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

Duncan Picknoll

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Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The external influences and current status of OE in WA secondary schools established in the initial conceptual framework (Figure 1) were investigated. The variations in the nature and scope of OE within different school sectors contributed to the overall delivery of OE in WA in 2007. In the next sections, these similarities and differences are discussed with reference to the two main phases of this research: Phase 2 centred on the nature and scope of OE delivered in secondary schools in WA in 2007; Phase 3 focused on how these affected the delivery of the WACE Outdoor Education course between 2008 and 2013.

5.2 Phase 2: The Nature and Scope of OE in WA Secondary Schools

5.2.1 Overview

OE is delivered in one form or another throughout WA. Its position in a school can be considered to be driven, in part, by the school's policy, principal and the selected curriculum. These underlying drivers are amplified to different degrees, depending on the school sector. In most cases, the results from this study have supported previous findings from similar research in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore regarding the nature and scope of OE within secondary schools.

5.2.2 Policy

All schools in WA are required to adhere to numerous government policies and employ teachers according to the regulations of the TRBWA. This may be a contributing factor for the growth and quality of OE in WA, because unlike Victoria, where the Victorian Institute of Teaching has specialisation areas of teaching, including OE, WA has no prescribed requirements for teaching OE. In addition, depending on the sector, each school is required to abide by policy determined by the
Department of Education, Catholic Education Western Australia or Associated Independent Schools Western Australia. In all sectors, the lack of specific OE teacher registration and the requirements of policy have had an effect on the nature and scope of programmes delivered in WA.

This has been accentuated by the OE-specific qualifications, certifications and registrations for OE teachers, with significantly fewer teachers with these qualifications in Government schools. In addition, teacher comments in Phase 2 of this research regarding adherence to policy provided greater clarity, with teachers in the Government sector commenting that the DOE ‘has abrogated its responsibility’ for teacher training. This highlighted a number of issues. First, teachers in Government schools believed that the DOE ‘should provide appropriate training opportunities’, which should include both pedagogy and skill-based training. Further education becomes complicated when considering the cost of it and when the training is offered.

This finding was supported by the findings of Hamid and Wahid (2012), who concluded that specific OE-skills-based PD was offered at a very low cost, supported by the Outdoor Industry, but had very low participation because it was conducted outside normal teaching hours. Teachers believed that the DOE should offer and fund the cost of both the training and of relief teaching staff. In addition, the DOE Guidelines were considered by one respondent ‘to be above the requirements to teach OE’ and thus increased the demand for external professionals. Comments made by teachers could be interpreted to show a gap in understanding of the current setting of the Outdoor Industry and requirements of the AAS.

Table 4.18 showed that more teachers in the Independent and Catholic sectors were registered with the NOLRS than were teachers in Government schools,
indicating that the latter were the least engaged with Outdoor Industry standards. Some of them considered that maintaining the NOLRS required too much time and cost. The teachers who suggested that registration was well above the knowledge and skills required to teach OE said that additional school support was required to allow them to obtain and maintain currency in skill-specific areas.

5.2.3 The principal

In all school sectors, the principal was the gatekeeper of their school and responsible for making a plethora of decisions on behalf of the students and staff. In accordance with ethics guidelines, the principal in each school was contacted to ask staff in their school to participate in this research project. The low response rate from Government schools could be interpreted as an insight into the initial level of commitment to the inclusion of OE in the curriculum.

It is logical that if a principal appreciates the values and ideology of OE as part of the holistic development of students, then a greater commitment to OE will be evident. In Independent schools, this included a greater budget allocated to OE, the number of OE programmes offered (particularly sequentially across multiple year groups), the willingness to employ specialist trained OE teachers and/or the provision of appropriate PD to ensure the quality of programmes. The greatest barriers to membership in professional associations, including ACHPER, Outdoors WA and external organisations, were the perceived value and cost. This could be influenced directly by the principal’s support in the form of cost of membership and time allocated to attend PD opportunities. School principals, therefore, had an integral role in the volume, type and quality of OE programmes delivered in WA schools.
5.2.4 The curriculum

Almost 60% of Independent schools and 25% of Catholic schools were not committed to the WACE Outdoor Education course and chose to deliver other OE programmes that were developed within their school settings. Schools that taught the WACE Outdoor Education course must follow the syllabus and associated nominal expedition days set by the SCSA. To be governed by one fixed curriculum that was not supported by specialist teacher training could be considered risky for the safety of staff and students and the outcomes of OE, and ultimately could restrict the growth of OE in WA.

These political, ideological and curricular factors had an effect on OE in all school sectors, contributing to a number of key barriers and resulting in differences in the nature and scope of programmes being offered.

5.2.5 The nature and scope of OE

In 2007, regardless of school sector type, OE was offered as a curricular, co-curricular or in some cases, a stand-alone compulsory educational experience. The separation between curriculum types created a key point of difference between school sectors and was further dependent upon whether a programme was offered as an elective or as a compulsory part of a student's education. In the majority of Government and Catholic schools, OE was positioned within the HPE curriculum. This highlighted the issues identified with the TRBWA, the DOE, the school principal, teacher training and the WACE Outdoor Education course. Education policy determined that schools were required to deliver a nominal amount of both Health and PE, but no such time allocation was afforded to OE.

Regardless of how OE was offered, the perceived learning outcomes were consistent across school sectors. Development of self and others was the most
important outcome, followed by an understanding of the environment, and although OE was positioned within the HPE learning area, physical activity and fitness were rated as the least important outcomes of participation in OE programmes. This finding raises two major points. First, and most importantly, it highlighted that OE was recognised by teachers for the unique contribution it can make to the development of the self and relationships with others and the role it can play in developing understanding of and sustainability for the environment. Second, what seemed to be missing was the understanding that OE can offer students an opportunity to participate in physical activity in a non-competitive environment. For example, learning skills associated with bushwalking or canoeing/kayaking may provide the basis for lifelong participation in physical activity and foster an appreciation of the outdoors, and with it the recognised benefits of physical and mental well-being.

It can be argued that the nature and scope of programmes between school sectors was also affected by significant differences apparent in the OE tertiary qualifications, skills-based certifications and registrations of teachers. This was most evident in the Government sector, in which OE was located within HPE and was taught predominantly by PE-trained teachers. This situation has occurred over time, as there was no requirement from the TRBWA for OE teacher training and the minimal OE offerings in WA universities at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

In addition to the education of teachers, a number of other barriers had an effect on the differences in inclusion and delivery of OE between school sectors. These included the financial differential, varying teaching loads and associated field-
based programme delivery, the perceived importance of OE in the school, practical activities used to achieve outcomes, and cross-curricular linkages.

5.2.6 Structural differences between school sectors in the delivery of OE

The school structure and the decision to include OE within various forms of curricular, co-curricular or elective-based OE opportunities were determined primarily by the school sector type, which was linked to the budget allocation. Most Government and Catholic schools offered a curriculum from Years 8 to 12, whereas Independent schools predominantly offered a K-12 curriculum and mostly delivered OE across Years 6 to 10. This approach enabled a greater sequential development of programmes, whether curricular, co-curricular or as an elective. Independent schools delivered the most Year 8 programmes as a compulsory part of the curriculum. In comparison, Government schools offered fewer compulsory programmes and more than half did not offer any OE in Year 9. The majority of schools in all sectors delivered programmes in Year 10, with Independent schools offering the greatest range of programmes but also charging the most, highlighting their financial advantage. Government schools offered the greatest number of OE programmes in Years 11 and 12 as part of the WACE Outdoor Education curriculum post 2007; Independent schools offered the least in these year levels, as they did not offer the WACE Outdoor Education course. Teachers attributed this to their school’s decision to focus on the academic achievement of students to achieve a competitive ATAR.

5.2.7 Financial differences

In addition to school structure and the choice of curriculum, it was evident that a significant financial differential existed between school sectors, which directly influenced the nature and scope of OE programmes offered. Independent schools had higher fee structures and a significantly greater OE-specific budget. Financial
advantage also allowed Independent schools to offer the Duke of Edinburgh's Award more, and only Catholic schools engaged with Outward Bound.

5.2.8 Teaching load and field-based programme delivery

The percentage of OE in teaching loads and the number of allocated field days reflected a difference in the nature of programme delivery between school sectors, which could be attributed to the choice of curriculum and the expertise of teachers. The number of teachers employed in full-time OE varied across the sectors. Independent schools predominantly employed specialist OE teachers, which was highlighted in teacher titles, academic qualifications, certifications and specific registrations. Although Government schools reported the highest number of OE teaching staff, this was not in a full-time OE teaching role. This was evident when considering the number of hours spent each week teaching OE. Most Government schools taught fewer than 10 hours per week, which was not sufficient for a full-time teaching load. The teaching of OE was spread within the HPE Department and often taught by teachers trained to teach primarily Health and PE. Teachers in Catholic schools were more likely to have a full-time OE teaching load than those in the Government sector. Only Independent schools delivered OE for over 30 hours per week, which represented true full-time OE teaching load.

The data regarding the delivery of the WACE Outdoor Education courses also provided a difference between sectors, with most of the content being taught within a regular school timetable. The number of field days required to deliver programmes reflected the WACE Outdoor Education course expedition component, which was determined to be three days and two nights in duration. However, Independent schools that did not deliver the WACE Outdoor Education course offered a significantly higher number of expedition-based programmes, with teachers
in some cases spending as many as 100 days per year in the field, reflecting the OE philosophy that OE should be taught in the outdoors and required a significant commitment from the school regarding timetable flexibility, financial support and staffing expertise.

5.2.9 Perceived importance of OE in the curriculum

OE was offered by all school sectors; however, there were differences in how OE programmes were offered within a school’s curriculum. If OE held a place of high importance in the school, it was more likely to be a compulsory part of the curriculum, be sequentially developed over a number of years and be taught by specially trained OE teachers. In both Government and Catholic schools, OE was not offered as a compulsory educational requirement, was not part of a co-curricular programme and was delivered as an elective only.

There were four main influences affecting the way OE was viewed in the schools: the DOE, the principals, the OE teachers and the school sectors.

5.2.9.1 DOE

An apparent misunderstanding at the Government level regarding the importance of OE in the school curriculum (see Appendix A) seemed to have filtered down to the school principals and teachers. This is particularly evident in the view that Physical Education teachers are adequately trained to deliver OE programs. In addition the passing of responsibility to ACHPER to support the training of OE teachers is misdirected. The intention of the 1990 WA HPE Guidelines (see Appendix B) was that OE would have a sequentially developed curriculum and would be recognised as a separate learning area. However, the DOE did not seem to recognise the place of OE in the current HPE curriculum, giving it no specific compulsory time allocation.
Some of the greatest barriers to the place of OE in schools were competition with other curriculum areas, the time required of teachers, and low staffing levels. To reduce these barriers, the DOE could provide greater structural support, including the allocation of sufficient funds to enable appropriate PD for current teachers, coupled with the employment of more staff in Government schools with specific OE qualifications. The DOE needs to advocate OE as a subject that requires specialist teaching status to the TRBWA. This political change of status would overcome a major hurdle to changing the perceived importance of OE in our schools.

5.2.9.2 The principal

The principal of a school has a major influence in determining what curriculum is taught. If a principal has an understanding of OE ideology and is willing to allocate specific curriculum time, offer compulsory OE across multiple year groups, be flexible in timetabling, provide an adequate budget for OE for programme delivery, employ staff with specific OE qualifications and allow appropriate PD for staff in school time, then OE would have an increased importance. Many of these enablers were already present in Independent schools.

5.2.9.3 The OE teacher

Government schools had fewer teachers with specific OE academic and skill-based training. The more highly trained OE teachers were choosing to work in other school sectors. Although the survey used in this research did not include questions to investigate why this was the case, it could be argued that OE-trained teachers who had a greater understanding of the underpinning ideology of OE were attracted to schools that also valued and placed greater importance on OE within the curriculum. Consequently, these schools offered a greater scope of programme and opportunity for OE specialist teachers.
If the DOE and school principals do not advocate for the growth of OE, then tertiary institutions may need to lead with both undergraduate and postgraduate offerings. This poses an issue regarding undergraduate training. If there are limited job opportunities for OE specialists, then to educate future teachers in this area could be deemed morally wrong. As OE remains positioned within HPE, it seems logical to offer some OE-specific units to HPE students, but this further perpetuates the undervaluing of OE. However, given the lack of OE-specific qualifications, university undergraduate degrees must include the appropriate theoretical knowledge and practical skills to teach OE effectively, from basic programmes to more sequentially developed programmes and the more academically developed stages of the WACE Outdoor Education course.

The delivery of postgraduate courses in OE in WA has proven difficult, as previous attempts have not been supported by teachers, resulting in the archiving of OE degrees. Additionally, other OE PD opportunities have not been supported by teachers. The results of this research showed that teachers, particularly in Government schools, required greater support in PD, resources and finance to undertake further education and skills-based certifications. However, teachers failed to engage in opportunities. This poses a dilemma for the DOE to decide whether attendance at PD opportunities, including participation in workshops and conferences offered by Outdoors WA, ACHPER and other professional organisations, should be compulsory. Independent schools showed a greater commitment to PD and teachers therefore were more involved in it.

5.2.9.4 School sector

The perceived value of OE varied between school sectors. This was evident when comparing OE-specific budget, staffing and time devoted to OE programmes.
Independent schools were clearly advantaged in all areas, with the exception of their later engagement in various stages of the WACE Outdoor Education course. In general, a lack of understanding of the learning area by school principals and the underlying issue of teacher registration with TRBWA, who did not endorse specialist teaching areas, affected the place of OE in the schools, particularly the Government schools.

5.2.10 Key learning outcomes of OE

Although the nature and scope of OE programmes varied greatly between sectors, the key learning outcomes identified by teachers were similar, which could be viewed as acknowledgement of OE within the curriculum. The three most highly rated outcomes were associated with personal development and social outcomes: improved social relationship with peers, increased cooperative behaviour and increased personal responsibility. These outcomes reflected the historical development of OE in WA.

OE was originally accredited by the Secondary Education Authority as a subject and throughout the 1990s, it was part of Personal Development Studies, until the introduction of Outcomes-based Education. As noted earlier in this document, in 1999, OE was rewritten into the Curriculum Framework, which resulted in it being placed within the HPE learning area. While this curriculum change was pivotal and has had a significant impact on the place of OE in WA schools, the learning outcomes of OE have remained consistent. In 2000, the CCWA stated that the OE course promoted the development of the individual and group through developing leadership qualities and ‘creating a sense of responsibility for self, others and the natural environment’ (Curriculum Council Syllabus Manual, 2000, p. 117). In 2008,
the WACE Outdoor Education course maintained a similar rationale and associated outcomes, which are similar to those in other Australian states and other countries.

To provide a comparison with similar research, Table 5.1 shows the information presented earlier in Table 2.1 alongside the results from this study.
### Table 5.1

**Identified Learning Outcomes of OE (Rankings) for Victoria, SA, New Zealand, Singapore and WA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching learning outcome</th>
<th>Victoria Lugg &amp; Martin</th>
<th>SA Polley &amp; Pickett</th>
<th>New Zealand Zink &amp; Boyes</th>
<th>Singapore Martin and Ho</th>
<th>WA Picknell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal development</strong></td>
<td>Group cooperation (1)</td>
<td>Cooperation (6)</td>
<td>Group cooperation (1)</td>
<td>Group cooperation (2)</td>
<td>Increased cooperative behaviour (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased responsibility (2)</td>
<td>Personal responsibility (1)</td>
<td>Increased self-responsibility (5)</td>
<td>Increased self-responsibility (3)</td>
<td>Increased responsibility (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved self-esteem (3)</td>
<td>Improved self-esteem (3)</td>
<td>Improved self-esteem (2)</td>
<td>Improved self-esteem (5)</td>
<td>Improved self-esteem (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social skills (4)</strong></td>
<td>Social interaction (4)</td>
<td>Social and communication skills (6)</td>
<td>Social and communication skills (4)</td>
<td>Social and communication skills (4)</td>
<td>Improved social relationship with peers (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership skills (5)</strong></td>
<td>Leadership skills (5)</td>
<td>Leadership skills (8)</td>
<td>Leadership skills (8)</td>
<td>Leadership skills (8)</td>
<td>Enhanced critical-thinking/problem-solving skills (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group (8)</td>
<td>Problem-solving skills (7)</td>
<td>Enhanced critical-thinking/problem-solving skills (6)</td>
<td>Critical-thinking skills (12)</td>
<td>Increased personal resilience (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relations with staff (2)</td>
<td>Critical-thinking skills (12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching learning outcome</th>
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<th>SA Polley &amp; Pickett</th>
<th>New Zealand Zink &amp; Boyes</th>
<th>Singapore Martin and Ho</th>
<th>WA Picknoll</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environment and sustainability</td>
<td>Environmental appreciation (6) Environmental knowledge (7) Human–nature relationship (8)</td>
<td>Environmental appreciation (9)</td>
<td>Environmental knowledge and appreciation (9)</td>
<td>Enhanced knowledge of outdoor environments (11) Understanding of human relationships and responses to nature (9)</td>
<td>Improved relationship with nature (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental action (11)</td>
<td>Environmental action (12)</td>
<td>Environmental action (13)</td>
<td>Environmental appreciation (10)</td>
<td>Involvement in environmental conservation (12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and skills of an outdoor activity</td>
<td>New skills (7)</td>
<td>Safety knowledge (4)</td>
<td>Provide an alternative to classroom-based learning (7) Outdoor survival skills (13) Extended learning in a range of discipline areas (12)</td>
<td>Increased knowledge and values (8) Improved academic performance (9) Physical fitness (13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survival skills (9)</td>
<td>Survival skills (10)</td>
<td>Recreation/leisure skills (11)</td>
<td>Recreation/leisure skills (11)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation/leisure skills (10)</td>
<td>Knowledge (10)</td>
<td>Physical fitness (11)</td>
<td>Physical fitness (14) Outdoor recreation/leisure skills (15)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In all studies, the most important learning outcomes were related to personal
development, the environment and sustainability, and gaining of knowledge and
skills for the outdoors. Some differences could be attributed to the intention of the
research conducted in each setting and the terminology used to describe outcomes.
For example, in Singapore the term ‘increased personal resilience’ was the highest-
ranked outcome. This is not surprising given the country’s key national education
directive promoting the value of resilience for students, which was to be a key focus
for the future development of OE in Singapore. Group cooperation was reported
consistently to be of very high importance, with the exception of SA, where the
importance of group cooperation was lower and the relationships with staff were
higher. Outcomes associated with personal responsibility and self-esteem were
ranked highly as well, followed by leadership and problem-solving skills.

Outcomes associated with the environment and sustainability were similar in
all studies. In Victoria, environmental appreciation and knowledge was ranked the
highest, possibly because of the specific focus and associated naming of the
curriculum as Outdoor and Environmental Studies. In most cases, the transference
between understanding of environmental knowledge and environmental action were
not prioritised or capitalised upon, with conservation activities rating the lowest
when compared to all environmental outcomes. In SA, Polkey and Pickett (2003)
noted that although environmental outcomes were of reasonable importance, they
were not necessarily achieved through the teaching of OE.

In WA, teachers from all sectors rated improved physical fitness as the
lowest expected outcome for students participating in OE programmes. This finding
was consistent with Lugg and Martin (2001) and Polley and Pickett (2003), who
reported that outcomes associated with knowledge and skills of an outdoor activity,
including fitness, survival skills and recreation/leisure skills, were of least importance. It could be argued that attempts to highlight the distinct learning outcomes of OE may have resulted in development of physical fitness being undervalued or simply overlooked.

This low ranking for physical fitness is a concern. Through participation in outdoor pursuits, students have the opportunity to participate in and develop physical fitness in a less competitive learning environment. For many students, this may be more attractive than participating in traditional sport and may provide the incentive for continued participation in physical activity for the rest of their lives. This requires further investigation, for a number of reasons. First, in the majority of schools, OE remains situated within the learning area of HPE. Second, the HPE curriculum promotes physical activity and an active lifestyle, which contributes to overall well-being and lifelong participation. Third, the role of OE in contributing towards long-term participation in physical activity is less defined. Jelley (2009) showed that physical outcomes achieved in extended OE programmes were more significant than those achieved in PE. Perhaps the attempts over the years to highlight the uniqueness and differences between OE and PE, to secure the place of OE in the curriculum, have led to the substantial physical benefits of OE to overall physical well-being becoming somewhat diminished, undervalued and underused within the HPE learning area.

In New Zealand, Zink and Boyes (2006) identified that outcomes associated with Tikanga Maori (Maori customs and traditions), data gathering, analysis and spirituality were of least importance. The consideration of cultural awareness was absent in the other studies, although it may be represented in the environment and sustainability domain as part of developing the human–nature relationship. There
seemed to be a missed opportunity to develop cultural awareness, understanding and the value of past culture within OE, which could be easily linked to other learning areas. In WA, a number of teachers in Independent schools commented that they incorporated aspects of Aboriginal culture in their OE programmes, but specific detail on the content, how this was done and the outcomes achieved were not investigated. Further consideration of this important aspect of education could provide an opportunity for the growth in all OE curriculum forms.

Of interest in WA, the outcomes associated with knowledge, values and improved academic performance were rated slightly higher than in the other studies. This indicated the value placed on OE in the WA curriculum and may explain why Independent schools supported the inclusion of sequentially developed programmes. In addition, this could have contributed to the recent inclusion of OE as an ATAR subject, which acknowledges that the academic rigour that can be achieved is comparable to the more traditional learning areas. Martin and Ho (2009) noted that academic-related outcomes have not been consistently investigated across all studies. Recognition of the value of OE in assisting academic performance (Brannan et al., 2003) may provide valuable support and a pathway for the growth of OE in schools in WA.

5.2.11 Practical activities used to achieve outcomes

Many practical activities were used to achieve the OE learning outcomes. It was clear that the choice of practical activities was directly related to barriers such as timetable restraints, the availability of staffing, staff training, budget, equipment and access to local environments. Bushwalking was the most commonly utilised pursuit, which is not surprising given the low cost and level of expertise required to deliver the associated content. Independent schools had more students involved in roping.
scuba diving and snow skiing, which could be attributed to available budget and staff expertise. Government schools had the highest level of student participation in snorkelling, which could also be linked to the lower costs, timetabling restraints and required qualifications of teachers. Clearly, the practical activities used to achieve the OE outcomes showed that teachers were working within the parameters of their school sector and individual skill level.

5.2.12 Cross-curriculum linkages

With appropriate school support and teacher creativity, OE was being linked to other curriculum areas, particularly in Independent schools. Links with PE were most common, although teachers in Government schools reported consistently that OE was not incorporated into HPE. This was interesting, given that in most Government and Catholic schools, OE was included in the overarching learning area of HPE; this could be a further example of the underlying misunderstanding of OE and its curriculum positioning.

Independent schools often integrated OE with a number of learning areas, particularly Society and Environment. It appeared that Independent schools valued the contribution of OE more highly, as well as the use of outdoor learning in a whole-school approach. This could have been because of their curriculum structure, particularly their compulsory programmes and the volume and flexibility to design the curriculum outcomes of programmes specific to the school’s needs and the associated teaching expertise of staff. Both Government and Catholic schools reported very little incorporation of other learning area outcomes and in most cases, only specific OE outcomes were taught within the classroom and excursions. The success of the shared approach to education and the role that OE can contribute to
other curriculum areas requires further investigation and may hold the key to the
growth of OE in WA schools.

5.2.13 **Key barriers to the growth of OE**

Table 5.2 provides a comparison with similar research, with the results from
this study added to the information that was presented earlier in Table 2.3. While an
obvious difference in the use of terminology and categories of barriers used in the
survey tools is evident, some comparisons were possible.

Table 5.2

**Barriers (Rankings) to the Delivery of OE in Victoria, SA, New Zealand and WA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>New Zealand</th>
<th>WA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Costs of programme (2)</td>
<td>Cost (1)</td>
<td>Costs of programme (1)</td>
<td>Cost (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>Finding appropriate staff (1)</td>
<td>Availability of staff (4)</td>
<td>Finding appropriate staff (6)</td>
<td>Staff support (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expense of updating qualifications (13)</td>
<td>Training/ qualifications of staff (2)</td>
<td>Expense of updating qualifications (9)</td>
<td>Training/ qualifications of staff (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff–student ratios (3)</td>
<td>Staffing levels (8)</td>
<td>Staff–student ratios (11)</td>
<td>Staffing levels (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands on staff personal time (7)</td>
<td>Time required of teachers (5)</td>
<td>Demands on staff personal time (3)</td>
<td>Time required of teachers (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paperwork/organisation (10)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Paperwork (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff absences (5)</td>
<td>Staff absences (16)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Lack of resources (9)</td>
<td>Resources (e.g., transport, equipment, etc.) (3)</td>
<td>Lack of resources (10)</td>
<td>Administration support (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching aids/resources (11)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timetable</td>
<td>School inflexible timetable (4)</td>
<td>Timetable (6)</td>
<td>Inflexible school timetable (13)</td>
<td>Timetable restraints (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crowded curriculum (14)</td>
<td>Competition with other curriculum areas (7)</td>
<td>Crowded curriculum (2)</td>
<td>Competition with other curriculum areas (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size (15)</td>
<td>Class size (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Barrier</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>WA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>Risks involved in practice (12)</td>
<td>Risk concerns/fears of litigation (9)</td>
<td>Risks involved in practice (7)</td>
<td>Risk/litigation concerns (10)</td>
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<td>Emphasis on safety and standardisation (17)</td>
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<td>School rules (17)</td>
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<td>Perception of value</td>
<td>School perceptions of OE (6)</td>
<td>Undervalued curriculum area (13)</td>
<td>School perceptions of OE (12)</td>
<td>Undervalued curriculum area (6)</td>
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<td>General school support (10)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lack of student interest (16)</td>
<td>Parental support (14)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location and access</td>
<td>Limited access to practice venues (11)</td>
<td>Location of school (12)</td>
<td>Lack of suitable venues (14)</td>
<td>Location (13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student absence</td>
<td>Student absence from school (8)</td>
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5.2.13.1 Cost and staffing

Cost of programme delivery was the major issue identified in Victoria, SA and New Zealand, but it was not seen as a predominant issue in WA. However, it should be considered that part of the overall cost of a programme must capture the expenses associated with the training of staff and maintenance of qualifications, which were considered major barriers in both SA and WA. All studies showed that the time required of teachers was a considerable barrier, which ultimately is a cost. Interestingly, both Victoria and New Zealand included demands on personal time, noting that teachers can be on duty for 24 hours over several days for many expeditions, as well as being away from their homes. In addition, personal time may be a financial factor associated with initial staff employment, particularly if OE specialists are employed, and create issues of staff burnout, noted in the Victorian and New Zealand research as staff absences.
5.2.13.2 Timetable

In WA, the highest-ranking barrier was competition with other curriculum areas. This competition was also seen in New Zealand (but not in Victoria) and was in most cases linked to issues with inflexible timetabling. Although the barrier was considered high by teachers in Independent schools in WA, most still prioritised compulsory OE within their curriculum. It is worth noting that the crowded curriculum issue was addressed in the Independent schools by using cross-curriculum linkages, which would show the contribution that OE can make to a whole-school approach.

Given the year of each survey, it is evident that the issue of a crowded curriculum developed as a barrier over time. Increasingly, schools and their teachers have been asked to include more and more content into the curriculum. Given the lack of perceived importance and value placed on OE, the time allocated for it has been reduced. Other contributing factors could be the increasing choice of elective subjects within schools, a restrictive OE curriculum, and that OE may not be prioritised in the whole-school approach.

5.2.13.3 Support measures

The three most important support measures noted by all sectors were the provision of appropriate PD, resources and increased budget. Teachers in Government schools felt the greatest need for PD, as there was a lack of specific skills and qualifications among the staff expected to deliver OE programmes. However, a major concern was that when given an opportunity to engage in PD, particularly skills-based training, teachers from the Government sector failed to participate. This was evident in the Outdoors Western Australia 2012 Industry Training Initiative Research Report, (Hamid & Wahid, 2012). Although the cost of
this training and assessment was heavily subsided and endorsed by the DOE, it
attracted only a very small number of participants from the education sector. The
content and implementation of this opportunity was considered and, after
consultation, was offered in the last week of the school holiday period. This outcome
highlights two main issues. First, PD needs to be offered in normal teaching time and
second, teachers need to be willing to commit to PD opportunities in their own time
as well. Further education opportunities, such as postgraduate university courses,
were viewed as being of least importance for further teacher PD. This was evident in
the low numbers of students who enrolled in the Graduate Certificate, Diploma and
Masters OE courses offered at the University of Notre Dame Australia, which led to
the eventual closure of these degrees.

5.2.13.4 OE opportunities for students with special needs

Most schools provided for students with special needs to participate in some
form of OE programme. The Catholic and Independent schools tended to include
students who required educational support into existing programmes; Government
schools provided additional opportunities for participation in specially designed
programmes. This was probably because of the specialised educational support
structures in these schools.

The WACE Outdoor Education course, which included PA/PB units, was
designed to provide an introduction for participation in the outdoors, with a focus for
students who were disengaged with school or had special educational needs.
However, the PA/PB courses attracted the lower level of intended and actual student
participation across all sectors. Potentially, this could be attributed to the low
number of students represented in this group, but it may also indicate a greater need
for suitable OE programmes for these students and associated teacher PD regarding the content and teachers’ ability to deliver these units.

The greatest barriers to inclusion in all sectors were staffing levels and the associated time required of teachers. Independent schools were least concerned with risk, had greater administration and parental support and viewed inclusion of these students as a more valuable undertaking.

Support measures required to include students with special needs in OE programmes are similar to those identified in this research for mainstream OE. As described by Berlach and Chambers (2011) the meaning of ‘inclusivity’ is a problem that could be considered even more difficult given the increased demands of the outdoor learning environment. However, as proposed by Forlin (2004), many tools could assist in this process of inclusion, but they have not yet been adopted into mainstream OE. According to Forlin (2004) and Forlin et al. (2008), appropriate PD to support teachers in the process of inclusion is required and it should include the development of a range of coping strategies to provide optimal conditions for success.

Smith (2004) suggested that the inclusion of students with special needs is often problematic in the PE learning area and that these students are often simply integrated rather than included in mainstream PE classes. PE teachers tend to include traditional team games that exclude many pupils with special needs, rather than facilitate the inclusion of them. OE, which is most commonly located in the HPE curriculum for most WA schools, appears to be an overlooked opportunity to address this issue. Brodin and Lindstrand (2006) concluded that inclusion is easier in outdoor environments because the facilitation of learning in the outdoors is based on concrete reality. The different nature of OE and associated outdoor learning outcomes means
it is logical that OE can contribute positively, in a more inclusive way, to the education of these students and the wider school community.

Brodin (2009) noted that inclusion in OE is still a distant concept, given the lack of educated staff and the current financial climate. If the inclusion of special needs students is seen as important to the educational setting and wider community, then engagement in outdoor learning would provide valuable support for the place of OE within a curriculum for both typically developing and special needs students. According to Fox and Avramidis (2003), OE is a missed opportunity, as it is an underused, powerful tool for promoting inclusive practice and has great potential to decrease the risk of exclusion for students with special needs.

5.2.13.5 Tertiary qualifications held by teaching staff

Unlike Victoria, where the Victorian Institute of Teaching has specialisation areas of teaching, which include OE, in WA the TRBWA has no set requirements for teachers of OE. As a result, OE teachers were employed under various titles, depending on the sector. As OE is offered as part of the HPE curriculum in the majority of schools, a HPE-trained teacher is often deemed to have the appropriate knowledge and skills to teach OE. This anomaly between states highlights a lack of understanding of the learning area and an unrealistic view of the knowledge and skills-based attributes required of teachers of OE by key policy makers. This further affects tertiary education opportunities for growth and undervalues the role of OE in contributing to the curriculum and the long-term well-being of students.

In WA, as with Victoria and SA, most OE teachers held a Bachelor of Health and Physical Education, (Lugg & Martin, 2001; Polkey & Pickett, 2003). In WA and Victoria, teachers in Independent schools held a greater number of OE-specific tertiary qualifications, compared with the Government and Catholic schools. Fewer
teachers in WA held specialised OE qualifications or postgraduate degrees, particularly in the Government sector. This lack of teacher training could have been a limiting factor in the growth of WACE Outdoor Education. Polley and Pickett (2003) also reported:

As South Australia has not had a Graduate Diploma in Outdoor Education since 1991 and nor is there a Bachelor of Arts in Outdoor Education, the higher number of PE teachers conducting outdoor education compared with Victoria (Lugg, 2001) is easily accounted for. (p. 16)

5.2.13.6 Skills-based certifications and registration held by teaching staff

Most teachers of OE in Australia and elsewhere acquire a range of qualifications, such as senior first aid, a bus driver licence and bronze medallion (pool or surf). These skills are expected for teaching PE and are generally considered appropriate for teachers of OE. In WA, more OE teachers in Independent schools had training in additional areas such as wilderness or remote area first aid, a registration with the NOLRS in bushwalking (or equivalent), and roping, kayaking, sea kayaking and swift-water rescue. Zaurs (2009) found that in WA, most (65.3%) teachers held no specific land-based pursuits or water-based certification/registration (59.7%). In Victoria, Lugg and Martin (2001) found that most teachers held only qualifications in first aid, a bronze medallion and/or surf bronze, and possibly canoeing and bushwalking. In SA, most staff held senior first aid and some level of activity-specific training (Polley & Pickett, 2003).

This limited range of qualifications and certifications could be linked to the scope of programmes currently being offered, but could also identify focus areas required for the growth of OE in WA. Of greater importance is that programmes requiring only minimal skills-based certification or registration may be offered
where there is a lack of appropriate teacher training, outside the benchmark standards of the AAS and other specific sector guidelines for outdoor activities. An example of this could be seen when examining the number of students participating in canoeing, the equipment owned (in this case, canoes) and the lack of certification/registration of the teachers delivering these programmes.  

5.2.13.7 Risk and safety

Safety and legal issues were directly linked to barriers such as cost and staffing ratios. Although teachers in Government schools indicated the greatest concern for risk/litigation, they also had the lowest skill certification/registration and engagement in PD. In 2009, Zaurs reported, ‘In general, many felt that experience was more important than qualifications but that training and education was important’ (p. 16). The Independent and Catholic schools who employed teachers with appropriate OE training relied on teacher expertise to ensure the safety of the students and reduce the risk to the school. It was felt that training bodies did not give enough recognition for previous experience and courses were too difficult to access. 

This situation raises the issue of adherence to policy. The introduction of the Australian Quality Training Framework, which was driven by Outdoors WA, led to the development of the AAS to serve as benchmark standards for the Outdoor Industry, of which OE is a part, and includes the NOLRS to register individuals. Both the AAS and NOLRS are now included as part of the DOE Guidelines. All Government schools are required to follow the DOE Guidelines and Independent and Catholic schools have their own sets of guidelines or standard operating procedures. The synchronisation between the industry standards and the education sector requires multiple pathways for teacher recognition. To date, this has not been fully resolved.
Regardless of the success of this process of registration, it highlights the impetus for schools, particularly in the Government and Catholic sectors, to consider the need for outdoor-pursuit-based qualifications to adhere to benchmark industry standards and specific sector guidelines. There is no policing of teacher registration or adherence to guidelines in the NOLRS, other than by the school principal, who is primarily responsible for their school’s practice. Knowingly or unknowingly, principals may be employing teachers to deliver pursuits for which they are not adequately trained. This again raises the issue of teacher preparedness in undergraduate university degrees, as the TRBWA does not have specialisation areas and the DOE does not support PD opportunities for current teachers. Failure to adhere to industry standards, policy and guidelines places unnecessary risk on teachers, students and school principals. A shared responsibility between the industry, employer and employee should be established and maintained, to minimise the risk and support the growth of OE in WA.

5.2.13.8 PD opportunities

Teachers with a degree in HPE and limited OE-specific training were predominantly teaching OE in the Government schools, whereas Independent schools and to a lesser extent Catholic schools were more likely to employ teachers with specialist OE undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications. Specific OE PD opportunities have been offered regularly in WA but with low participation by teachers. It is of underlying concern that teachers, particularly in the Government sector, do not engage with appropriate OE offerings, including skills-based training, workshops and conferences.

This situation has arisen, in part, because there are limited opportunities for OE teachers to be trained formally in the tertiary education setting within this state,
which has resulted in the dominance of HPE teaching degrees and a gap in sufficient
OE teacher preparation. WA has not followed the Victorian-mandated requirement
of specialist teaching areas, which ensures that undergraduate teaching degrees have
specific OE requirements. This has resulted in limited support for OE in the tertiary
setting. The University of Notre Dame Australia currently offers a Bachelor of
Outdoor Recreation, consisting of 10 specific OE units, and the Bachelor of Health
and Physical Education degree has two compulsory OE units. Recently, the Bachelor
of Health and Physical Education has included two additional OE units, to allow
students to specialise in OE. A further two units can be added for a Minor and eight
units for a Major in OE. Edith Cowan University also offers six OE units and the
University of Western Australia offers two OE units.

Alumni records show that approximately half of the students who graduated
from the Bachelor of Outdoor Recreation chose to complete a Diploma of Education,
some immediately and others after a year or two of freelance outdoor instructor
employment. Most recently, a small number have elected to enter the Master of
Education, which is anticipated to be a compulsory requirement for teaching from
2017 when entering from an undergraduate degree. This may create issues in
attracting students into the Bachelor of Outdoor Recreation degree, as a student who
intends to teach will require five years of tertiary education, whereas a student
enrolled in the Bachelor of Health and Physical Education degree completes four
years of tertiary education, with a Minor or Major in OE if desired. The Bachelor of
Outdoor Recreation has no capacity to include HPE units within the degree, so most
students select Science or Humanities and Social Sciences as their minor teaching
area. Students from both degrees are gaining employment across all school sectors,
with Bachelor of Outdoor Recreation students being more likely to be employed in Independent and Catholic schools that offer greater OE opportunities.

Postgraduate training was the least desired support measure for teachers, which may explain why postgraduate OE degrees offered at the University of Notre Dame Australia between 2007 and 2011 were archived owing to the low student enrolments. PD training was seen as more valuable, even though skills-based training alone has been poorly attended. A logical progression to build the profile of OE would be through the development of undergraduate degrees. As more teachers with OE qualifications enter the teaching profession, the offering of postgraduate OE qualifications may again be considered. This gap in OE teaching in WA has been the result of many years of HPE-dominated tertiary education, affected by Government policy, curriculum changes and a lack of timely advocacy.

5.2.13.9 Professional association affiliations and memberships

In WA schools, the Teacher Registration Act 2012 requires teachers to be registered with the TRBWA. To gain registration, a teacher must be qualified appropriately. However, what is deemed qualified appropriately in relation to OE is not clearly articulated, with historical evidence showing that a degree in HPE is seen as appropriate. As previously discussed, the TRBWA has no set requirements for the teaching of OE, unlike the Victorian Institute of Teaching, which has specialisation areas of teaching that include OE. Adequate training in Victoria consists of one year of study in OE, which includes environmental studies and outdoor recreational activities and a current First Aid Certificate (Emergency First Aid Level 2). A lack of understanding and enforcement in government bodies regarding the knowledge and skills necessary for OE teachers in WA has resulted in sector differences in
teacher training, qualifications and certifications, particularly within the Government sector.

OE teachers placed a greater value on services provided by external organisations to assist them in providing the necessary support of additional casual specialist staff for specific OE activities. Although the employment of external specialists can be considered good for the Outdoor Industry, it highlights that this easy solution to meet the needs of programmes continues to perpetuate the core issue of appropriate teacher training and associated PD. Registration in the NOLRS and accreditation with organisations such as Australian Canoeing were highest among teachers in Independent schools. Engagement with professional associations such as Outdoors WA, ACHPER and Australian Canoeing remains underutilised.

Approximately half of the teachers from all sectors were members of ACHPER, which is not surprising given that OE is positioned under the HPE learning area and therefore PE teachers are more likely to engage with ACHPER than Outdoors WA. Membership with Outdoors WA was highest in the Independent schools, which was likely due to underlying sector differences, the nature and scope of programmes, support from the school’s principal and the willingness of staff to engage in PD opportunities. Membership with these professional organisations shows that ACHPER may well represent HPE but may be failing to represent OE sufficiently, while Outdoors WA better represents OE but is not supported by the majority of HPE teachers in the Government and Catholic sectors.

Teachers who were not members noted that these associations were not considered valuable and particularly in Government schools, financial constraints were an issue.
5.3 Phase 3: WACE Outdoor Education

5.3.1 Overview

The participants in the initial 2007 survey were asked whether they intended to deliver the WACE Outdoor Education courses in 2008, its first year of implementation, and if so, what stages. The responses from teachers in all sectors were similar.

5.3.2 Initial intention: Study schools

Few schools in this sector planned to implement the PA/PB and the 3A/3B courses, indicating they were less committed to the lower- and upper-end offerings of the syllabus. PA/PB units were intended for students disengaged with school and/or had learning difficulties; however, only a small number of schools offered specific OE programmes tailored to the needs of these students. Most schools planned to include these students in the existing mainstream OE programmes. In additional, the low intention level could reflect the relatively small number of students for whom these units were designed.

The WACE Stage 1 course was initially the most attractive option for most teachers, as it provided a simple transition into a new curriculum model and an avenue for schools to continue offering OE within their school setting. The curriculum provided clear structure, content and assessment requirements for teachers. The Stage 2 and 3 courses were viewed with reservation. Many teachers took a wait-and-see approach before encouraging their respective schools to commit to these ATAR offerings. Primarily, teachers were concerned to see how the content would be refined, what PD opportunities would be available to ensure the underpinning knowledge was understood and what resources would be available to support the teachers. A recurring issue of great concern was the ability of the courses
to produce a competitive ATAR for students intending to use OE for entry into university.

5.3.3 Delivery of WACE Outdoor Education: All schools

The data showed that the delivery of the WACE PA/PB course remained low. Participation in Stage 1 was the greatest, particularly in Government schools. From 2008 to 2013, there was a slight decrease in the delivery of Stage 1A/1B, 1C/1D remained constant, 2A/2B steadily declined and 3A/3B increased. These trends were similar to those identified in the Study schools.

Stage 2 courses across all curriculum areas, including OE were heavily scaled to differentiate between the stages, to ensure students who studied the highest level Stage 3 curriculum were appropriately rewarded. Over a number of years, it became evident that Stage 2 courses were unable to produce a competitive ATAR and as a result, the SCSA restructured the courses as General and ATAR for all learning areas including OE.

Even though WACE Outdoor Education was taught in all school sectors, it was predominantly taught in Government and Catholic schools. This was probably due to government policy, the school structure and decisions made by the principal regarding support for OE. The learning outcomes associated with OE remained consistent, with very few changes made to the WACE Outdoor Education course.

The cross-curricular and whole-school approaches to OE that were present in Independent schools were not utilised by schools who delivered the WACE Outdoor Education course. A lack of participation in professional associations and PD opportunities, particularly among teachers in Government schools, could have been a contributing factor in the level of uptake and actual delivery of the WACE Outdoor Education courses.
The WACE Outdoor Education course has allowed OE to remain within the curriculum of schools but it has not been embraced at an ATAR-level subject. Its positioning within the HPE curriculum has resulted in OE being offered predominantly as an elective only, without the set compulsory time allocation that is afforded to Health and Physical Education. Consequently, the WACE Outdoor Education course has maintained a presence for OE and promoted the academic rigour that can be achieved when teaching OE as an ATAR subject but overall, has done little to develop the nature and scope of OE taught in secondary schools in WA.

5.3.4 The Australian Curriculum: An update

These findings should reignite the debate for appropriate teacher training and the place of OE in the curriculum. Many years have lapsed since this research project began and political changes have resulted in another major curriculum change. The Australian Curriculum has retained OE within the learning area of HPE and in 2014, the OEA released a draft paper *Advice on Outdoor Education in the Australian Curriculum* and described how to organise and deliver OE to address the objectives of the Australian Curriculum. The *Review of the Australian Curriculum: Final report* (DET, 2014) suggested that teacher preparation should be increased, as well as the implementation of outdoor excursions. It stated, ‘Greater emphasis needs to be laid on outdoor activity in this learning area’ (p. 207).

5.3.5 Strengths and limitations of this study

This study is the first to undertake a comprehensive survey of the nature and scope of OE in WA. The resulting detailed baseline data can now be considered when mapping the delivery of the learning area, particularly given national curriculum changes.
A limitation is that the findings were limited by the low response rate of 15.3%. This seems to have been a common issue in similar school-based studies. The SA survey was addressed to the OE or PE coordinator and returned a higher response rate of 63% from 225 surveys. It was also completed by principals, with a 49% response rate, thus resulting in an overall rate of 56%. The Victorian survey attracted a response rate of 31% and in New Zealand schools, the response rate was 14%, which was attributed to a short time frame for the survey and limited piloting.

There were several reasons for the low response rate for this project. First, acquiring direct permission from school principals for their staff to be involved was a major obstacle, as school principals receive numerous requests to be involved in research opportunities. This researcher timed the request carefully, but if a principal was not supportive of OE and its place in a holistic education, the request was declined. Government schools recorded the lowest response rate of 9.6%, possibly because of the directive from the DOE for schools to work to rule and not participate in opportunities outside core business. Second, once the survey reached the relevant teaching staff, they could choose whether they would participate. Given the low response rate, particularly from Government schools, the attitudes of OE staff needs to be addressed if future research is to be conducted in the school setting. However, for Phase 3 of the study, which examined the delivery of WACE Outdoor Education course, data were provided from the SCSA for all secondary schools and comparison with the state data for All schools and the results from the Study schools collected in Phase 2 showed no significant differences. This indicates that the information provided by the Study schools and findings could be representative of the whole state.