



Adventure revisited: critically examining the concept of adventure and its relations with contemporary outdoor education and learning

Simon Beames, Barbara Humberstone & Linda Allin

To cite this article: Simon Beames, Barbara Humberstone & Linda Allin (2017) Adventure revisited: critically examining the concept of adventure and its relations with contemporary outdoor education and learning, Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning, 17:4, 275-279, DOI: 10.1080/14729679.2017.1370278

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2017.1370278>



Published online: 31 Aug 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 300



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

EDITORIAL



Adventure revisited: critically examining the concept of adventure and its relations with contemporary outdoor education and learning

Were this the mid-1980s and not 2017, this special issue would likely feature papers discussing states of adventure and adventure paradigms. Most of the debates would likely focus on individuals and groups, technical competence and activity, and the physical environment. These would be heated, cutting-edge discussions, of course, and we are indebted to the likes of Mortlock, Martin and Priest and so forth, who gave us the conceptual language with which we could have these debates.

As with all fields of study, however, the debates progress over time. Outdoor adventure education is no exception and its discourses have evolved over the last 30 years at a steady pace. Perhaps the most notable shift is that discussions are looking increasingly beyond the limited dyad of people and activity; we are firmly inhabiting what might be considered a post-Mortlockian era. This era can be characterised by the ways in which people and activity are seen as part of a much larger and complex matrix that pays closer attention to issues of equality, diversity, community, local ecosystems, global migration, technology, climate change and school curriculum, while being influenced by increasing demands for programme evaluation and decreasing financial resourcing. These critical discourses have not only been shaped and influenced by male analysts but also, if somewhat invisible until recently, by the practical and scholarly contributions of the many women in adventure and outdoor education fields (see Gray & Mitten, 2018).

Outdoor adventure pedagogy is firmly located within broader scholarly discourses on 'adventure'. Adventure and its associated concepts transcend disciplinary boundaries and have seen considerable changes and developments during the last few decades. Much discourse surrounding concepts of adventure in the sociological literature has focused on notions of 'risk' and 'edgework' (Lyng, 1990). This has led to the rise of terminology such as 'risky sports', 'extreme sports', 'adventure sports', and 'alternative sport' (McNamee, 2007; Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010) to describe and examine aspects of risk and culture from various perspectives. Some social analysts identify these forms of physical cultures as 'life-style' sport (Wheaton, 2004) or 'nature-based' sport (Humberstone, 1998; Vanreusel, 1995). Thorpe and Olive (2016) prefer the term 'action sport' to represent activities that have some element of risk. This diversity of 'adventures' signifies its depth and breadth, and by extension, the broad reach of adventure pedagogy (see Beames & Brown, 2016).

The papers within this special issue together bolster the position that adventure education programmes that do not respond to the wider socio-cultural, ecological and geo-political circumstances in which they take place leave them educationally suspect. We know that adventures are by their nature subjective and unpredictable. These two factors, in particular, render designing educational adventure programmes for groups of people an extraordinarily demanding task. It is not easy to construct a programme that challenges each participant at an individually suitable level, gives them the power to choose among several courses of action, and which is meaningfully connected to their everyday lives. Further, it is arguable that in an ideal world, conscientious educators will make their programmes accessible to all, place-responsive, and have a low carbon footprint.

We suggest, however, that the above hallmarks are not the most difficult to achieve when it comes to designing adventure education programmes for today's young people. There remains an

unmentioned but dominant feature of social life that has only existed for 10 years and which has a large and relatively unexplored influence on education and adventure practices in general: the mobile, touch screen device.

In the global north, the influence of mobile devices for personal adventuring, educational practices and leisure is nothing short of astonishing. A question that fascinates many of us, but particularly Simon Beames (2017), is the role that technology and innovation play in contemporary adventure education programme design and delivery. Are phones and tablets to be locked away before we venture into the woods with a group of teens? Or, do these devices become part of standard equipment that can be used as information source (e.g. a tree ID app); a way to capture images of ecological phenomena which can be explored further once back in the classroom; and as a method of more deeply understanding navigation and mapping?

Many outdoor educators work with those born between 1995 and 2010. These children have been labelled Generation Z and called the 'most materially endowed, technology saturated, globally connected, formally educated generation the world has ever seen' (McCrindle, 2014, p. 15). Boyd (2014) explains how Gen Zs inhabit a 'networked public' and are rarely without their mobile device, which connects them to others through social media. Mobile devices are a vital and integral part of Gen Z life. Where Prensky (2016) notes that 'the education that we have been universally offering them throughout the world is no longer appropriate for the times in which they and their posterity live' (p. 1), we could justifiably add the word 'adventure' before 'education'. We need kinds of adventure education that respond to the challenges of our time. The echoes of Hahn's voice (cited in Garret, 2016) imploring us to impel young people into experiences where 'they are needed' ring loudly.

Following this Hahnian thread, which is not immune to critique (see Brookes, 2003, 2016), Gen Zs are also largely characterised by decreasing levels of physical and mental health (McCrindle, 2014; Sparkes & Honey, n.d.). Beyond indicators of low batteries or weak wiFi, Gen Zs harbour fears about the future, borne out of watching executions, suicide bombings and devastating wildfires on various media formats. This is a generation of young people that seeks to change the world for the better.

Consequently, there is a need for broader conceptions of adventure education that are much more responsive, not only to the times in which we live but to the children and students who are products of this time. Such conceptions move beyond running a session of 'planks and barrels' on a lawn and thus demands much more from educators and students alike. We owe this to the young people, the communities they serve and which nurture them, and the ecosystems that we inhabit.

Now, on to the papers in this special issue.

In our call for papers, we sought critical texts that might challenge conventional assumptions and explore new ways of learning around adventure. This special issue on adventure contains six papers from a variety of perspectives and countries that do just that. They are diverse and contrasting, particularly in terms of content and methodology.

This issue begins with a paper written by Martha Bell (New Zealand), whose critical sociological perspective challenges adventurers and adventure educators to consider ways in which the nature of Western advanced society and its capitalist structures and ideologies influence the meanings and practices of adventure and adventure education. She explores this through examination of the paradoxes of four cultural sites. Mindful of the global upheavals in the North, which is experiencing a massive movement of people to Europe, she sets the current 'adventure' in late modern time from its historical baseline. Drawing upon significant social theorists of risk and society and recent research in adventure education, Bell asks the reader to build a 'pedagogy of ecologies' in the process of learning. Her work brings a vital, critical perspective to contemporary discourses in the field.

Mike Brown (New Zealand) and Simon Beames (UK) also take a critical sociological perspective critiquing neoliberalism and its influences on society and schooling. Focusing in on adventurous learning, they draw attention to incorporating elements of place- and culturally responsive pedagogy—thus advocating adventures that are educationally relevant and can promote student

agency, where learners can gain mastery through the affordance of progressive, relevant challenges. The paper offers four principles that may help educators re-conceptualise how they incorporate adventure into their educational programmes.

In the next paper, Te-Hsin Chang, Anita R. Tucker, Christine Lynn Norton, Michael A. Gass and Stephen E. Javorski (USA) also consider cultural dimensions but do so from a very different epistemological position. This paper outlines how North American-style adventure programming might more appropriately attend to the needs of clients from culturally diverse societies. The authors argue that facilitators may be unfamiliar with the clients' values and norms, together with social and cultural contexts in which they find themselves working. Consequently, Chang and colleagues draw attention to Hofstede's (2001) five cultural dimensions, which it is suggested provide a basic framework 'to help develop awareness of and assess cultural differences and to guide adventure choices and practices'. To this end, each dimension is accompanied by a set of prompts and questions to be considered by facilitators.

Ivo Jirásek and Ivana Turcova's (Czech Republic) paper is an historical narrative of Czech outdoor educator, Jaroslav Foglar, and the significance his work has had on the philosophy and practice of outdoor adventure education in his own country. The paper draws attention to the cultural diversity of outdoor and adventure education and spotlights the ways in which Foglar's work influenced the form and content of adventure education experienced in the twentieth century in his country. These roots of adventure education from central Europe are examined through documentary analysis of Foglar's writings and provide comprehensive and illuminative insights into a variety of dimensions of outdoor adventure in the Czech Republic while locating them in the broader adventure field. The findings reveal how key themes from Foglar's extensive written work and documented practices have had a profound and enduring influence on outdoor adventure education in the Czech Republic.

In the next paper, Benjamin C. Ingman (USA) draws upon phenomenological 'portraiture' (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to explore and interpret the meaning of adventure for one skilled climber. This methodological approach has emerged from art-based educational research and has many aspects in common with reflexive ethnographic approaches (Coates, Hockley, Humberstone, & Stan, 2016; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Through naturalistic interviews and participant observation, Ingman reveals the adventurer's understanding and meaning making through adventure. He then proffers implications for adventure education practice based on key themes that were revealed from his data.

Finally, Ed Christian, Matt Berry and Phil Kearney's (UK) paper focuses on high-level adventure sports coaching (ASC). ASC is a section of sports coaching which has until recently been under-researched. One of the few existing studies (Collins, Collins, & Grecic, 2015) highlighted the ways in which high-level paddlesport coaches maintain a sophisticated approach to teaching and learning built upon shared common beliefs around (amongst others), the independence of the learner and reflective practice. Unlike most other sports coaches, adventure sports coaches must sustain a high level of skilled performance in order to coach paddlesport in constantly changing water-based environments. In their paper, Christian and colleagues build on extant literature by exploring the beliefs, values and practices of high-level adventure sports coaches who work in either sailing, climbing, mountain biking, skiing or surfing. Findings from the in-depth interviews with the coaches show the ways in which the participants were found to have developed their own coaching philosophy and practices through what is termed an 'epistemological chain'.

The editors wish you good reading within the pages that follow. The featured papers provide a multiplicity of perspectives and challenges to conventional thinking and it is hoped that established practices and taken for granted assumptions may be questioned with the arguments you'll encounter. We hope you find the diversity of philosophical and methodologies approaches provided here of use in your practice and scholarship.

Whilst these six papers reflect current methodological approaches to exploring adventure and pedagogy, there remains much territory that has seen relatively little attention. We encourage

future submissions to this and allied journals that more directly tackle pressing issues under the umbrellas of equalities and sustainability. If adventure education has the capacity to be as powerful as many argue it to be, then surely it needs to be accessible to all and its efforts directed towards addressing some of humanities biggest problems. With this in mind we commend these papers to you. We would also like to draw your attention as contributor or reader to the next special issue: Ageing, Adventure and the Outdoors. (See the extended call for papers.)

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References

- Beames, S. (2017). Innovation and outdoor education. *Journal of Outdoor & Environmental Education*, 20(1), 2–6.
- Beames, S., & Brown, M. (2016). *Adventurous learning: A pedagogy for a changing world*. New York: Routledge.
- Boyd, D. (2014). *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. London: Yale University Press.
- Brookes, A. (2003). A critique of neo-Hahnian outdoor education theory. part one: Challenges to the concept of 'character building'. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 3(1), 49–62. doi:10.1080/14729670385200241
- Brookes, A. (2016). Foundation myths and the roots of adventure education in the Anglosphere. In B. Humberstone, H. Prince, & K. Henderson (Eds.), *Routledge international handbook of outdoor studies* (pp. 11–19). Oxford: Taylor & Francis.
- Coates, E., Hockley, A., Humberstone, B., & Stan, I. (2016). Shifting perspectives on research in the outdoors. In B. Humberstone, H. Prince, & K. Henderson (Eds.), *Routledge international handbook of outdoor studies* (pp. 69–79). Oxford: Taylor & Francis.
- Collins, L., Collins, D., & Grecic, D. (2015). The epistemological chain in high-level adventure sports coaches. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 15(3), 224–239. doi:10.1080/14729679.2014.950592
- Garret, J. (2016). And, above all, compassionate service: Kurt Hahn's service ethic. *Outward Bound International Journal*, 16–25.
- Gray, T., & Mitten, D. (Eds.). (2018). *The Palgrave MacMillan international handbook of women and outdoor learning*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. London: Routledge.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Humberstone, B. (1998). Re-creation and connections in and with nature: Synthesizing ecological and feminist discourses and praxis? *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 3(4), 381–392. doi:10.1177/101269098033004005
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S., & Davis, J. H. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lyng, S. (1990). Edgework: A social psychological analysis of voluntary risk taking. *American Journal of Sociology*, 35(1), 851–886. doi:10.1086/229379
- McCrindle, M. (2014). *The ABC of XYZ*. Bellavista, Australia: McCrindle Research.
- McNamee, M. (Ed.). (2007). *Philosophy, risk and adventure sports*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Prensky, M. (2016). *Education to better their world: Unleashing the power of 21st-century kids*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Rinehart, R., & Sydnor, S. (Eds.). (2003). *To the extreme: Alternative sports, inside and out*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Sparkes & Honey. (n.d.). *Meet Generation Z: Forget everything you learned about millennials*. Retrieved from <http://www.slideshare.net/sparksandhoney/generation-z-final-june-17>
- Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2014). *Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise and health: From process to product*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Thorpe, H., & Olive, R. (Eds.). (2016). *Women in action sport cultures: Identity, politics & experience*. London: Palgrave-Macmillan.
- Thorpe, H., & Rinehart, R. (2010). Alternative sport and affect: Non-representational theory examined. *Sport in Society*, 13(7/8), 1268–1291. doi:10.1080/17430431003780278
- Vanreusel, B. (1995). From Bambi to Rambo: Towards a socio-ecological approach to the pursuit of outdoor sports. In O. Weiss & W. Schulz (Eds.), *Sport in space and time* (pp. 273–282). Vienna: Vienna University Press.
- Wheaton, B. (Ed.). (2004). *Understanding lifestyle sports, consumption, identity and difference*. London: Routledge.

Simon Beames
University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

Barbara Humberstone
Buckinghamshire New University, UK
✉ Barbara.Humberstone@Bucks.ac.uk

Linda Allin
Northumbria University, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK