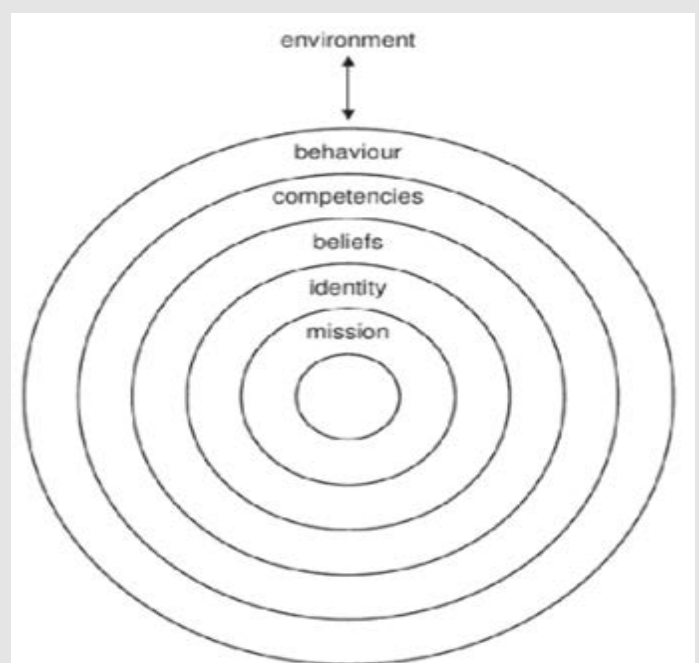


Figure 3: The Onion: a model of levels of change.
Source: Korthagen & Vasalos (2005, p.54.)

1. What **environment** can we create to support metacognitive thinking and effective habits of mind? I.e., morning routines and pre and post-activity monitoring and evaluation of our thinking processes, etc.
2. What **behaviours, strategies, and habits** could promote effective thinking and performance?
3. What **skills and capabilities** could support these behaviours? I.e., planning, monitoring, critical reflection, and mindfulness practice.
4. What are our **beliefs and values** and what beliefs are we cultivating in participants about their learner self-identities, self-efficacy, and confidence? Additionally, what assumptions are we challenging?
5. What is our **identity** as educators and how are we supporting learners with theirs?
6. What is our **Mission** and how do we support students to perceive and create positive ideals for themselves in the future?

Consequently, Gibb's (1989) model for reflection can support participants to structure *their* reflective practice. Gibbs' Reflective Cycle offers a framework for examining experiences (and thinking), and given its cyclic nature lends itself particularly well to repeated experiences, allowing participants to learn and plan from things that either went well or didn't go well.

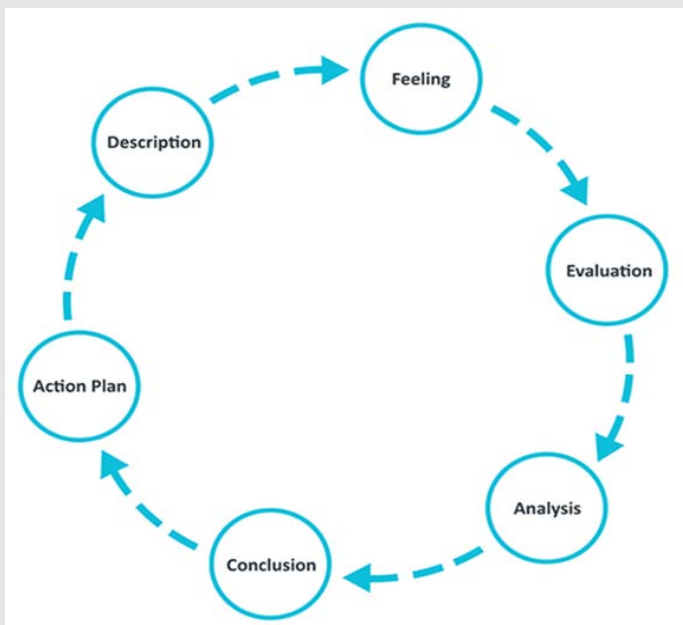


Figure 3: Gibb's Reflective Cycle
Source: The University of Edinburgh, 2020

Conclusion

In this article, exploring OAE/OE with a metacognitive lens provides an opportunity for OAE/OE practitioners and researchers 'to think about our thinking'. This 'metacognitive viewpoint' illuminates the implicit and intimate relationship that connects metacognition to the 'uniqueness' of OAE. It also permits speculation on the potential impact explicitly teaching metacognition could have on teaching and facilitation of OAE experiences plus the potential impact on participants' self-efficacy, motivation, self-directed learning, and achievement of OAE learning outcomes.

Being metacognitive is a way of being and thinking. It is a habit of mind that needs to be developed as such. It is a skill for life that bridges all contexts: personal, academic, and professional.

My hope is this article inspires OAE researchers and practitioners to study, practice, and explore metacognition further to truly uncover the impact of metacognitive approaches on Outdoor Adventure Education. So here's a question for you.....



What knowledge, skills and strategies are you developing in your participants to support them to become metacognitive self-directed learners who can intentionally coach themselves to enhance learning, performance, and achievement?

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NEW!!!



MSc in Outdoor Education, Wellbeing and Sustainability



A new dawn - the Outdoor Education team in Atlantic Technological University, Mayo Campus are delighted to announce that applications are now open for the MSc in Outdoor Education, Sustainability and Well-being. The programme, which is part-time and will use a blended delivery approach, begins in **September 2022** and will take place over two years.

The programme is intended to develop the knowledge, capacity, and know-how of outdoor professionals so that graduates can function as highly competent, self-aware, senior leaders. This MSc will be work-focused and applied in nature, focusing on interdisciplinary application. Graduates will draw on the latest research and methodology to critically reflect on and develop their impact in their specialist sector and be capable of implementing programmes in well-being, experiential place-based learning and education for sustainability. It is aimed at those who want to develop policy, change practice and further develop their competencies to play a valuable role in shaping their work context.

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[GMIT \(Official\)](#)

Empowering Young People

Mairéad Cluskey



Mairéad Cluskey is a lecturer on the BA (Hons) in Outdoor Education and upcoming BA (Hons) in Community Development and Youth Work, on the Mayo Campus of the Atlantic Technological University.

Pearse O'Toole is a graduate of the BA (Hons) in Outdoor Education from the Atlantic Technological University (formally GMIT), Mayo Campus, has worked with Foróige and Tusla as a Youth Worker and Family Support Worker. Pearse is presently completing his MA in Counselling and Career Guidance at the University of Limerick.



Mairéad met with Pearse O'Toole, founder and coordinator of the Dúshlán programme in County Galway to learn about it. Dúshlán (meaning Challenge as *Gaeilge*), is a nine-month adventure based personal development programme geared towards older teenagers wishing to make a positive change in their lives. The Dúshlán programme was developed through a unique partnership between Tusla (The Family Support Agency), Foróige and Galway Roscommon Education & Training Board (GRETB) comprising of a four member multi-disciplinary team; programme Coordinator (Foróige), Outdoor Educator (Petersburg OETC), Social Worker (Tusla), and Occupational Therapist (Tusla). This programme is part of Tusla's Creative Communities initiative in Galway and is aimed at engaging older teenagers who are presenting with complex needs.

In 2021, Dúshlán, Galway received the prestigious *Investing in Children Membership Award™* from Investing in Children (IiC). IiC is children's human rights organisation working in partnership with children and young people 'to exercise their rights and participate in decisions that affect them' (Investing in Children, n.d). This was a great honour for Dúshlán as it importantly recognised the essential elements of the programme that make it successful for all stakeholders. Pearse outlined the key elements that underpin the Dúshlán to celebrate the pioneering work of the programme and to showcase a model of good practice.

The Journey

Pearse describes the notion of the journey as '*fundamental to outdoor education, whether its physically, emotionally or spiritually*'. The 'journey' is often loosely thrown around in various settings, we've heard it and many of us have spoken of it too. Importantly, Asfeldt and Beames (2017:73) implore us to 'trust the journey to present opportunities for learning' which is a very useful context for this interview. Pearse reflected on returning to his post in Foróige/Tusla after a sabbatical in Zambia and feeling as if the project 'was the same'. As an Outdoor Educator and Youth Worker in a family support project, the drive was there to continue to discover, to learn and to journey. Pearse had a vision, where his previous experiences of youth work and outdoor education could move beyond the current offer to young people and families in Galway. Pearse had observed the 'wrap around' (Devaney *et al*, 2017) approach in Family Support services and recognised that this would not only compliment an approach rooted in Youth Work and Outdoor Education, but design a journey based on relationships, trust, family and place. Dúshlán's journey is proving to be quite profound, as the programme leans into a cycle of experience and reflection. The mechanism of reflective practice (Kolb, 1984) with the young people and the team, is used to design and tailor the programme based on the experiences of the young people. The Young People on the programme use Foróige's model of the Youth Committee (Foróige, 2020) to plan, amend and direct the programme content as it is happening. The young people and staff do not know what will be happening towards the end of the 9-month cycle as the experiences and the process of reflective practice guide the programme journey.



“ It just wouldn't work without the outdoors

The Relationship

It is well established that the relationship is paramount to both the task and process of youth work and outdoor education, where young people's meaningful participation is key (Ord and Leather, 2018). There is wide consensus that developing a relationship requires time and supports the young person to be empowered and to find their voice (Podd, 2010; Rodd and Stewart, 2009; Smith, 2001). Pearse stresses the importance of the outdoor environment in creating the opportunity and authentic space to develop the relationship with young people. He proposes that the programme, *'just wouldn't work without the outdoors, and the quality of the relationships could not be developed within the timeframe of the programme'*.

Pearse recognises the relationship as both a goal and a mechanism to achieve other goals and enhances the possibility for meaningful participation as the relationship is based on reciprocity, trust and mutuality. A major theme of social education is the relationship with the learner, once again recognising relationships as an active task and not just something that happens (Smith, 2001). The multi-disciplinary team on the Dúshlán programme create necessary spaces with young people and recognise the value in the structured and unstructured interactions to facilitate both the relationship and the young person's participation. Smith (2001) positions the relationships as an 'essential occupying position' to achieve other things and cites Carl Rodgers' core conditions for learning which are based on the real, connected and empathetic relationship. Pearse advises if we seek genuine participation, we must recognise the essential role and value of the relationship to foster meaningful participation in our engagement with young people.



The Value of Outdoor and Experiential Education

Pearse presents experiential education as a given, 'there's just no other way to do it'. He would not meet any challenges to his position from practitioners across a wide variety of fields beyond youth work and outdoor education. The traditions of practice through experiential education have 'led to ways of working that focus on flourishing, relationships and the integrity of pedagogues' (Smith 2019). This interlinks seamlessly with the other key elements of the Dúshlán programme from the relationship, rights and empowerment of the young people. Smith (2019) also interestingly notes that through experiential education, educators 'accompany them (young people) on their journeys', reinforcing the values of partnership, trust and discovery. Pearse recognises the fundamental importance of the outdoors to the Dúshlán programme, not solely in terms of supporting to develop meaning relationships, but recognising the role of context/environment in the personal development journey. Pearse highlights the essential added value in an outdoor setting ' as it removes the authoritarian approach and reinforces the relationship'. Interactions differ from place to place between various people. The young people in the programme describe their participation as a 'release' and 'leaving their problems behind', recognising the therapeutic value of the outdoors and the experiences it brings. This is not a new understanding in Outdoor and Experiential Education. The link between the freedom of space and movement through experiential education and its impact on 'advancing thought' or 'opening horizons' is long accepted (Dewey, 1937). Pearse highlights the 'different environment, the outdoors' as fundamental to this. Roberts (2012) too recognises the role of situational contexts and highlights the importance of the learning and processing that can occur in the outdoors, creating a 'continuity with the past and present' and an ability to 'connect with the future'. This links strongly with the change process and can support 'perspective taking' (Cooper, 2018). Pearse clarifies the importance of perspective taking (sometimes referred to as cultivating empathy) as a very important part of development work with young people and their families. He also notes, interestingly, that these skills can be transferred across contexts, from the outdoors to home and even shared and taught with other family members.



Reflective Practice and Empowerment

Batsleer (2008) unambiguously states that youth work is about dialogue, enabling 'young people to come to voice' (p.20). She explains how these conversations are the basis of informal learning, and as a result that youth workers are facilitators of learning. Pearse agrees wholeheartedly with this and praises the use of dialogue and reflection as tool on the programme. He describes how the young people are matched with a mentor from the multi-disciplinary team. Each pair engage in weekly sessions of reflective practice to discuss and analyse the programme, family and the general ups and downs of life, linking their experiences on the programme to other areas of their lives. The entire group also come together to engage in a group dialogue that reinforces the partnership and the relationships that are core to the programme. This approach recognises the role of critical dialogue in youth work, linking power and empowerment (Coburn and Gormaly, 2017). In Smith's (2000) analysis of learning theory, he links the social context of the learner to the learning and how they engage with the process. This is closely related to power and empowerment too, where young people may have power in one situation but not in another (Coburn and Gormally, 2008), and if not managed correctly can undermine the intention of the intervention (Oliver, 2010).

Resisting a Standardised Approach

The ever-growing influence of the neoliberal agenda in 'effective' practice has led to increased involvement of the state in targeting and outcome led policies/processes in children and young people's services and resulted in standardised models of practice emerging (Banks, 2017). There are many examples of Youth Work (and other such services) being moulded into agenda's that are problem focused and welfare based rather than educational, developmental and rights based (Devlin and Gunning, 2009) compromising and restricting the experience of the young people and other stakeholders. The Dúshlán programme respectfully (and successfully) resists a standardised approach and embraces quality evidence informed practice placing trust in the expertise of the multi-disciplinary team and most importantly, recognising the young people as experts in their own lives (Mason and Danby, 2011). In choosing to centre the Dúshlán programme on the voice of the young people, rather than on other definitions of outcomes or quality, the Dúshlán team establish a rights-based philosophy and specific approach to the work (Edmunds, 2015). This facilitates a sophisticated linking of professional practice with policy (Spense, 2007) integrating Tusla's policy regarding young people with complex needs, with the youth centred values of youth work and the core principles of Outdoor and Experiential Education. This genuine partnership with the young people and the Dúshlán team embraces a culture and cycle of learning based on parity of esteem and discovery through dialogue (Rodgers, 1957).

Concluding Thoughts

The approach Pearse and his team have taken in the Dushlán programme, capture the fundamental elements of youth work and outdoor education. Focusing explicitly on a rights based approach with the young people creates the environment for meaningful relationships to be built, genuine participation and empowerment. This type of work can be observed in Youth Work and Outdoor Education settings around the country, but can often be restricted in its application, or often not recognised/valued, as a result of organisational systems and structures or funding requirements. The Dushlán programme has pulled away from a 'standardised' model and leaned into decades of research to embrace an evidence informed approach. This approach is successfully engaging 'hard to reach' young people as partners on a journey, with rights and responsibilities. Reflective practice as a core component of the entire programme, guides the young people and the team to situate the experiences and learning through the journey using dialogue, and importantly bringing that learning into other settings. For the young people, it is back to their families, peers, communities and beyond. For the team, it also contributes to ongoing continuous professional development, fine tuning of their craft and recognising progress in often very complex and demanding work environments. Smith (2000) advises, we should focus on the basics of learning and examine it as a 'product and process' (p.2) to resist an overemphasis on outcomes and to avoid becoming 'woodworkers rather than gardeners' (Gopnik 2016 cited in Smith, 2019, p.4). It is the process of learning, through participation and dialogue where empowerment can occur for individuals and groups, which is what we are trying to achieve!

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The Bangor Trail - 'the way that we went'

Orla Prendergast

Orla has lectured in ATU on the BA in Outdoor Education for over 20 years. She teaches a range of environmental , safety, cultural landscape and mountain adventure modules. Mountaineering is her main focus and feels lucky to get to share her love of wild places with students and introduce them to the challenge and beauty of the mountains.

Introduction

"Doing the Bangor Trail" was first introduced as part of the Outdoor Education degree at GMIT, by our much-missed colleague and friend Niamh McGrath back in 2003.

The Bangor Trail is an historic 30km trail in North Mayo and travels through some of the bleakest landscape in the country, skirting the west side of the Nephin Beg mountains, including Slieve Carr, the most isolated mountain in Ireland. In his landmark book, *The Way That I Went*, the Irish naturalist Robert Lloyd Praeger (1937) describes the Nephin Beg mountains as "the very loneliest place in this country, for the hills themselves are encircled by this vast area of trackless bog", and little seems to have changed since then.



Praeger further described this area as a houseless and roadless 200 square miles of "nothing but brown heather" but found the place "not lonely or depressing but inspiring". He wrote, "You are thrown at the same time back upon yourself and forward against the mystery and majesty of nature, and you may feel dimly something of your own littleness and your own greatness...". Today, much of trail is within the Wild Nephin National Park and also within Ireland's first International Dark Sky Park with views of some of the darkest, most pristine skies in the world.

The Trail

Over the last sixteen years, I have done the trail with second year Outdoor Education students during their first three days back to college in September. The trip creates a rhythm and structure to the yearly cycle and reunites the students after their summer break. Over the three days, we travel from Bangor Erris southwards towards Newport. This short article provides some reminiscences of my trips on the Bangor Trail and on how my thoughts and perceptions and those of the students have changed during this time.

From Bangor Erris to Letterkeen, the trail is approximately thirty kilometres in length and could be completed in a day. However, we saunter and explore, amble and examine, identify and record and so, we split it into two and a half days including two bivouacs. This gives time to absorb the full beauty and wildness of the landscape, with no rush or deadlines. The trail has a long history dating back perhaps to the 1500s and was used as a droving route for cattle. It follows the natural contours, and the driest route in an area of vast Atlantic blanket bog. It is one of the last intact blanket bog systems in Ireland and Western Europe and protection of this rare habitat was one of primary reasons for the establishment of the 15,000-hectare Wild Nephin National Park in 1998. There are a couple of ruined farmstead buildings along the route that in the past would have provided shelter and sustenance to travellers. Realising this rough trail was once an essential gateway for farmers into North Mayo, that they would have travelled with cattle in all sorts of weathers, puts our minor hardships and struggles on the trail into perspective. Sean Lysaght's beautiful book, *Wild Nephin* (2020) and the rich store of placenames preserved in the East West map of Wild Nephin help reimagine the people and community of the area. The trail is not a recent creation designed just for walkers but is a deeper layer of landscape. On one trip we were thrilled to find a bench mark chiselled into bed rock about midway on the trail. It was carved by the early OS mappers of the 1800's to mark a height and shows the importance of the trail to warrant a mark and the diligence of the mappers. The area also has a longer history going back to the Neolithic times over 5500 years ago as shown by the discovery in 2016 of a boulder cave burial site by local man Michael Chambers. The cave on the side of Bengorm Mountain near the southern end of trail contains bones dated from that period and is a fascinating site.

The Trek

In essence, the trip is a simple activity. Like any long trek, everything is distilled down to a rucksack. It is all about simplicity and the clear objective. No technical skills are needed, just basic map reading and tenacity. We sleep out under tarpaulins, stripping away the paraphernalia for cooking and sleeping to a minimum. There is a freedom in simplicity, in moving away from our busy lives with the paralysis of infinite choice that is presented to us. There is calm after the exertion of the day on arrival at a camp, just resting, and paying attention to what is there.



There is a sense of creativity and autonomy in putting up the tarp and a sense of pride in a construction that keeps you dry on a wet night. There is a joy in the ancient craft of the bivy, the open air, the breeze, with no enclosure of a flapping flysheet as when camping. There is a calm in feeling drops of windswept rain and seeing the stars from your sleeping bag.

The trail provides clear learning outcomes in terms of bogland and upland ecology, geology, issues of sustainable outdoor recreation management such as trail building and technical skills of packing and cooking. A realisation of the importance of planning and preparation are key learning outcomes. Other learning outcomes are more intangible and personal but equally, if not more important. I take encouragement from Asfeldt and Beames (2017), who argue well-conceived wilderness journeys will present a range of unpredictable experiences that have the capacity to elicit meaningful and enduring learning. They encourage us as outdoor educators, to trust the journey to present opportunities for learning, rather than assuming that we can plan and anticipate specific and predictable educational experiences while "on trip."

*"we don't have prairies,
but we have bogs..."*

The trip can be categorized as suiting the approach of an aesthetic experience. The journey provides diverse opportunities for sensory perception, for re-imagining or re-considering nature and for creating intensive aesthetic experiences. There are certain points along the trail where the view and the horizon are limited. Then on cresting a ridge the vast plain of blanket bog stretching out towards the Atlantic and Achill, is suddenly, dramatically revealed, a huge brown carpeting expanse.

In the words of Seamus Heaney, we don't have prairies, but we have bogs. Listening to bellowing rutting stags in a bivy by the stream while seeing the stars appear from behind fast-moving cloud can mark the first night. Arriving at the lone oak tree beside a sheltered stream is a key landmark of day two. As the only tree for many a mile, surviving grazing and adversarial soil conditions, it is a small leafy oasis.

This store of rich aesthetic experiences are seared into the brain. As described by Lefebvre (2020) those who often go out into unobstructed natural landscapes will be able to remember many incidences of natural occurrences and adventurous situations, which can lead to intensive aesthetic experiences. Suddenly coming across a breath-taking distant view in the mountains, bivouacking on an uninhabited Atlantic Island under a starry sky or contemplating the flickering flames and the embers of a campfire for a long time may serve as examples here. Thinking about the sensory, listening to the quotes of poets, philosophers like Muir, can transform from sensory to aesthetic. "Aesthetic experiences go beyond purely sensory experiences through their urge for reflexion and processing" (Lefebvre, pg.18, 2018). On this trip, completing a written reflection and a Haiku afterwards can help make that step.



The trip provides opportunities to connect with nature, to fall in love with it as well as know its name. Lefebvre (2020) proposes that there is educational potential inherent in what may be regarded as a detour, in searches and in lingering or "dawdling". I think all outdoor educators would agree with that sentiment.

An Oasis of Calm

After the trip, I read reviews/reflections of the trip written by each of the students. These reviews and conversations over the sixteen years seem to show a subtle shift over time regarding the personal impact of the trip. During the first ten years or so, the emphasis of the reflections was surviving the physical challenge of the trip, dealing with the heavy packs, and the rough, boggy terrain. The challenge created a sense of pride, a unity in the class group and a comradeship intensified by a little bit of hardship and misery. There was the giddy reuniting of day one, and many unspoken acts of kindness, sharing, and encouragement. Appreciation of the beauty in the bleakness and wildness of the area and a newfound appreciation of the understated beauty of the bog habitat featured as comments. Trips that were dominated by rain and especially by swarms of midges gave a different perspective, where creating a connection with nature was replaced by a survival mode and getting on with it.

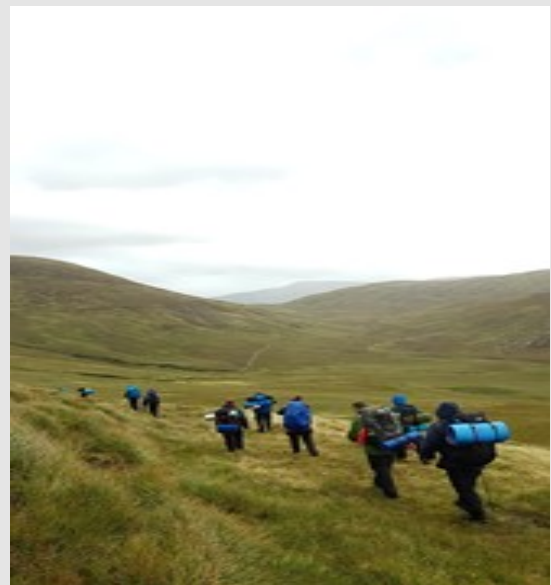
In the last 5 years or so, some new elements emerged such as the trip providing a chance to unwind, relax, and provide a sense of refuge, calm and a relief of being away from the digital. Perceiving the trip as a time of restoration and as an antidote for a stressful life, were very rarely mentioned as features in the early years of the trips.



Could this be because nowadays, we are more familiar with a language describing wellness in nature and realise there exists a well publicised evidence base to support it. The perception and expectation of the stress release we can receive from extended time in nature frame the lens through which we analyse and explain our experiences. The mindset and language are there nowadays to see nature in that light. Surveys such as Price, Smith and Kavalidou, (2019) show an increase in stress levels in students year on year and therefore it is unsurprising that the trail experience is regarded as presenting opportunities to reflect and help manage a more stressful lifestyle.

Local and Simple

Within the Outdoor Education course student folklore, The Bangor Trail has become a rite of passage. Some years, the trip is dominated by surviving onslaughts of midges. Stories of trying to eat breakfast while pulling up the midge net briefly to grab a mouthful and walking fast to create a breeze, get passed on. Learning about the limitations of midge spray and nets dominates conversation. However, overall, the trip is driven by a conviction that it can nurture a deeper sense of respect and of awe for the Nephin landscape. The trail provides countless small moments of learning and realisation, learning that varies from year to year and person to person. The students go on in the following years of the course to do longer expeditions where they take control of all aspects of the planning and design however we start local and minimalist and hopefully launch a desire for a lifetime of exploration, sharing experiences and deep time in nature.



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Meeting the needs of all our children: an exciting future for ETB Outdoor Education and Training Provision.

Stephen Hannon



Stephen lectures on the BA in Outdoor Education in the areas of experiential learning, expeditionary education and facilitation.

When I first started lecturing on the BA in Outdoor Education at Atlantic Technological University (ATU) Mayo Campus the outdoor sector consisted mainly of what were then called the Vocational Education Committee (VEC) Outdoor Education Centres along with some of the larger private centres. In other words, if you wanted to experience adventure or bring young people into nature you would contact an outdoor centre. In the last 25 years the outdoor sector in Ireland has grown and diversified. It now includes a wide spectrum of activities from outdoor therapy to outdoor kindergartens and Forest Schools, and from outdoor focussed youthwork to Burren Beo's place based pedagogy. Both society and the outdoor sector landscape have changed considerably in the 50 years since the first VEC Outdoor Education Centres (now Education and Training Board (ETB) Outdoor Education and Training Centres) were established. In this article, I would like to explore how the recent Review and Strategic Framework for ETB Outdoor Education and Training, might impact on provision for young people.

A Sectoral Review of the ETB Outdoor Education and Training Network

In 2020 a Sectoral Review of the ETB Outdoor Education and Training Centre network was undertaken by Kevin O Callaghan and I on behalf of Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI). This was the first Review of the sector since the 'Rice Report' of 1997 and can be accessed in the ETBI Library [here](#)

The purpose of the Review, as required by ETBI, was to: establish a basis upon which the Outdoor Education and Training Centres and Services (OETCs) could be designated as Centres for Education; identify an appropriate funding model; provide an overview of the sector's performance and inform best practice and policy (Hannon & O' Callaghan, 2020). The Review provided an overview of the Sector (see figure 1) and made recommendations regarding focus and funding.

The primary catalyst for the Review was the realisation that the current self-financing funding of programme provision was not sustainable into the future. The Review noted that the lack of consistent funding had left OETCs vulnerable and dependent on commercial revenue generation to plug gaps in funding and to engage in 'policy surfing' to identify needs from which they could generate revenue. The potential pressure to 'marketise' provision was noted and the Review observed that,

"This 'Resource Dependency' can cause an organisation's activity to shift from targeting those that might benefit most from outdoor education, and may have least access to it, towards those most able to pay. Providing services beyond their marginal cost impacts on the very survival of a centre and can shift the focus and energy of centres away from providing for a public good or service to meeting individual needs." (p.72)

Figure 1 - Main findings of the Review



The Review recommended the importance of communicating the OETCs vision for *differentiated outdoor education*, in other words that the provision offered by OETCs would be significantly different in terms of its educational and developmental focus to provision available elsewhere.

"Fundamental to differentiated provision is communicating how the OETCs are ideally placed to address those multi-disciplinary and cross curricular elements of government policy which are not amenable to traditional pedagogies and which are difficult to address within the confines of a school or Further Education and Training (FET) centre." (p.2)

Any pressure to commercialise provision through a self-financing model can erode the distinctive educational and developmental ethos that the OETCs can provide.

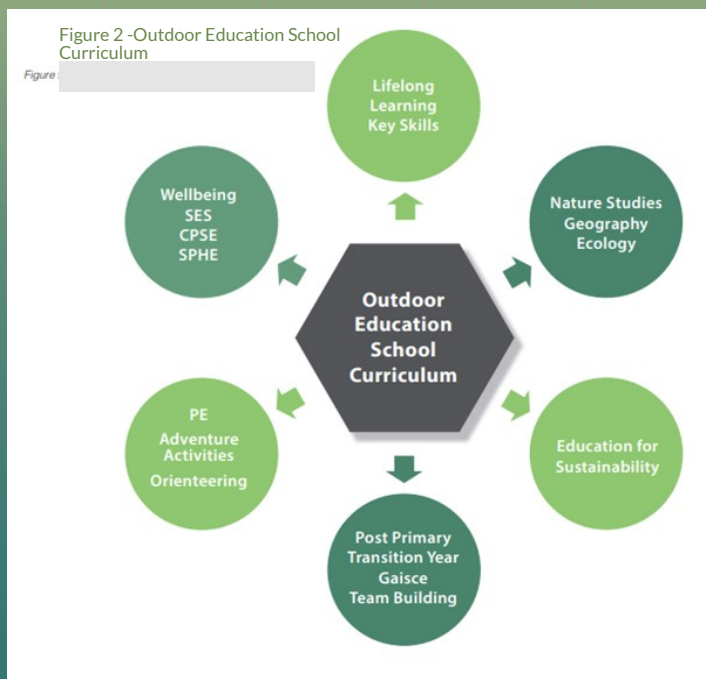
The Review proposed a vision of,

“inspiring outdoor education provision that is lifelong, inclusive of all, sustainable, enhancing of curricular learning and training, connects people to their environment and challenges individuals to reach their potential and to contribute to society”. (p.2)

The Review concluded that the biggest barrier to the continued development of outdoor education-for-all in Ireland was the self-financing model. Having a clear vision can make for a clearer justification of funding. With this in mind the Review was circulated for discussion to an Outdoor Education Working Group and subsequently a Strategic Framework was developed.

A Strategic Framework for the ETB Outdoor Sector

The Strategic Framework, which can be accessed at this [link](#), outlined a vision for how Outdoor Education and Training Centres “can help support the aims of Future FET while providing more focussed provision to the primary and post-primary sector”. The Outdoor Education Working Group concluded that the future of Outdoor Education and Training Provision would be best served under the auspices of FET (Further Education and Training) with the transfer of their staffing, management, core funding and governance moving into the newly formed Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS). Whilst the Framework Strategy had a considerable focus on outlining the role the OETCs could play in supporting education and training in the FET sector it is important to note the role identified in the vision for the OETCs for supporting Primary and Post-Primary learning. The Strategy envisaged that this provision will be directly subsidised (p.20) and identified how the ETB Outdoor Education and Training Centres could support curricular learning (figure 2).



With the transfer of funding to a Department focussed on Further and Higher Education it would be reasonable to consider whether there might be a drift in focus and provision to older participants from the Further Education and Training (FET) Sector. Several questions flow from this consideration; if there was a change of focus in provision would this be important? Is the age that participants are exposed to outdoor experiences important? If exposure to outdoor experiences and outdoor education is important, how can we ensure equality of access to all?

How important is equality of access to nature and outdoor education experiences?

Much of the most recent research speaks in terms of experiences in nature, access to nature or Nature Based Activities (NBA) rather than outdoor education however the terms are so closely related as to make the research relevant. A recent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) survey (EPA, 2021) in Ireland showed that 84% of people say access to nature is important for mental health. Researchers at the Near Project (Nature and Environment to Attain and Restore Health) at National University of Ireland, Galway have found that being in nature makes us feel better, more connected to one another, and helps us to care for the environment (NUI Galway, 2020). Caitriona Carlin of the NEAR Health Project noted that Nature Based Activities (NBAs) “build a sense of pride and purpose” and that connecting with nature “helps us make sense of the world in changing times and help us to feel better” but noted that not everyone “has equal access or opportunity” to make these connections.



The Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland also notes that the outdoor environment “provides a resource that has tremendous potential for supporting the delivery of long-term social and economic transformation” (Sport Northern Ireland, 2014). This report refers to the need to ensure that access to green space and opportunities for enjoying the outdoors must be improved for all sections of the community. Access to green space is recognised as very important for people’s health and especially mental wellbeing, noting how “helping people to be active outdoors in groups or as individuals has proven potential to deliver on the issues associated with social exclusion, rural and urban deprivation and community cohesion”.

Is the age we get exposed to outdoor experiences important?

There is a broad range of research evidence backing the importance of access to nature and experiences in nature but is it important at what age these experiences occur? The significance of early experiences in nature was popularised by Richard Louv’s influential book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-deficit Disorder* (2005). The association between adventure activity, green space, outdoor activities and children and adolescents’ mental well-being is consistently referred to in research (Brymer & Feletti, 2020, Jackson, et al., 2021, Reece, et al., 2021, Zhang, et al., 2020). Studies by Natural England (Natural England, 2016) emphasise the importance of access to nature and they found that more than one in nine children had not set foot in a park, forest or other natural environment over the previous year and that children from low income and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) families were particularly affected.

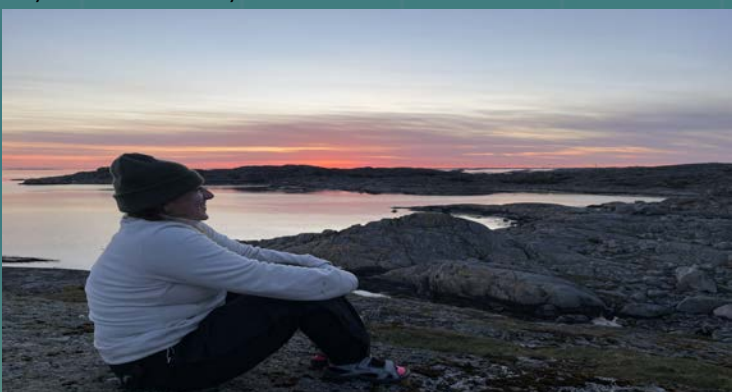
There is also evidence that children with restricted or limited experiences of nature can disproportionately suffer long-term developmental consequences (Kolbert, 2005 cited in Strife & Downey, 2009). It seems reasonable to conclude that experience of activity in nature is important and that this is particularly important in younger participants.

ETB Outdoor Education Provision for all

The role that the ETB outdoor education sector, has played, continues to play, and could increasingly play in improving access to those on the periphery of society to outdoor education is profound. As far back as the 'Rice Report' (1997) specific mention of the issue of inclusion is made in its review of outdoor education provision in Ireland through the network of the then VEC outdoor education centres.

"The Working Group also recommends that special efforts should be made to ensure that socially and physically disadvantaged Groups have access to Outdoor Education. It should not be the domain of those who are in a position to pay an additional premium or to those who are able bodied. A distinctive effort should be made to ensure maximum inclusion for these Groups in the service." (p.110)

The Strategic Framework for ETB Outdoor Education and Training Provision has positively addressed so many of the issues that have dogged the sector in the past and has "outlined the exciting and purposeful contribution that ETB Outdoor Education and Training Centres can play in contributing to and enhancing education and training in Ireland" (ETBI, 2022). Experiences in nature and outdoor education can be particularly significant for those who are socially, physically or intellectually disadvantaged. ETB Outdoor provision has a particularly good record in residential outdoor experiences and recent research has shown the impact such experiences can have on attainment in school and significantly, that this impact is greatest for those pupils who are vulnerable or weaker academically (Dudman, et al., 2019). The Strategic Framework advocated that the future of Outdoor Education and Training Provision was "best served under the auspices of FET....". With this move there will be an inevitable increase in focus by ETB Outdoor Education on participants from Further Education and Training. It is clearly important that any change in provision is not at the expense of younger participants. Adolescents are at a critical formative life-stage where attitudes and behaviours towards nature and exercise are established and the meaningful outdoor education experiences that ETB Outdoor Education provides can have a distinctive impact. The issue of equality of access is one that aligns well to the core values of the ETB (ETBI, 2018) and with the improvements envisaged in the Strategic Framework the opportunity for access to outdoor education for young people and for those at the margins of society should be more possible now than at any time in the history of the outdoor education centres.



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Acronym buster

VEC – Vocational Education Committee

ETB Education and Training Board

FET - Further Education and Training

ETBI - Education and Training Boards Ireland is the national representative body established to collectively represent the sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and promote their interest

OETCs – Outdoor Education and Training Centres and Services



Public Consultation on a National Strategy on Outdoor Recreation

A National Outdoor Recreation Strategy is currently being developed by [Comhairle na Tuaithe](#) (The Countryside Council) in conjunction with the Department of Rural and Community Development. It is expected that the Strategy will be launched later this year.

The strategy will provide a vision and an overarching framework for the growth and development of outdoor recreation in Ireland, creating a shared approach for the many strategies, programmes, agencies and elements in Ireland's outdoor recreation sector.

The first public consultation on this Strategy was carried out in July 2021 and there was a very positive engagement with over 2,100 responses. Heather Humphreys, has launched a second public consultation seeking the views of the public on proposed objectives and actions for 6 key themes.

To share your views on the draft strategy objectives, please click on the link below and complete the online questionnaire.

<https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/NationalOutdoorRecreationStrategyConsultation2>



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