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REA

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF REFLECTION IN THE PEDAGOGY OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION

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This paper seeks to examine the veracity of claims that Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning can be applied to outdoor pedagogy and can help to explain the efficacy of outdoor educational programmes. Exeter (2001) has adapted Kolb's four stage cycle specifically for the outdoor professional and included the "transfer of learning" as an adjunct to the original. Hattie et al. (1997) tentatively suggested a four-stage model, which might explain the striking effect gains found in their meta-analysis. There appears to be congruence between this model and the Kolb/Exeter cycle. Research undertaken during a case study in July 2003 set out to investigate the role of the reflective process in the experience of 20 participants aged between 14 and 18. All were UK nationals from three schools in the south of the country. The expedition was over land and sea from southern UK to Iceland, via the Faroe Islands, and had the twin objectives of mapping glacial movement in the Klængshóll area of northern Iceland whilst enhancing the personal and social development of the participants. The group camped throughout and their activities included mountaineering and glacier walking, providing opportunities for the quality of experience and experiential challenge referred to by Hattie et al. (1997). The methodology involved semi-structured interviews of the participants during the expedition. Participants were asked about their thoughts following mountain experiences and how they felt they had benefited from individual activities as well as from the expedition as a whole. Three of the leaders were also interviewed. These questions focused upon pedagogical approaches used in the field. The findings indicate that the amount of immediate quality feedback given by the leaders was sparse, and that leaders made little or no attempt to encourage, facilitate, or enable reflection on the part of participants. With a few exceptions, the participants did, however, engage in reflective thought about what they had been doing and the holistic benefits of the expedition. Some of the participants stated overcoming personal challenges amongst the benefits of the activities. Most cited benefits in terms of social development rather than skills or personal development. The findings suggest that Hattie et al's (1999) model does little to explain the pedagogy within this expedition. There was, on the other hand, evidence of reflective learning from the participants. This leads to a number of important questions, which beg further research into this area.

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