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Adventure and learning in a changing world

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Principal points

- Definitions of adventure are not fixed
- 'Narrow' views of adventure require high levels of control - restricting learners' ability to display agency and to take responsibility
- Key features of the contemporary world
- Adventurous learning – four features: uncertainty, agency, authenticity & mastery
- How we can use these features to guide our practice

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Adventure

- **In education is associated with uncertainty of outcome, risk & danger.**
"inherent in ad ed is the inclusion of activities and experiences that often include elements of danger or risk and uncertain outcomes" (Ewert & Garvey, 2007)
- **In recreation 'adventure' is associated with problem-solving, developing/testing skills, social interaction, excitement, achievement, control & agency** (Brymer 2010; Kane & Tucker, 2004)
The logic that adventure & risk are inseparable is flawed.
"it does not follow from the fact that risk is a necessary component of adventure sports, that it is the main point of such sports, or that this is why people participate in them" (Krein, 2007).
- **Tourism is associated with thrill & excitement** "tasting the heroic... without taking all the necessary risks" (Holyfield, 1999).

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'Narrow' adventure

Adventure is a commodified product where students are positioned as consumers (Rubens, 1999).

Characteristics: short time frames, high thrills, minimal participant effort, almost no responsibilities

'Broad' adventures: long timescales, varied challenges, sustained effort demanded, increased responsibilities for decision-making granted to students (Rubens, 1999).

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Meanings of adventure

- Individually and culturally relative
- Multiple meanings = 'adventure' is too vague to be used in education without detailed investigation of what constitutes an adventure.
- Need to reconceptualize adventure and learning in rapidly changing times.




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So what?

- Outdoor Ed has (arguably) become yet another domain of rationalization. Production line programming and predictable outcomes.
- Narrowing of the curriculum.
- Much outdoor education teaching replicates the power differentials of the class-room (expert knower – novice).
- Focus on technical competence, required to run activities involving risk, denies students opportunities to develop creativity, to experiment, to think outside the box, and to learn by trial and error.
- Social justice – if OE is thought of in terms of activities requiring technical expertise - who are the 'winners and who are the 'losers'?

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Need for different answers



We suggest that there are several questions that require 'different pathways to answers' than those we are currently providing.

How can we better prepare students for an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world?

- New technology, global crises; more-& more, faster & faster (Elliot & Urry, 2010)
- Risk culture (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991)
- Daily life is increasingly complex (Morrison, 2008)
- Neo-liberal agenda. Education is increasingly shaped by market forces (information, standardized testing)

How can we assist students to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty?

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How can learning be more adventurous?



Qualities of adventure can help to equip young people with the tools to thrive in a constantly changing world.

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Adventurous Learning



Redefine adventure based on four dimensions:

- **Authenticity** (keeping the activities real)
- **Agency & responsibility** (ensuring that learners have the power to shape what is learned and how it is learned)
- **Uncertainty** (being willing to move away from rigid and prescribed processes and allow creativity in finding solutions)
- **Mastery through challenge** (helping learners develop applicable knowledge and skills)

Adventurous learning isn't defined by activities or discourses of risk management - it's starting point is learning and the social backdrop of 21st century learner

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Uncertainty



- Outcomes and processes are not fully predictable: Tasks offer multiple possible courses of action — there is not one right answer
- Elicits creative responses from students imagining solutions, refining ideas, putting them into practice (Robinson, 2011)
- Deep reasoning and innovation is required
- Draws on Aristotle's need to practice reasoning and moral decision-making (see Stonehouse, 2010), Dewey's Indeterminate situation (1938), Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance (1957)

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Agency



- Students have the power to influence what is learned and how it is learned
- Key is teachers providing appropriate 'autonomy support'
- Students need to be given the 'right' kinds of choices: *relevant, not too many, and cognitive* (rather than organisational) (Assor et al., 2002; Stefanou et al., 2004)
- Facilitators need to allow criticism and encourage independent thinking (Assor et al., 2002)
- Draws on Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1987)

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Authenticity



- Concerns what is 'real' and encountered in ordinary life experiences
- Starting point is the inherent curriculum: *What can be learned here?*
- Responds to place and community
- Does not rely on contested notions of transfer of learning between greatly differing contexts
- Draws on Dewey's *Criteria of experience* (1938/1997) and Dewey's 'process of living' rather than 'preparation for future living' (1897)

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Mastery

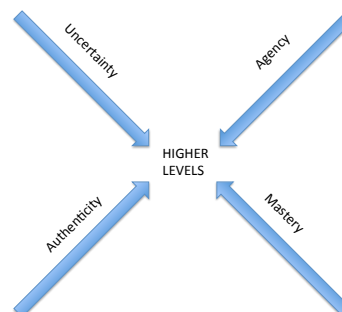


- Is about acquiring and exercising skill and knowledge
- Is rooted in discourses of **challenge** — not risk
- Challenging tasks demand acquisition of skills and knowledge to make decisions, take responsibility, and take action
- Overcoming challenges requires tenacity, personal investment, and an ability to overcome setbacks
- Draws on Bandura's *Self efficacy* (1977), Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow theory* (1990), and Berman and Davis-Berman's *Autotelic experiences* (2005)

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Putting it all together...



Alternative approaches



Adventurous learning aims to open up space for learning rather than restricting opportunities to learn.

Ethical imperative of '*Living well*' - addressing social inequality, connecting learning to community needs and aspirations, & an ethic of care to both human and non-human worlds.

Aligns with:

- Local student-inspired journeys
- 'Back to the future' simple low tech communal living
- Place-responsive, cross-curricula outdoor studies
- Longer residential programmes
- Integration of EFS and OE

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Final thoughts



- The four dimensions are not mandatory — educators may have good reasons for using prescribed methods and artificial settings
- The dimensions of Uncertainty, Agency, Authenticity, and Mastery are together an heuristic tool to enable meaningful discussions
- Adventurous learning is not about outdoor vs indoor education
- It is about appropriate contexts and methods for deep and meaningful learning.

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