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Towards nature-immersive pedagogy of place in outdoor education

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OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

This research paper aims to develop a nature-immersive pedagogy of place in outdoor education. It proposes a conceptual blueprint for curriculum development that may be implemented practically at universities.

APPROACHES USED

This exploratory research builds on previous work conducted by the author (Luetz and Beaumont 2019; Buxton, Luetz and Shaw 2021) and used a three-pronged approach to collect, analyse and synthesise relevant data towards the formulation of a viable curriculum proposal:

(1) Review of the literature reflected a compelling rationale that “modern humans must rediscover their sense of ‘wonder’ for the beauty of nature via tactile, immersive and ‘soulful’ educational experiences with, and importantly, *in* nature.” (Buxton et al. 2021, p. 355)

(2) Review of environmental higher education courses and other conservation initiatives that have nature-immersive elements revealed promising opportunities to develop a nascent field of ‘hands-on’ (and ‘heart-in’) environmental study.

(3) Focus Group: Based on analysis of the above literary and curricular inputs, this study then formulated nature-immersive learning initiatives, which were subsequently discussed and analysed by a focus-group of experts, thus resulting in the final shortlist of curricular elements.

RESULTS AND KEY FINDINGS

- According to UN-Habitat (2006) more than half of all humans alive today are residing in cities. UN-Habitat (2006) refers to this urban global demographic as “city-zens” (p. 6).
- Urban living sees a growing number of modern humans engaging with nature “almost exclusively via the interface of a ‘screen’” (Buxton et al. 2021, p. 355)
- “Given that modern curricula are still overwhelmingly aimed at teaching scientific facts (to the cerebrum) rather than instigating soulful experiences (within the human heart) makes alternative pedagogies a vitally important field of leading-edge research and scholarship.” (Buxton et al. 2021, p. 355)
- Experiences in nature are conducive to environmentally sympathetic behaviours (Horwitz 1996).
- “[G]reater experience with the natural environment [engenders] more pro-environmental attitudes” (Hinds and Sparks 2008, p. 110).

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

- Pedagogy of place in outdoor education has much to offer at a time where higher education is progressively dominated by ‘online’ and ‘distance’ learning.
- Ripple et al. (2017) have called for “effective steps humanity can take to transition to sustainability ... *increasing outdoor nature education* for children, as well as the overall engagement of society in the *appreciation of nature*” (§(i) p. 1028).
- Positive affectivity towards nature is not silently inherited but must rather be nurtured, encouraged and cultivated via experiences in nature. Modern humans must rediscover a sense of ‘wonder’ for the beauty of nature via tactile, immersive, enchanting and ‘soulful’ educational experiences with, and importantly, *in* nature (Kahn & Kellert 2002, Clayton & Myers 2015, Scoffham 2019, Buxton et al. 2021).
- **Conclusion:** Nature-immersive curricula should involve: “Listening *to* and learning *from* and *within* [nature] as opposed to learning *about* it from *without*.” (Buxton et al. 2021, p. 368)

CURRICULAR ELEMENTS

- Recalibrating worldview (centre-peripherality / insider-outsider); Anthropocentrism ⇔ Ecocentrism
- Emphasising ‘offline’ (actual reality) rather than ‘online’ (virtual reality)
- Cultivating ecological literacy through direct observation (‘David Attenborough approach’)
- Proffering wilderness experiences
- Promoting hands-on growing and eating; community gardening
- Planting trees; ‘Re-wilding’ environments; ‘Greening’ urban spaces; ‘Guerrilla Gardening’
- Expanding ecological mental health; ‘Walk and talk’ therapy
- Conducting nature-based pollution/extinction audits; Rubbish collection (beach, bush, etc)
- Re-enchantment with nature; Spirituality; ‘Soulfulness’; Ecological ‘conversion’ experiences

THANK YOU!

Time for Q&A

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