The nature and scope of outdoor education in Western Australian secondary schools

Duncan Picknoll

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The Nature and Scope of Outdoor Education in Western Australian Secondary Schools

Duncan Picknoll

A thesis submitted to the University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle, Western Australia
to fulfil the degree of Doctor of Education

2017
Signed Declaration

I declare that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university of higher education, and that to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature: .................................................. Date: ........................................

Duncan Picknoll
Acknowledgements

This thesis was edited by Elite Editing, and editorial intervention was restricted to Standards D and E of the Australian Standards for Editing Practice.

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Definition of Terms

- **Adventures Education**: ‘Activities into which are purposely built elements perceived by the participants as being dangerous. Adventure activities include such things as rope courses, white water rafting, mountaineering and rock climbing, under qualified instruction’ (Ford, 1986, p. 2).

- **Accreditation**: ‘A process recognising that a programme or institution has met certain predetermined standards of operation and that the individuals operating under the programmes guidelines conduct outdoor experiences appropriately’ (Priest & Gass, 2005, p. 6).

- **Certification**: ‘A process guaranteeing that certain minimum standards of competency have been met or exceeded by an outdoor leadership candidate as evaluated by a certifying agency’ (Priest & Gass, 2005, p. 6).

- **Environmental Education**: ‘Education about the total environment. Environmental education is seen as all encompassing, while Outdoor Education is seen by some to relate to natural resources and not include the wide sense of the world environment’ (Ford, 1986, p. 2).

- **Experiential Education**: ‘Learning by doing or experience. Many experiential education activities are synonymous with adventure activities and outdoor pursuits; however, experiential education can also mean any form of pragmatic educational experience’ (Ford, 1986, p. 2).

- **Nature**: *Nature* by definition is ‘a kind, sort or class’ (Oxford Dictionary, p. 576).

• ATAR: ‘Through interaction with the natural world, the Outdoor Education Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) course aims to develop an understanding of our relationships with the environment, others and ourselves, and ultimately contribute towards a sustainable world’ (School Curriculum and Standards Authority, 2015, p. 1).

• Outdoor Educator: ‘A person who is trained in teaching, who takes students into the out-of-doors with the intention to have an educational experience, where by the enhancement of teaching and learning curricula can be achieved’ (Zaurs, 2009, p. xiii).

• Outdoor Profession: The outdoor profession in Australia pertains to the components that have been mapped by Martin (2001, as cited in Zaurs, 2009, p. xiii) and include outdoor education, outdoor recreation, adventure therapy, and corporate management and development programmes.

• Outdoor Pursuits: ‘Generally non-mechanised, outdoor recreation activities done in areas remote from the amenities of telephone, emergency help, and urban comforts’ (Ford 1986, p. 2).
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAS</td>
<td>Adventure Activity Standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACHPER</td>
<td>Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATAR</td>
<td>Australian Tertiary Admission Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCWA</td>
<td>Curriculum Council of Western Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOE</td>
<td>Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSR</td>
<td>Department of Sport and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPE</td>
<td>Health and Physical Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOLRS</td>
<td>National Outdoor Leader Registration Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>OE</td>
<td>Outdoor Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OEA</td>
<td>Outdoor Education Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
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<tr>
<td>PE</td>
<td>Physical Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCSA</td>
<td>School Curriculum and Standards Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>South Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRBWA</td>
<td>Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>WACE</td>
<td>Western Australian Certificate of Education</td>
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Abstract

Outdoor Education (OE) is an important learning area taught in many Western Australian (WA) schools. However, very little is known about its nature and scope, and how its delivery may differ between school sectors. Given the valuable contribution of OE to the holistic development of children and adolescents, it appears to be an under-resourced and undervalued learning area.

The primary aim of this study was to gather data regarding where and how OE was being taught in secondary schools in WA and to compare the findings to similar studies undertaken in Victoria, South Australia (SA), New Zealand and Singapore.

This research used survey methodology and proceeded in three phases. In Phase 1, the main survey tool was developed by piloting the tool with nine secondary school OE teachers, with three from each school sector (Government, Catholic and Independent). The final version of the survey comprised 114 questions, with the opportunity for open-ended qualitative responses in some areas. Phase 2, which was undertaken in 2007, involved the implementation of the survey. It was completed by OE teachers in 51 secondary schools across WA. The responses enabled the identification of where OE was being taught within the school sectors (Government, Catholic and Independent), by whom (including position title, academic qualifications and skill-based certifications), the diversity of programmes offered, the desired outcomes, and the barriers to (and enablers for) programme delivery. In addition, the respondents indicated their intention to deliver the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) Outdoor Education course, which was introduced in 2008 by the Curriculum Council of WA (CCWA), now the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA). In Phase 3, longitudinal data on the uptake of the
WACE Outdoor Education course from 2008 to 2013 were obtained from the SCSA. The delivery of these programmes was tracked to examine how the factors identified in Phase 2 affected the delivery of OE in the school sectors.

The Phase 2 results showed that regardless of sector differences, the key learning outcomes associated with OE related to the ‘self and others’ domain, with improved physical fitness being of least importance in all sectors. The nature and scope of OE varied between school sectors, with underpinning structural, financial and curriculum differences. Significant findings were as follows: 1) The teachers’ academic qualifications and skills-based certifications varied between school sectors; 2) Independent schools offered more compulsory, sequentially developed OE programmes, which were often linked to other curriculum areas; 3) In Government and Catholic schools, OE was taught predominantly as an elective; 4) Key barriers to delivery included competition with other curriculum areas and the time required for teacher training/qualifications; 5) Teachers perceived the value of professional associations as being moderately important, with notable differences in membership existing between school sectors; and 6) All sectors identified the need for support via professional development (PD), resources and increased budget to aid in the delivery of OE.

In Phase 3, the delivery of the WACE Outdoor Education course revealed a major point of difference between the sectors, with over half of the Independent schools not intending to deliver the course. Fewer schools in all sectors planned to implement Stages PA/PB, 2A/2B and 3A/3B, opting instead for the intended transition from the current OE syllabus to the entry-level Stages 1A/1B and 1C/1D. The overall findings showed that: 1) Government and Catholic schools generally met or increased their intentions to deliver the course; 2) Independent schools delivered
fewer stages of the course than they had intended; 3) Stages PA/PB were the least delivered stages; 4) Stage 1 had the most participation; 5) Participation in Stage 2A/2B was approximately half that for Stages 1C/1D; and 6) Participation in Stages 3A/3B was approximately half that for Stages 2A/2B.

The nature and scope of OE varied between school sectors, mainly because of structural, financial and curriculum differences. These factors were amplified by the level of teachers’ existing OE qualifications and certifications, which were affected by the existing barriers. The WACE Outdoor Education course provided an avenue for OE to remain as an elective in Government and Catholic schools and Stages 2A/2B and 3A/3B attracted small numbers, allowing students to use OE to contribute to their Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) for university entry. Independent schools continued to deliver compulsory OE programmes that were sequentially developed across multiple year groups. These results have provided baseline data regarding the delivery of OE in WA schools and may contribute to the future development and advancement of OE in this state.
Presentations


