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Moral deliberation and environmental awareness: reviewing Deweyan-informed possibilities for contemporary outdoor learning

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Abstract

The recent surge in interest in progressive education ideas has often been accompanied by an increased advocacy for learning outdoors, with experiential and holistic learning approaches considered the most beneficial method for cultivating personal and social development and raising awareness of contemporary environmental concerns. However, theoretical and practical unease exists about how increased opportunities to learn outdoors can help young people to reflect on their experiences and make sound decisions. The paper reviews the contribution of John Dewey to debates about experiential education and the development of moral deliberation; as for Dewey there are strong connections between cognition, character and actions. This leads, in conclusion, to analysis of outdoor learning prospects and the extent to which these can benefit personal responsibility and social interaction, and provide learners with the capacity to make dependable voluntary decisions that display stable states of character.

Key words: Moral deliberation; Environmental awareness; John Dewey; Outdoor learning

Introduction

The recent enthusiasm for pursuing progressive education intentions (Priestley & Biesta, 2013) have often been accompanied by an increased advocacy for learning outdoors, with experiential and holistic learning approaches considered the most beneficial method for enhancing learners' personal and social development and raising awareness of environmental concerns (e.g., Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), 2010; King's College London, 2011). If successful, young people would be better able to mediate problems and reconcile their scientific and aesthetic attitudes (Quay, 2013; Fesmire, 2015) with participatory virtues that are underpinned by habits of ecological imagination (Ferkany & Whyte, 2012). This would be evident by learners' personal responses to sustainable and ecological wellbeing practices (e.g., with regard to recycling waste) and the part these actions played in showing understanding and awareness of public policies. Whether stated explicitly or otherwise, many of the progressivist-based attempts to modernise curriculum are underpinned by Deweyan notions of experiential learning, problem-based inquiry and democratic sharing (Ord & Leather, 2011). Interest in Dewey is to be expected, as his writings on the aims of education, the benefits of inquiry, the importance for communities in nurturing personal growth and on the plurality of goods which human activity can achieve in their natural and social environments, have become key tenets of progressive education. As such, Dewey's pragmatism-informed writings on how moral goods can benefit from our interactions with humans and the environment resonate with a great deal of thinking on how learners' can constructively engage with the educational, social and environmental issues that confront society (Pring, 2007). This makes Dewey's writings of interest to those involved in outdoor learning, as evident in recent publications (e.g., Quay & Seaman, 2013; Thorburn & Marshall, 2011), and to those who broadly share the view that Dewey 'provides a rich yet still misunderstood and underappreciated framework for clarifying and extending (the) achievements of contemporary moral philosophy' (Fesmire. 2003, p. 2).

Outdoor learning, moral deliberation and environmental awareness

The capacity of learning outdoors to foster connections between moral deliberation and environmental awareness needs to address two main concerns. Firstly, there has been a relative absence of suitable conceptual inquiry to date (Brown, 2009), with reliance instead on curriculum framework devices that only partially serve connections between theory and practice and practice and theory. For example, Higgins and Nicol (2008, 2013) have shaped their ideas on the content and context of outdoor education in similar ways to Arnold's (1979) integrated approach to learning. This holistic approach for planning the content and teaching of curriculum has been widely adopted in Australia where Arnold's thinking (i.e., learning 'in', 'through' and 'about') has informed the development of examination awards in physical education from the late 1980s onwards (Thorburn, 2010). However, as Stolz & Thorburn (2017) make clear, it is often difficult to recognise the theoretical roots of Arnold's thinking and in practice many teachers have frequently found achieving the level of holistic integration expected to be problematic to realise. Therefore, while the curriculum framework ideas taken forward by Higgins and Nicol (2008, 2013) are helpful in signposting how integrated approaches to learning could be a productive context/space for highlighting the enhanced role outdoor learning might play in providing nature-based experiences that contribute to improved environment awareness, there remains a need to review the conceptual ideas of thinkers (such as Dewey) whose theorising continues to influence outdoor educators. These efforts can help clarify and support new thinking in the field. As Nicol (2014) makes clear, greater and more coherent theoretical thinking is required, so that educators can confidently draw upon their analysis in their pursuit of more imaginative and informed practice arrangements.

A second concern is the shallowness of the outdoor learning experiences learners often experience. Beames and Brown (2014) note that many 'outdoor' experiences now take place in consumerist-led indoor settings (e.g., in climbing centres and the like) and that many of these short term learning experiences conspicuously fail to help learners take on sufficient responsibility for their learning. This is some way from outdoor learning experiences that foster character and aesthetic and moral

development, and which examine ‘various aspects of our complex and tensioned relationship with the natural world: its indifference to us; our continuity with it; our alienation from it; and its redemptive power’ (Bonnett, 2010, p. 521).

In trying to overtake these concerns, the main focus of the paper is on the interrelationships, between outdoor learning (as a context for learning), moral deliberation (as part of personal, social and moral education) and environmental awareness/sensitivity (as part of understanding sustainable living agendas). Enhancing the links between these three elements is considered pivotal to enacting the type of curriculum planning aspirations elaborated on by Beames, Higgins and Nicol, (2012) and Higgins and Nicol (2008, 2013) and which are popular within the outdoor education field e.g., LTS (2010). In doing so the paper positions itself more broadly within a context which recognises that issues of ‘place, sustainability and transformation are at the forefront of debates concerning the types of outdoor learning experiences educators might provide for students’ (Hill & Brown, 2014, p. 218). In pursuing this focus there is an engagement with selective writings by John Dewey as many of his arguments and concerns on morality, moral education and environmental awareness may well have traction and relevance in contemporary times.

Dewey, moral deliberation and environmental awareness

Even though Dewey’s writings are often the theorizing point of entry within the field of outdoor learning/outdoor education, this paper recognises that enthusiasm for working with Dewey’s writings is not shared by everyone. Boostrom (2016, p. 4), for example, is perplexed by Dewey’s current go-to ‘legendary status as the father of all things educational’ as Boostrom believes there is more evidence of Dewey being cited rather than read. As such, references to Dewey and the practices of public schooling are often ‘simply a decorative flourish, in the manner of the oral tradition of citing the generations of the tribe or the epic tradition of invoking the gods’ (Boostrom, 2016, p. 7). More specifically within the outdoor learning field, Quay (2013) considers that Dewey

is not very well understood relative to educators understanding of experience in its wider sense. Of concern as well with particular regard to environmental awareness is Bowers (2003) contention that Dewey failed to sufficiently take account of ecologically centered cultures. On this basis, Dewey is not a helpful eco-justice philosopher to consider when focused on encouraging communities to lessen their ecological footprint. Arguably, this is rather a severe assessment, and one which is strongly refuted by Parker (2004) who considers that Dewey's theorizing was consistent with pragmatist intentions towards enabling new generations to question existing knowledge assumptions and to conduct experimental inquiry in ways which are as democratic as possible 'and geared toward reconstructing the problematic aspects of the tradition' (p. 334).

Furthermore, Cohen & Mohl (1979) consider that Dewey appreciated that the task of reconstructing problematic aspects of education was going to be difficult during the first third of the twentieth century. This was evident though his pursuit of inquiry into how education could try to retain a focus on character building and establishing community and family values during a time when urban industrialization impacted on the regeneration of cultures and societies.

That said it is appreciated though that analysing Dewey's collective thoughts on moral theory and moral deliberation is quite difficult as Dewey never fully teased out a definitive account of his moral thoughts in connection with his overall philosophical outlook (Pappas, 1997). Dewey considered that a unifying moral theory would neglect context and take an insufficient account of rapid social changes and plural values. For these reasons Dewey rarely provided examples of applied ethics, preferring to focus instead on improving methods of inquiry. Dewey's writings on the virtues in a moral life are therefore scattered through several of his works, most notably, in the context of this paper in *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (1920), *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922), *Experience and Nature* (1925), *Three Independent Factors in Morals* (1930) and *A Common Faith* (1934).

There can however be little doubt of the importance Dewey assigned to fostering moral values in education. In *Democracy and Education* (1916/2012) Dewey is insistent on the need to build vital connections between moral deliberation, knowledge and activity and to avoid simplified learning contexts where morals are treated too narrowly and based around ‘a sentimental goody-goody turn without reference to effective ability to do what is socially needed ... (as evidenced by) ... overemphasising convention and tradition so as to limit morals to a list of definitely stated acts’ (p. 194). As such, Carden (2006, p. 1) considers that Dewey has ‘a great deal to say about the virtues in a moral life, although this aspect of Dewey’s work is too often overlooked.’

The connections Dewey (1920/1957) perceived between the urban industrialisation of the modern world and a new approach to morality was communicated through his belief that people and communities can endeavour to improve the quality of their lives in diverse ways rather than by pursuing fixed goals and following prescribed rules. In taking this approach, Dewey was trying to recast existing moral theories and develop methods of experimental inquiry, where growth fostered by critical reflection and social transformation can lead to ‘rethinking and readjusting our principles and practices ... (as) ... growth itself is the only moral end’ (Dewey, 1920/1957, p. 177). In this way, ‘moral life is protected from falling into formalism and rigid repetition. It is rendered flexible, vital, growing’ (Dewey, 1920/1957, p. 175). Ralston (2009) also considers that reflection can play a helpful part in stabilizing thoughts and informing individual decisions or socially intelligent group decisions, as our experiences are a key part of a ‘ebb-and-flow movement between pre-cognitive (or felt) havings and cognitive knowings’ (p. 191). The connection from immediate experiences to mediated experiences, returning to reconsider immediate experiences underpins an experiential-based methodology, as it is informed by thought and foresight rather than by reactive routines and familiar decision-making (Ord & Leather, 2011). For as Dewey (1925/1958) makes clear, emphasising the importance of situational contexts is pivotal to appreciating that lived experience is both the basis and product of reflective reason.

By way of example, Ralston (2009) describes a kayak touring journey where Dewey's naturalistic metaphysics of primary and secondary experiences can help learners investigate the spatial and social-graphical moment of experience and deepen their appreciation of the qualitative richness of their journey. Considered again, through a forest walk example (something which is typical of the type of opportunities available to many educators in schools) learners' previous primary experiences can help them develop their sensory experiences of the forest and use the confidence gained from their past experiences to complete the walk safely. In this way, the forest experience can enter a cognitively-rich secondary phase, if (planned or otherwise) new situations disrupt the walk e.g., such as the need to cross a stream which is running higher than normal or to navigate a new route around fallen trees. At this stage, learners' inquiry can help them engage with new decision-making possibilities which are capable of transforming problematic situations into unproblematic ones. This interconnected view of experience suggests that having (primary) and knowing and understanding (secondary) experiences are not discrete episodes but are part of a single whole experience, which are not unnecessarily separated from each other by undue periods of time. As such, the merging of primary and secondary experiences can happen on an immediate and repetitive basis in ways that can help learners to develop their curiosity and flexible thinking as well as their sensitivity to the environment and confidence in being part of the forest environment. In addition, conceiving of primary and secondary experiences as part of a single whole experience opens up varied pedagogical possibilities for educators as they reflect on how and when to engage learners in better understanding their overall experiences.

In terms of further supporting reflection on moral deliberations arising from environmental engagement, moving beyond reviewing procedural risk and safety issues and engaging with situations and scenarios which reflect issues such as the fragility of the land and societal use of resources would be a helpful part of experiential inquiry. On this basis, the forest walk example

becomes consistent with Dewey's views on primary experiences, whereby those components of the walk which are valued immediately as part of habit are not separated from experiences requiring new intelligent thinking, as for Dewey we can enrich our understandings based on reflections on our primary experiences as well as through sharing new mediated secondary experiences with others. For example, if learners on the forest walk are involved in making a miniature environment using leaves, twigs, small branches to construct a shelter, it helps if learners can review the materials they have used in previous similar exercises (primary experiences) as well as reviewing what other materials it might be possible to use (secondary experiences), provided these are informed by knowledge of how to protect and sustain forest environments. This type of primary-secondary process reflects the importance Dewey attached to habits in the creation of revised ideas and of how ethical deliberations connect with moral judgement and actions, as for Dewey (1922/2012, p. 85) what is 'at stake in any serious deliberation is not a difference of quantity, but what kind of person one is to become, what sort of self is in the making'. Thus, as moral judgements are experimental and subject to revision, 'morality is a continuing process not a fixed achievement' (Dewey, 1922/2012, pp. 109-110). On this basis, learning outdoors would benefit from placing learners in situations where reflecting upon actions which were previously relegated to unreflective habits are re-evaluated with respect to their better-or-worse quality.

In taking forward these intentions, Dewey (1930/1966) focuses on the interrelationship and tensions between duty, good and virtues, and of what one should reasonably do when faced with conflicting moral demands. What Dewey (1930/1966) was advancing was a new form of ethical pluralism which recognizes the inevitability of conflict between the three general characteristics of moral experience - the demands of communal life (duty), individual ends (good) and social approbation (virtues). As these characteristics of moral experience are enduring it cannot be claimed that one consideration is more important than another. Rather, the route to resolving conflicts is to use our reflective intelligence in the form of 'fine-tuned habits of character' (Fesmire, 2015, p. 123) in

order to reach considered and defensible views. On this basis, our moral progress depends ‘on the ability to make delicate distinctions, to perceive aspects of good and evil not previously noted and to take into account the fact that doubt and the need for choice impinge at every turn’ (Dewey, 1930/1966, p. 199).

This line of thinking was not evident in existing moral theories, as the focus was on setting normative ends or standards and not on considering uncertainty and conflict in moral life. Dewey considered that perceiving morality as mutually dependent on character-centered (subjective) and conduct-centered (objective) measures was preferable to considering these issues on an either/or basis. For example, Dewey (1930/1966, p. 200) states that morality consists ‘in the capacity to judge the respective claims of desire and of duty from the moment they affirm themselves in concrete experience.’ Viewed this way, Dewey’s conception of experience reveals that ‘our moral life is a social, creative, imaginative-emotional, hypothetical and experimental process ... (where) ... we need to acknowledge that change, novelty, tragic conflict, contingency, uncertainty and struggle are at the very heart of our moral life’ (Pappas, 1997, p. 544). Proceeding on this basis helps learners to appreciate the views of social groups and of the need at times to submit to authority, not out of need but rather as part of something which has become self-evident. As Dewey (1930/1966, p. 203) notes ‘through the action of habit, the requirement in question can become an object of desire; when that happens, it loses the character of right and of authority and becomes simply a good.’ In an education for sustainability context, Paulus (2016) advises that these types of gains are most likely to occur when there is an acceptance of uncertainty, open-endedness and a diversity of practical outcomes, and when learners ‘are provided with time and space to explore each other’s positions and (their) personal stories’ (p. 126).

Two problems with Dewey and moral deliberation considered

For such a prolific and wide ranging author it is to be expected that there are doubts about the lack of development of some of Dewey's ideas. Two main concerns in this paper are the extent to which Dewey's theory of moral deliberation enhances democracy in society (Ralston, 2010) and whether Dewey's focus on inquiry, pluralism and experience fails to adequately recognise changing times and contexts (Rogers, 2009). Ralston (2010) reappraised the extent to which Dewey's theory of moral deliberation could be used to foster societal gains or utilised more conservatively as a free-standing contribution to democratic theory. Ralston's (2010) reappraisal is an update on Gouinlock's (1978) essay on Dewey and moral deliberation, which was in itself a riposte to earlier criticisms of Dewey's ethical thinking. This was on the grounds that Dewey's descriptive and normative reasoning was either confused or that Dewey over emphasised choice and subjectivism and insufficiently appreciated the shared benefits of discussion and decision-making. After reviewing these respective claims, Ralston (2010) considers that social and political problems (e.g., in an outdoor learning context, of reviewing land access controls and restrictions) are already moral problems as they involve conflicting values. Thus, Dewey's theory of moral deliberation should not be used as part of advocacy arguments for promoting democratic deliberation but is best used as a model for reconstructing Deweyan insights in current times. Those supportive of Dewey (e.g., Caspary, 2000) argue therefore that it is unhelpful to overly problematize deliberation and instead it is better to highlight the benefits individuals and groups can gain from their experience of managing their moral lives and showing mutual responsiveness. In this way, we will have 'reached a point where social conditions create a mind capable of scientific outlook and inquiry' (Dewey, 1920/2012, p. 128).

These democratic and relevance concerns are pertinent within environmental ethics as Deweyan-type pragmatism has also been criticised as being inherently anthropocentric (human centered) and thus implicitly anti-environmental and out of touch with current times (Bowers, 2003). However, as McDonald (2004) notes, Dewey was naturalistic rather than anthropocentric in that he perceived

humans to be part of nature and not separate from nature. Furthermore, Fesmire (2015) considers that Dewey's (1934/2013) theorizing stands out as an attempt to connect a naturalistic affinity with romanticism with an evidence-based scientific outlook on nature. On this basis, Ralston (2009, p. 197) considers that Dewey's naturalized metaphysics can provide deep descriptions 'of our ordinary experiences in relation to the lived environment, including the spaces and places that we inhabit.' In this context, Dewey's plural approach can strengthen arguments for the moral standing of the environment with all that this entails for moral deliberations on the preservation of certain landscapes and the maintenance of habitats within the social environments in which most people live (Macdonald, 2004). Fesmire (2012, p. 217) goes further, and in similar ways to Bonnett (2010) and Quay (2013) suggests that Dewey can inform 'an aesthetic dimension to environmental ethics and ecological moral education', whereby a number of perspectives on experience collectively inform our moral actions. In continuing with the forest walk example, it could be that part of the walk included time for designing and making some form of marker sign or sculpture using natural resources. These experiences would again bring to the fore sensitivity-related issues and raise questions about materials it is reasonable to expect the wider community to accept being used for such purposes. It might also include further considerations such as where to build some form of marker sign or sculpture and crucially whether what is created should remain once the walk continues, or whether it should be taken apart so that there is as little sign as possible of what happened. Alternatively, a mid-position such as photographing the sign or sculpture and dismantling thereafter any trace of it might be considered the best option.

While additions to the forest walk such as producing a sign or sculpture might be considered as positively contributing to the aesthetic dimension within learners wider moral deliberations on ecological-related matters, Bowers (2003) considers that Dewey's methods of experiential inquiry insufficiently distinguish between values and behaviours which are more ecologically sound than others. This is important in a cultural context as Dewey's pragmatism is considered as part of the

problem in that it is insufficiently influences ‘the deep cultural changes that must be made if we are to reverse the unsustainable human impact on natural systems’ (Bowers, 2013, p. 36). This view is predicated on arguing that in effect the type of decision making learners are involved in when making some form of marker sign or sculpture on their forest walk is too narrow and superficial to signal the chronic downturn in the sustainability of the natural world taking place. These are weighty conceptual matters to ponder, and as noted earlier there is concern that Bowers (2003) only partially acknowledges the educative possibilities of Deweyan-informed methodologies for triggering interest in learners in making more sensitized and informed decisions about how to live more environmentally self-restrained lives. Thus, what remains of concern following Bowers (2003) is how best to identify to outdoor educators the types of pedagogical strategies which might help benefit learners’ moral deliberation and environmental awareness.

Dewey, moral education and outdoor learning

Dewey like other leading pragmatists considered that imagination, reflection and active experimentation should be central features in education. In terms of taking such thinking forward, Fesmire (2012) and Liu (2014) endorse an integrated curriculum approach (as opposed to moral education being a separate area of study) with Dewey’s metaphysics of experience increasing the expectation that learning experiences can equip learners with the habits to make sound judgements. This is on the basis that habits require to be continually reconstructed through the use of intelligent inquiry in order to be meaningful to learners and to avoid routines (such as going on a regular forest walk) becoming dull and monotonous. However, as noted earlier, utilising integrated learning approaches can prove difficult to enact (Stolz & Thorburn, 2017). The main issue therefore in planning and pedagogical terms is considering how learners as moral agents can engage in choice-related decision-making that helps them to enhance their skills following their varied experiences in exercising agency (Rogers, 2009). Those looking to Dewey for pedagogical ‘toolkit’ type guidance will be disappointed, for what Dewey offers instead is a general encouragement for learners to be

responsible and to live more emotionally engaged and imaginative lives amidst the conflicts which are an everyday feature of life. As Liu (2014, p. 145) confirms, 'Dewey's concept of moral inquiry and moral deliberation is not as easy to teach as the six moral stages' of Kohlberg's (1966) developmental view.

Furthermore, in the current outdoor education literature there are criticisms that experiential learning ideas often become reduced due to ineffective and shallow learning and a lack of focus on the transaction between individuals and their environment (Ord & Leather, 2011). For Dewey (1938), this meant that the two-way process of the individual expressing themselves on the environment (trying) needs to connect with the ways in which the environment impacts upon the individual (undergoing). For example, when walking on a popular open hillside, the intention to follow the path at all times (trying) would make one feel good (undergoing), as it would provide satisfaction in knowing that walking was making a relatively low level impact on the environment (relative to cutting corners or walking outside the intended path boundaries which would not). Such a transaction could take place in a more nuanced way with regard to quietness: through recognising that limiting and lowering speaking volume at times (trying) could enhance the capacity to listen to and appreciate outdoor sounds (undergoing). In taking forward these types of intentions, Ord & Leather (2011, p. 8) advise that to 'understand the significance of the experience to the individual, much of the understanding must be elicited prior to the activity and explored during it, as much as on subsequent completion.' For the educator this involves anticipating the types of decisions learners might make when presented with choices, and designing strategies and alternatives which direct learners to gain the greatest possible benefit from their experiences. Continuing with the recent hillwalking exemplar, fragility issues exist which influence decisions about how to move across the ground. In these circumstances, the wise teacher would consider the choices which are made available as if 'carefully facilitated, the expression of divergent standpoints can inspire self-

reflective and creative thinking and can incite changes of perspective for the simple reason that multiple opinions can be expressed' (Paulus, 2016, p. 125).

This level of meta anticipation, and the avoidance of situations where choices are offered but subsequently withdrawn (i.e., if the wrong option is chosen), requires a high level of teacher expertise and of being able to direct and redirect learners' attention towards experiencing nature as well as developing positive relationships with other learners. These are genuine challenges for the outdoor educator as there is a need to embrace a relativistic dilemma: namely, how to determine some form of moral criteria to distinguish and decide between different options at the same time as welcoming the diversity of learning responses, many of which may come from learners who are new to making sense of their experience and contemplative mind outdoors (Paulus, 2016).

Nevertheless, these challenges are consistent with Dewey's intentions, for as Dewey (1920/1957, pp. 163-164) concedes, the 'practical meaning of the situation – that is to say the action needed to satisfy it – is not self-evident. ... There are conflicting desires and alternative apparent goods. What is needed is to find the right course of action, the right good.' Therefore, teachers' remit is one where they need to review how they are guiding learners towards discovering informed and stable values which are borne out of their diverse experiences, observations of place and which is enhanced by their individual reflections, deliberations and review. Progress in this type of way can help meet Doddington's (2014) imperative that engaging with Dewey's ideas on experience and community should be apparent in the quality of learners' engagement e.g., as evident by their contribution to open-ended discussions and listening and sharing ideas with others. Beyond the immediacies of formal education, Rogers (2009) also notes, that when engaged purposefully in deliberations in the context of moral conflicts, people develop the capacity to revise their judgements as well as develop a sympathy for others views. This does not mean that decisions are always made in a cognitively idealized way but does serve to highlight how voluntary decision-making which reflects ideals is not at the mercy of circumstances either. Instead, habit-forming

decisions are widely reflective of a wholehearted commitment towards fulfilling ideals e.g., decisions on whether extended and complex long-distance travel arrangements justify their fuel energy outlay will be routinely subject to review based on personal ideals.

Making progress in guiding learners' decision making in environmentally sensitized ways might appear rather daunting for teachers. In this respect, Blenkinsop, Telford and Morse (2016) consider that outdoor and experiential educators possess five particular pedagogical skills that are highly likely to benefit mainstream educators. This mix of skills (managing rhythm, shape and structure; lateral thinking; risky learning; safety; and eco-reflection and evaluation) highlights the benefits of learning which is capable of responding to unpredictable circumstances, so that learners can develop their curiosity, express themselves clearly as well as internalize their thoughts. The combination of 'flexibility but also rigorous direction' (Blenkinsop et al., 2016, p. 350) can also help educators to teach in the moment, develop trust with learners and incorporate a focus on reflection that includes an emphasis on personal strengths and limitations relative to the values being advocated, attention to learners both individually and as a group and a co-reflection where wider community responses are considered.

Furthermore, those teachers' doubting their capacity to set suitable tasks and plan sound choices which benefit from deliberation should recognise the responsibility Dewey (1930/1966, p. 202) affords them to govern, and to build a consensus around 'not only the power of the claimant (teacher) but the emotional and intellectual ascent of the group.' Making suitably sensitized decisions in these contexts requires educators to avoid being overly drawn towards pre-established decision-making routines or to make judgements that are overly subjective. Progress in this way increases the chances of outdoor learning becoming a context for scientific, aesthetic and humanistic inquiry. For as Dewey (1925/1958) notes, moral realism is as much an art as a scientific method, where feelings, aspirations and hunches are all capable of becoming the productive basis

for experimental investigation. When this perspective is taken forward distinctions between theory and practice should lessen and become one where ‘modes of practice that are not intelligent, not inherently and immediately enjoyable... (are separated out) ... from those which are full of enjoyed meanings’ (Dewey, 1925/1958, p. 358). Under these arrangements, experiences should be secure and organised enough for teachers to occasionally disrupt existing understandings and build participatory virtues among learners, as they review their experience of nature and engagement with the environment (Ferkany & Whyte, 2012).

Conclusion

Increased advocacy for school-age learning outdoors reflects a growing awareness of the importance of environmentally aware decision-making at an individual and societal level. In reviewing the contribution of Dewey to debates on experiential education and moral deliberation, analysis of Dewey’s writing supports educators in the outdoor learning field of linking primary and secondary experiences that are informed by thought and foresight and which can lead to experiences becoming stable and habit forming. In these contexts, teachers are encouraged to consider the progressive pedagogical challenges associated with longer term planning e.g., through considering how moral deliberation can connect with environmentally-aware decision-making across the various zones on learners experience (Beames et al., 2012). This relatively straightforward, open-ended and uncluttered mode of curriculum planning and pedagogical thinking is preferable to investing further professional energies into more complicated and poorly theorized interdisciplinary models e.g., Arnold (1979) as these have often proved difficult to operationalise to date. To make good on this aspiration, the paper has shown that educator’s expertise would benefit from recognising that there are rarely determinant rules for settling moral conflicts. Therefore there is a need for educators to become skilled at constructing outdoor learning experiences which help

learners to continuously review their actions and the impact they may have on the environment.

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