Outdoor Adventurous Activities, the learner's voice, and learning in, through and about movement.

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Introduction

This paper which has evolved out of a much larger doctoral thesis, explores the value of placing the learner at the heart of their own learning, whilst using the notion of learning in through and about movement as a pedagogical approach. This approach is examined in the context of Outdoor Adventurous Activities (OAA) at a residential camping centre, located on the Essex, Greater London borders in South East England in the United Kingdom. One hundred and sixty children, over a four-year period to date, have taken part in the venture and their views and thoughts are used to illuminate the discussion surrounding the value of learning in through and about movement in the outdoors. In contextualising this research further, we also wanted to revisit the findings of Falk and Dierking from over 20 years ago, and to examine whether young people still felt the same today about their learning in the outdoors, as they did over two decades ago. In 1997 Falk and Dierking wrote

One hundred and twenty-eight subjects were interviewed about their recollection of school field trips taken during the early years of their school education. 34 fourth grade students, 48 eighth grade students and 46 adults composed the group. Overall 96% of all subjects could recall a school field trip. The vast majority recalled when they went, with whom they went, and three or more specific aspects of what they did. Most said they had thought about the field trip experience subsequently, nearly three-quarters said they thought about it frequently. Reinforced by this study were the strong interrelationships between cognition affect, the physical context and social context. Even after many years, nearly 100% of the individuals interviewed could recall one or more things learned on the trip, the majority of which related to subject matter. (1997:1)

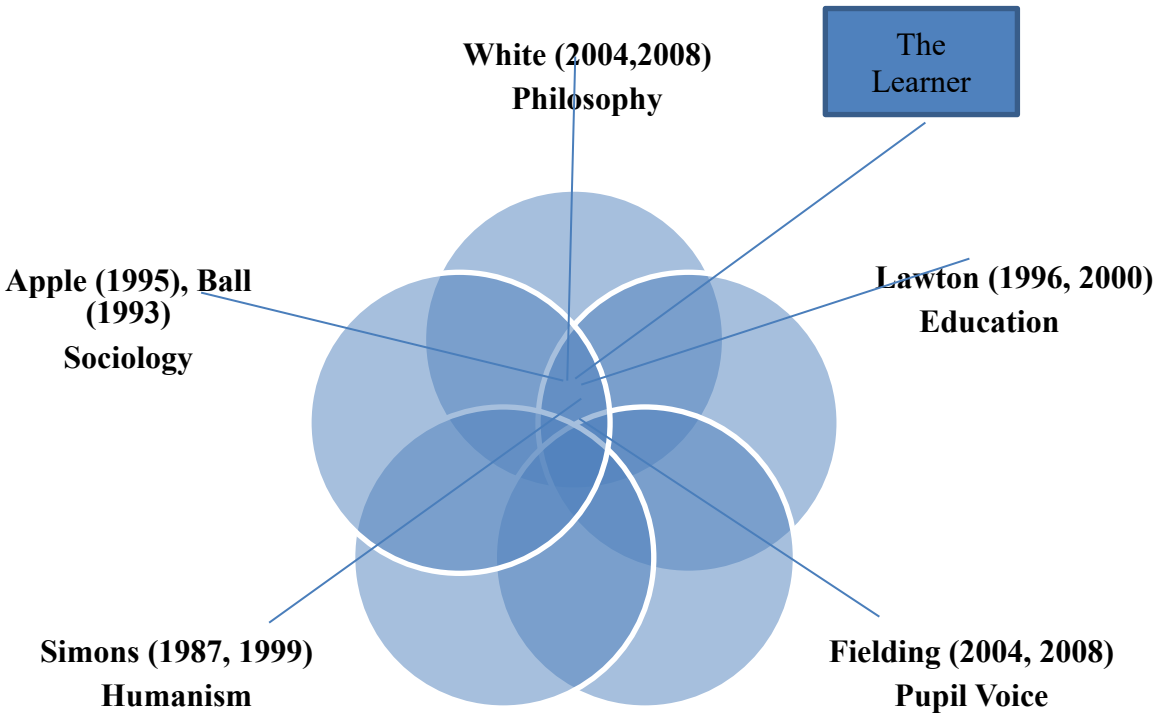
The Learner at the heart of their learning

The notion of the learner as having a key role to play in their own learning (Fielding 2004, 2008), is not a new pedagogical approach, but rather, we contend, we are seeing the concept re-emerging as a way of addressing the tired and dated ideas that learners are often 'blank slates' or 'empty vessels,' 'should be seen and not heard' and learn best through the transmission of knowledge, views commonly held in the early twentieth century. We argue that effective teaching and learning must start with where the learners are at, *not with where the teacher or teaching assistant is at.* In order to do this the learner has to be central to the intended learning outcomes and to be fully engaged with their own learning. The learner must have understanding of what it is that they are learning and why they are learning it.

In Figure 1 below, White (2004, 2007), Lawton (1996, 2000), Simons (1987, 1999), and the sociologists Fielding (2004, 2008) Apple (1995), Ball (1993), have all argued, the learner must be included to a much greater extent in their own learning, if education is to be successful in the 21st century. In a democratic society however one interprets it, the learner has a stake in what is taught, and we raise the questions of *who* and *what* education is for, if the learner is not central to the process? At the heart of White's narrative (2004, 2007), Lawton's (1996, 2000), Fielding's (2004,2008), Simons' (1987, 1999) and Apple's (1995) and Ball's (1993), is a call for imaginative thinking, where the learner is central to their own learning, In summary of their work, White argues that philosophically it would be invidious not to include the learner, Apple and Ball as sociologists argue that as future adult citizens, the

young learners have a vested interest in their education. Simons as a Humanist, in summation of her work, rhetorically asks the question *Why as human beings, would we not want to listen to the voices of our young learners?* Fielding in turn contends that 'pupil voice' is a worthwhile and valuable pedagogical tool in its own right, and Lawton from an educational perspective argues that listening to the learner from their perspective, can only improve one's teaching. *They could not all be wrong could they we wondered?* (And that is not to say of

Figure 1 The Learner at the heart of their own learning Costas (2011)



course, that the educator has to listen to, or act upon everything that is said or shared by the young leaner, but it is the act of actually listening to the learner that is important here.)

As Figure 1 above demonstrates, the selected academic researchers identified by the five rings of the venn diagram all emphatically make the point that the learner needs to be included in the discussion surrounding their own education, even though the academic expertise emanates from very diverse and different academic fields of enquiry. It is the central part of the diagram where all the circles interconnect that we discuss in this paper. The academics argue that in education we need to move away from seeing the learner as a passive recipient of knowledge, and to place them at the heart of their own learning. What we are advocating is not unlike the concept of personalized learning (Zmuda, Ullman and Curtis 2016, and Rickabaugh 2016), but the learners voice is actively encouraged throughout as a teaching tool. Through using movement as an individual starting point and acknowledging the point that we as human beings have learnt to move and evolved to move, we place the learner at the heart of their learning. In short we asked the children what they thought they learnt through movement.

Education in, through and about Movement – The philosophical context

Our body in movement is essentially how we experience the physical world indeed our environments in which the roles of perception and cognition play a significant part. Understanding this relationship or process is highly problematic and not without philosophical difficulties, not least with Cartesian dualism, and how the physical material body, is able to create immaterial thought, feelings and cognition. In his seminal work Arnold (1979a, 1979b, 1988) argued that physical education could offer a three-fold contribution to a curriculum and

carries the potential to educate in, through and about movement. However, as Whitehead has argued for example, ‘Can it ever be proved without a shadow of doubt, the experiences in physical education are significantly responsible for improved cognitive function or the development of enhanced social skills’ (2013:24)? Whilst it is almost impossible to prove unequivocally that experiences in physical education and movement do impact on cognitive or emotional development, and moral education for example, a Monist philosophy and perspective would argue that as human beings, we are all indivisible entities, made up of in Whitehead’s words ‘of a variety of capabilities – cognitive, affective, interpersonal, embodied – that function in concert, mutually enriching each other.’ (2013:29) But, and here is another significant issue, for whilst we do not really understand or are able to show how such capabilities might impact on and enrich each other, nor are we able to identify such processes of how the human physical entity (the body), is able to create unique and individual immaterial thought? In line with existentialist thinking and phenomenologists (Thorpe and Holt 2008, Lakoff and Johnson 1999) who support the Monist concept of ‘human oneness’ or ‘human wholeness’, until we have overcome the initial problem of how a physical material being is able to create immaterial thought, will we ever be able to show how these immaterial capabilities interconnect and ‘mutually enrich each other?’ These questions do not go away easily regardless of our philosophical positioning?

So whilst we cannot say much for certain, what we can do is ask young people, what they think they learn from movement, and add their voices to the debate in order to enrich and

illuminate the discussion, as it is they after all who are the key stake holders in education, and it is their voices that are often conspicuously absent from such discussions.

Learning *in* Movement

The learner acquires new knowledge and understanding *whilst participating* during the game or activity. So, for example the climber has to change climbing techniques as the terrain changes, or the cyclist has to change or adapt race tactics because the original plan is not working.

Learning *through* Movement

In this context, the learner gains a deeper understanding and gains new knowledge indirectly through participation in the game or activity, *as a result of having participated in the game or activity.* The rock climber or skier may increase fitness levels or develop a deeper understanding of performance, application of rules or tactics or even aesthetics.

Learning *about* Movement

Here, the learner develops a greater understanding as a result of studying and participating in the game of physical activity/ The climber has learnt and understands how to deal with oxygen debt while ascending / descending. The rower has learnt and understands that dehydration will severely impact on performance and the need to consume liquids at regular intervals.

As Almond and Myers (2017) have argued, as humans, we are attracted to movement and meaning from the moment we are born. We have a curiosity and a desire to move, to not only make sense of the world, but also to be able to interact and engage with it. As infants, we

move to explore, move to learn, (and how to learn), and move to make sense of our world and environments and to communicate. Movement however we define it, came naturally to all of us, and the idea of using movement and self-regulated learning in a variety of outdoor learning opportunities and contexts, seemed like an ideal place to explore the curriculum, from the learner's perspective.

Methodology

This paper examines the learner's views on what they think they learn by moving. The cohort was made up of four groups, of Year six children, (160 children in total) chronologically aged 10 and 11 years old, from an inner-city north-east London Primary School. The group comprised a mixture of males and females, and cultural backgrounds typical of a 21st century two form entry inner-city London Primary School. The residential visits generally lasted three full days, departing on the Wednesday from the school site and returning on the Friday of the same week. There were two senior teachers and a senior teaching assistant (TA) from the school leading the venture(s), with three further adults present to help and support with the overall cohesion and smooth running of the week, including the catering. Over the course of the week, the children participated in a broad range of activities, including swimming, navigation and orienteering, raft-building, fire-lighting and bush-craft, forest walking and visiting a farm, and learning about simple husbandry. The children learnt new skills, like first aid and then had to apply them to activities, in order to overcome a variety of challenges and to solve problems. Notions of collaboration, and co-operation, whilst being competitive were always present.

Data Analysis and interpretation - An Overview

Taking a 'constructivist – interpretivist' stance, (Geertz 1973, Schwandt 1994, Guba and Lincoln 1994), we have looked at the unique or individual viewpoint, and then endeavoured to construct general 'themes', based on what the individual is saying, to form more general but robust arguments, as opposed to isolated random responses. We have included the voices of the children in this section, and their citations have been included exactly as they were given as a means of capturing the vibrancy, colour and depth of the responses. Through the use of discussion and questionnaires the children's responses have been analysed and used to classify their own learning. In analysing the data provided by the children, we have grouped a sample of the responses and also drawn upon the work of Benjamin Bloom in his *Taxonomy of Learning* (1956) to help us interpret and classify the data that the children shared with us. Notwithstanding the point that there have been a number of interpretations and additions to Bloom's taxonomy since his original work, the taxonomy serves as a very helpful guide in terms of categorising the children's responses, (see for example Harrow 1972, and Dave 1975). In his taxonomy Bloom identified three different types of educational activity, which he called domains of learning. One of the key strengths of Bloom's work is that his *domains of learning* are not unlike the *capabilities* identified by Whitehead (2013) in a Monist philosophy on learning. However, the persisting issue within dualism does not go away, as how precisely does movement (the physical) affect Bloom's *domains of learning* or Whitehead's human *capabilities* (the immaterial)? In short, metaphysically, how can something material and physical, which we can see and touch, that is, the human body, create something immaterial,

which we cannot see or touch, yet emotionally and psychologically exists? Nevertheless, Bloom's domains of learning continue to be helpful here in terms of classifying the data.

a. The *Cognitive,* which he associated with mental skills and were linked to *knowledge.* (Thinking about theirs and others learning in through and about movement.)
b. The *Affective,* which was linked to growth in feelings or emotional areas and associated with *attitudes.* (Feelings about their learning in through and about movement.)
c. *Psychomotor* learning, which was linked to the development of manual or physical activities and associated with *skills.* (Learning whilst *doing* new physical activities.)

<u>Cognitive Learning: (Mental and acquisition of Knowledge)</u>

Child A stated, "I learnt lots of new things like looking at a map to see where you are in a forest, and how to look after animals".

Child B wrote "I learnt different ways to start a fire in the forest, and how to cook something to eat with no pots and pans to cook in, and even find things to eat when you think there is nothing around you".

Child C was clearly influenced by the first aid training that the children did. He emphasised on the questionnaire “I learnt how to help people who are severely injured or wounded, and even onconsciuos (sic), and the First Aid training was very interesting anyway”.

Child D made the point about the First Aid training also, because she stated “it made me think about CPR, and why you tie knots to make a sling to help broken bones get better”.

Affective Learning (Emotion and feelings)

Child E wrote that the one thing she would never forget was “When we were all happy and when we were laughing all the time.” I learnt “to never give up, be healthy and be happy”.

Child F emphasised in capitals “IT WAS PERFECT, nature is wonderful and even the goats were calm, and I loved waking it, and looking after it”.

Child G admitted “It was scarey, when I fell in (the mud), and everybody was laughing, but more scarey was walking in the forest, but I did like it though, I think?”

Child H stated that it “was so much fun and I felt good working as a team, even when we had to do our chores, like cleaning up and tidying our tents.”

Psychomotor Learning (Manual Physical learning)

Child J felt that “it was great that I learnt how to make a fire, because this can keep you alive. The camp fire and the marsh-mellows were great fun, as I learnt to use sticks with no knifes (sic) or forks”.

Child K recorded, “I learnt how to make a raft, it wasn’t easy, but if you took more time it was better, not to rush things and make it secure. I also learnt to be strong when you walk the goat, and not to let it pull you, as they are quite strong, but not as strong as me”.

Child L commented on the Rope climbing course “It was very hard, but I learnt that you have to use your arms and your legs together, and balance, and don’t let people put you off – You have to concentrate, that is something I leant 100%”.

Child M summed up much of the learning across all three domains as she wrote “Apart from the team work, and First Aid, I learnt that you need different techinices (sic) on different activities”.

In the sample of data offered by the children, it suggests that they can play a greater role in their own education and learning if given the opportunity, by giving the teacher or adult precise feedback on what *they* that think *they* have learnt through movement. Moreover, by listening to the earner it potentially raises the learner’s self-esteem, and the very act of listening would help the teacher to assess and evaluate what the child feels that they have learnt. At the very least it is potentially a diagnostic tool. When given the opportunity the children offered and provided a colossal amount of information, some of which as a small sample is included here in this paper. Of the 160 children who took part in this research *all* 160 children completed the questionnaire voluntarily and had agreed to share their views. As (Lawton 1996, 2000, Fielding 2004, 2008 Simons 1987, 1999 Apple 1995, Ball 1993 and White 2004, 2008) all argued so forcibly, it does appear to be the case that there is a mismatch in terms of pedagogical approaches, between a transmission model, and the learner taking an active role in their own learning, by sharing with the teacher what the learner thinks they may or may not have learnt. Moreover, as White argues, the real problem lies in the lack of clarity regarding the basic aims that underpin education. What common goals and aspirations are we

striving for? Should they include the views and active engagement of the learner? Should the learner have a role to play in their own learning? Should the learner be encouraged to enact this role and be given greater responsibility? Advocates like Mullan (2003) argued that an educational system, which focuses on the rights and responsibilities of the learner, will involve the learner in decision making processes in all aspects of their education, and help develop an understanding of *what* and *why* they are learning something. The feedback from the children can be used as an evaluative tool to assess the children's learning from their own perspective in a democratic way, and not just from what the teacher thinks the child may or may not have learnt?

Summary and Conclusion

It has been argued in this paper that as a means of taking education forward into the 21st century, the learner must be central to that the process. Building on our innate relationship with movement as a primary function of what it is to be human, we have argued that learning in, through and about movement can be used to teach a wide range of other related areas of learning. Quite how these 'domains of learning' or 'capabilities' impact on each other remains unclear and unproven to date.

As Harris (2018), and Costas (2018) have argued that whilst some educators might contend that physically active teaching and learning has gained traction in the early 21st century and things might have begun to improve, they contend that for as long as physical education continues to remain only a *foundation subject* within the National Curriculum, the issue will

not dissipate. Although different issues, they are intrinsically related and moreover we raise the twofold question of whether physically active teaching can ever reach the full potential for traction when the subject area continues to be burdened with the lower status of foundation status as opposed to core status within the National Curriculum. Additionally, will the traction be affected should the Primary PE and School Sport Premium not be renewed after 2020? Indeed, vast areas of learning are inseparable and intrinsically linked in the learner's mind (see, e.g, Vygotsky's notion of the transferability of learning skills in Vygotsky, 1962, and Bernstein's conceptualisation of 'weak classification' in Bernstein 1971). It is us, the educators who place boundaries as to when one area of learning starts and another one finishes. Notwithstanding the limitations of our research in terms of the size of the cohort, we did have lots of fun, and in what is becoming an ever-increasing sedentary society, the learners in this context also did lots of physical activity and in their view they learnt much in the process through movement. By way of concluding it is worth making the point that the citation from Falk and Dierking (1997:1) used at the beginning of this paper does indeed seem as pertinent today, as it did over 20 years ago.

To reinforce the point, Child N wrote "I will never forget when my friend fell in the water, and how much fun we had. I learnt about working as a team, doing chores and more about first aid". Child P stated "I will never forget when Child Q fell in the mud, and he did it 7 times and never gave up. And what about the camp-fire and the marsh-mallows?"

Child R explained that 'her choices' of things that she would never forget were "Goat show, rope course, and camp fire, as 1) they were fun, 2) challenging and 3) memories".

Child S wrote “When we were all happy and when we were laughing all the time. I learnt to never give up and you will learn new things, be heathy and be happy”.

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