

Exploring Outdoor Education as an Effective Means Of Experiential Learning In Secondary Schools in Nigeria

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Abstract

Outdoor education acknowledges the necessity of selecting a well deserved place for learning to take place. In this place, students learn directly within their immediate environment and gain knowledge about the physical reality of that environment. Through these means, students learn about the key importance of relationships and respect for the learning and teaching processes. The process begins with personal experience and leads to deep questioning which brings about new ideas and knowledge. This paper therefore discourses the essence of outdoor education for students in secondary school, curriculum in the outdoor classroom setting. It also explains the symbiotic relationship between the outdoor education and constructivist strategy. Some models of experiential learning for outdoor education are also highlighted. Conclusion and recommendations are discussed at the end of the paper.

Keywords: Outdoor Education, Experiential Learning, Exploring, Second Cycle Institution, Effective.

Introduction

Outdoor education is a cultural construct which is thought about and applied in different ways within and between countries. The concept of outdoor education acknowledges the importance of selecting an appropriate place for education as well as a technique or means of learning. In this setting, students learn directly about the relationship of knowledge to the physical reality of that place. This is achieved through environmental, social, and cultural dimensions whereby that which is known have a past, present and future. Through these means students learn about the key importance of relationship and respect for the learning and teaching process.

The relationship between the teacher and learner is characterized by an open minded exchange of views between the two. This is a constructivist pedagogy whereby the learners construct their own views of the world based on personal experience. A second dimension, reconstruction, recognizes that the learner may wish to modify their personal experiences with reference to existing theoretical construct. Lastly, throughout the process reflection, it is sometimes necessary to deconstruct personal and social constructs in order to gain new understandings. The process begins with personal experience and leads to deep questioning.

Purpose of the Study

Purpose of the study is to:

- 1) Develop an interest in environment/recreational and make sure time activities of students.
- 2) Develop in student the sense of personal responsibility toward local environment.
- 3) Stimulate students to appreciate aesthetic of national environment.
- 4) Develop curiosity in student about the wonder of the outdoor world.
- 5) Allow spiritual development and ability in students to express their feelings about the environment.

Concept of Outdoor Education

Szczepanski (2002) define outdoor environmental education as a thematic and interdisciplinary field of education in the natural and cultural landscape. Through thematic studies and activities in the landscape, outdoor environmental education tries to animate the often abstracts concepts of the subject disciplines, and thereby create a local, ecological, historic, physical and social sense of place among children, students and teachers (Dahlgren and Szczepanski, 1997). The ultimate goal of outdoor environmental education and ecological learning, other than to generate knowledge is to develop students' awareness and concern about the whole ecosystem and its associated problems. (Dahlgren and Szczepanski 1998). Direct nature experiments are widely acknowledged to enhance environmental awareness and to foster sympathetic attitudes. It is an essential goal of such educational approaches to produce an environmentally knowledgeable citizenry that is competent and willing to take action (Szczepanski and Ekstom 1993).

Some studies about outdoor education according to Szczepanski (1998) promote a more solid grasp of the concepts than a similar environmental curriculum taught in a traditional classroom setting. Outdoor education, environmental education and nature education, all interrelated terms, are particularly beneficial to elementary students and early adolescents because the activities promote problem solving, risk taking, leadership training, self confidence and teamwork along with the necessary cognitive skills. These characteristics are attributes in which adolescents are still at the stage of developing.

The Curriculum in the Outdoor Classroom

Outdoor education develops knowledge, attitudes and skills across the whole curriculum. It is knowledge about the environment (Heads), developing skills through going out in the environment (Hands) which in turn creates the caring attitudes needed for the environment (Heart). The approach to education was originally proposed by the Scots polymath, Sir Patric Cteddes (Adams 1998). Many aspects of the curriculum especially in science, geography, physical education and art can only be taught effectively through outdoor experience, and the school grounds are the obvious place to start. Teachers need the confidence to use this outdoor classroom but unfortunately the environmental education module in teacher – training courses has disappeared from most UK colleges. In – service courses, therefore are extremely valuable to give teachers the confidence and expertise to develop learning opportunities in the school grounds, ranging from growing and caring for plants to designing and making a solar punared fountain.

Link between Outdoor Education and Constructivist Strategy

Outdoor education and constructivist pedagogy concepts represent a move away from traditional ideas of education and are oriented towards what used to be referred to as the learner or recipients. The link between the two concepts by means of concrete approaches often mentioned is that which the learner already knows in one form or another. Furthermore, they state that, occurring to the constructivist view, the individual himself construct and add to this knowledge by frequent visits to the real world (Dahlgren and Szczepanski 1998).

Models of Experiential Learning for Outdoor Education

Experiential learning is generally concerned with learning that depends on first-hand experiences which connect the learner with real people and real issues. It is often associated with informal education although this is not exclusively so. Furthermore, it is generally considered to be a lifelong process integrating education work and leisure. (Glaserfeld 1995).

Experiential learning according to Jonasson (1991) is based, on the premise that the learner learns best by doing and one of the teaching methods often explored is based on problem solving approaches. In this way experience becomes the catalyst for learning in other key government policy objectives such as citizenship and personal and social education. This means that experiential learning has direct relevance to the transition from secondary school to adult life and enhancing a range of personal and social skills among young people (Kopke 1995).

Kolb cycle model of experiential learning

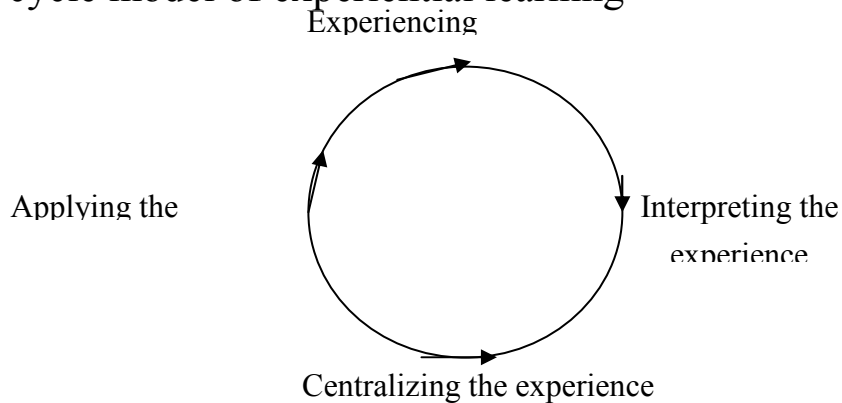


Fig. 1

Source: Kolb (1995)

Kolb's cycle model implies that experience and reflection occur independent of each other, which is challengeable. It does however, provide a framework for thinking about the linkages between different components of learning processes. Consequently, it offers a tool to think about how we work with young people.

Learning Styles (Hong and Mumford models).

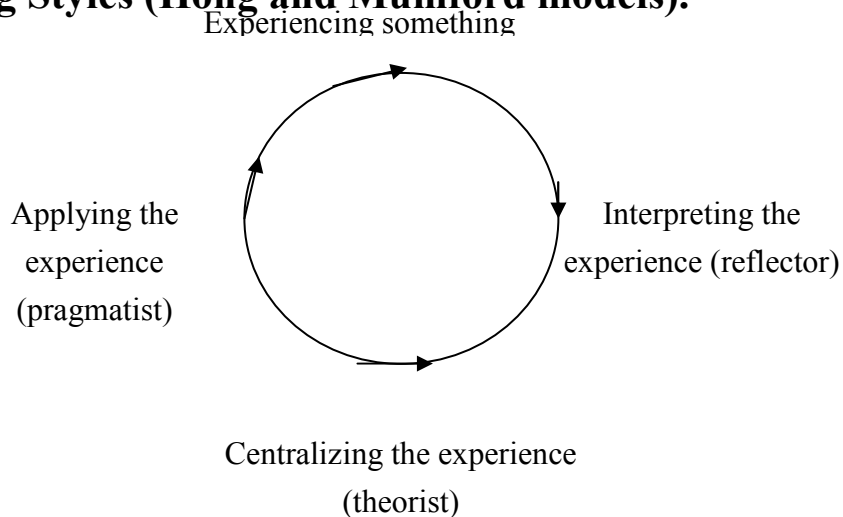


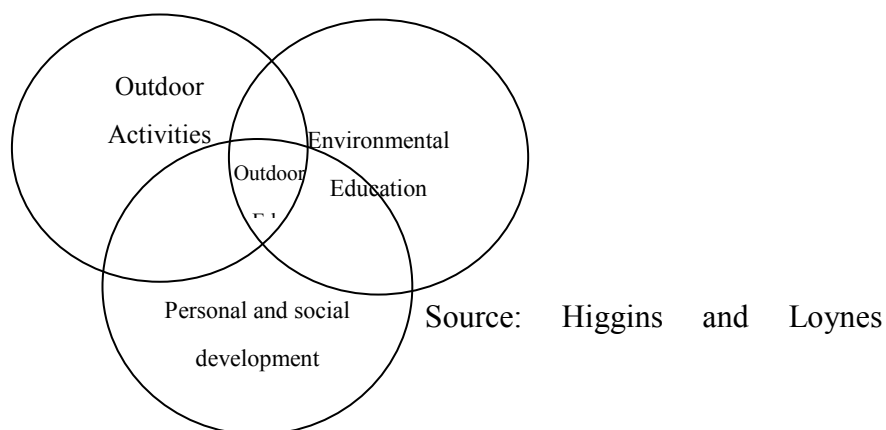
Fig. 2

Source: Kolb (1995).

This model can be used to show that people vary in their preferred style of learning (Honey and Mumford, 1992). It implies that people generally show tendencies towards one particular learning style, that of the activist, reflector, theorist or pragmatist. It is based on both learning cycle and so the “activist is associated with experiencing something, the reflector” with interpreting the experience and so on. Consequently the teacher needs to be aware that desired outcomes may depend on different methods for different people. This is where the models can be useful.

They help the teacher/instructor to become involved in each young person’s learning cycle, allowing them to be alerted at an early stage as to whether their teaching is being effective. This is an extremely important point because it is important to distinguish between teaching strategies (that which the teacher marks the young person to learn) and learning outcomes (that which the young person actually learns).

Range and Scope of Outdoor Education



Dimensions of Outdoor Education

Fig. 3

The relationship between the three dimensions can be seen in the above models of outdoor education. Further understandings can be developed through thinking about concepts such as:

- learning out of doors,
- outdoor learning
- education out of doors
- education in nature
- authentic learning in landscapes.

There are diversity of approaches that lie in different theoretical understandings and practical applications of outdoor education. They include ideas about the cultural and natural heritage, ideas about a sense of place, and how to use the opportunities available to each teacher’s particular situation. The common thing to these ideas is that the teacher and pupils pursue learning outcomes beyond the classroom.

Conclusion

This is not to suggest that outdoor education is a better form of learning than class-based learning. It is to suggest that some learning is better suited out – of – doors and that there are good educational reasons for identifying and capitalizing on these opportunities. In this way class – based learning can be integrated with outdoor learning. From these philosophical underplaying, out – door education seeks to explore the practice of outdoor education in relation to people, place and activity in keeping with the models above.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are therefore made in order to properly develop the curriculum of outdoor education in Nigerian school setting.

- 1) Government should set up a committee that will look into the essence of outdoor education in Nigerian school setting.
- 2) Teachers and students should be enlightened on the importance of outdoor education.
- 3) Teachers should be trained for the purpose of outdoor education.
- 4) Facilities that will aid the proper establishment of outdoor education should be purchased.
- 5) School programme should be properly designed to accommodate the curriculum of outdoor education.

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