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Outdoor education: The Romantic origins at the University of St Mark and St John

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper discusses the history of outdoor education at a university in the south west of England, starting in 1840. **Methodology:** This research uses secondary sources of data; original unpublished work from the university archive is used alongside published works on the university founders and first principals, as well as sources on the developments of outdoor education in the UK. **Findings:** Both founding principals were driven by their strong values of social justice and their own experiences of poverty and inequality, to establish a means for everyone to access high quality education regardless of background or means. They saw education as key to providing a pathway out of poverty and towards opportunity and achievement for all with outdoor education as an essential part of that process. Kay-Shuttleworth, founder of St John's, wrote that "the best book is Nature, with an intelligent interpreter", whilst Derwent Coleridge, St Mark's first principal, had a profound love of nature and reverence for his father's poetic circle. His father, the famous English Romantic poet Samuel Taylor-Coleridge, made the first recorded use of the verb "mountaineering". Coleridge was using a new word for a new activity; the ascending of mountains for pleasure, rather than for economic or military purposes. **Originality:** The Romantic influence on outdoor education, the early appreciation of nature and the outdoors for physical and psychological well-being, and the drive for social justice have not been told in one case study before.

Introduction

The University of St Mark and St John (Marjon) has a long history of outdoor education and outdoor learning. This has developed alongside the political, cultural, social, educational and commercial changes, not only in the outdoor education sector, but also within the commercial higher education institution, in response to the changes in the wider socio-cultural, political landscape. The university campus is, since 1973, geographically well situated to provide

higher education degree programmes using local outdoor environments; sitting in the heart of the southwest of England, on top of a hill on the outskirts of the historical port city of Plymouth, overlooking both Dartmoor National Park and Plymouth Sound. However, the history of the two colleges, that merged on paper in 1923, and physically on one campus in 1926, and the use of the outdoors for educational purposes stretches back much further to the foundation of two Anglican teacher training colleges in London in 1840 (St John's) and 1841 (St Mark's). James Kay-Shuttleworth of St John's, and Derwent Coleridge of St Mark's were the founding Principals of the two colleges. They provided the foundational values of holistic, character-based education and the pedagogical approaches that embraced these values. They were both products of the Romantic Era in England, and this was an influence on both men and their perceptions and their connections to the outdoors. This is the story of their English educational adventures, or to quote one of the early students Thomas Adkins, "the [educational] experiment in operation" (Adkins 1906, p. 88).

The Foundation of the colleges; changing landscapes and changing skills

Cipolla (1973) discusses how that in an agricultural society the old man is the wise one; in an industrial society he is a has-been, and in England in 1838 we were a society in transition between the rural and the urban. The Industrial Revolution had shifted us in space, time and attitudes. By 1838, the SS Great Western had made a maiden voyage to transatlantic shores, transporting a brave and affluent few - it is said that only seven passengers made the trip (Grace's Guide 2019). Darwin had recently returned on HMS Beagle and brought new world views which would inform his most important work '*On the Origin of Species*', still 20 years from publication at this time. A Coronation and new queen moved Britain into the Victorian era, and the publication of the *People's Charter* in 1838 drove people to the streets in a movement of protest for political and social reform (Picard 2005). The move from an agricultural society to an industrial one saw a transition in both mind and body. Many people shifted from life and work in open and rural landscapes to a new urban population in towns and cities, working on machines in factories. Different times called for different skills, and those unable to acquire them, or unable to work due to illness or accident, were significantly less able to support themselves or their families. For many young people at this time, knowledge and skills would be passed on through the family and through apprenticeships and community relationships. So as soon as the skills of your elders and your community became obsolete and outdated, so did yours. Schooling was not an option available to all, only to

those who could afford it, and even then, the standards of teaching were variable to say the least (Floud and Johnson 2004).

In the introduction to *Memorials of St Mark's College* the founding principal Derwent Coleridge described the educational landscape:

... it is somewhat difficult for us... to realise the educational destitution of England in the first quarter of [the] century. The schools, such as there were, were few and far between; the school houses were little better than tumbledown barns; the teachers were for the most part men or women who had failed to make their way in any ...trades... or ...occupations... There was of course no Education Department, and the majority of thinkers still regarded the intervention of the State... [in providing accessible education] as undesirable” (Gent 1891 p.1).

At this time, illness and poverty were judged by many to be largely self-determined. If you and your children are in the workhouse¹ or living in the slums it was generally believed that you must have deserved it, and not because of societal or economic conditions. Low social and economic status was widely deemed by the affluent and middle classes to be caused by idleness, drinking and other personal shortcomings, a belief that was used to justify the stigmatic nature of the Poor Law (amended in 1834). The same applied to poor health. Acceptance of germ theory in England was at this point many years away (attributed in England to John Snow, 1854) and sickness was often attributed to ‘bad air’ and a lack of cleanliness. It is at this time that the terms ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving poor’ become distinctions enshrined in law (Renwick 2018).

Some moves towards an English national education system had been made, by the likes of Bell and Lancaster (Selleck 1995) who relied upon monitorial and rote methods to teach rudimentary labour skills, but any causal link between education, work and poverty had not yet been fully realised; nor was it a popular notion. Education for the masses was a contentious topic, following on from decades of mass protest and radical unrest. It created deep anxiety about order and social control. People might get ideas ‘above their station’ and refuse to work in menial roles. There would be access to radical and subversive literature and ideas (Selleck 1995) and this would be problematic for the law and order of society.

The Poor Law Commissioner for 1835, James Kay (later Kay-Shuttleworth), held somewhat different views. Born in Rochdale in 1804 into a reasonably prosperous family, as a young man he was expected to go into business with his father, or to adopt some other suitable gentlemanly career. The family were not entirely delighted when he chose to study medicine,

attending both Dublin (briefly) and Edinburgh Universities, where he was a fellow member of the Royal Medical Society with Charles Darwin, who deemed his debating skills as the “best of their generation” (Smith 1923 p.11). Kay-Shuttleworth was invited by the eminent physician Professor Alison to assist with the treatment of an outbreak of typhus while he was still a student, and witnessed first-hand the devastating effects that poverty, poor housing, poor working conditions and poor nutrition had on the health of the population (Selleck 1995). An energetic and pragmatic man, as well as an empathetic and sensitive one, Kay-Shuttleworth was spurred to action stating that:

parallel...with my scientific reading, I ...began to make myself acquainted with ...works on political and social science...and the connection between the mental and moral condition of the people and their...wellbeing (Kay-Shuttleworth, in Smith 1923, p14).

A pamphlet outlining his studies *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* (Kay-Shuttleworth 1832) attracted considerable attention, not least for its radical views on education, which he claimed should not be rudimentary or merely restricted to labour skills, but “substantial” and able to encompass skills for recreation as well as labour, to be “life-long and many-sided, adapted to occupation and to leisure, to market and to home” (Smith 1923, p.25).

Putting the torch of knowledge into the hands of the rickburners - James Kay-Shuttleworth and St John's College

Originally known as Battersea College, St John's was where Kay-Shuttleworth *enacted* his ideas as founder and principal. His outspoken and unpopular views had impacted adversely on his medical career and from 1835 he shifted his attention to work within public administration as an Assistant Poor Law Commissioner, examining conditions within workhouses and pushing forward his case for better education for the children of the poor. His critics argued that “to teach a pauper child to write was ... not simply preposterous but dangerous. It was...like putting the torch of knowledge into the hands of the rickburnersⁱⁱ” (Smith 1923, p.47).

Frustration at the delays in the provision of an English national system for education led to Kay-Shuttleworth and a colleague, E. Carleton Tufnell, to begin an action of their own (Adkins 1906). They began a tour of renowned educational establishments, first in Scotland

and England and later overseas. Kay-Shuttleworth was particularly attracted by the Swiss educational system, especially the Romantic model of education espoused by Pestalozzi; one which was holistic, concerned with physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing (Barnard & Pestalozzi 1859) where instead of dealing with words, Pestalozzi argued, children should learn through activity and through things. Kay-Shuttleworth and Tufnell also visited the model schools run by De Fellenberg and Wehrli (influenced by Pestalozzi) and were impressed by their cheerful atmospheres and lively communities - good examples of the “vigorous mental atmosphere... and the “uncovered schoolroom” that they had first encountered in Scottish schools, and which Kay-Shuttleworth felt to be especially beneficial to pauper children who would have likely had little exposure to either (Smith 1923, p.49).

Battersea College was privately funded by Kay-Shuttleworth and Tufnell opening in February 1840, with a timetable designed to “encourage vigour of ...body and mind” and based on the belief that “the best book is Nature, with an intelligent interpreter” (Kay-Shuttleworth n.d.). Based on Pestalozzian principles, garden and farm work were an integral part of the daily routine which began at 5.30 a.m. and was shared by students and tutors alike. Students would also attend outdoor instruction in drawing, singing, geography, and ‘long day excursions’, designed to test the students’ powers of observation and familiarise them with the ‘external phenomena’ surrounding the school (Smith 1923, p.58). Battersea in London, at that time, was a rural area, with market gardens set amongst fields. For the first students, including young teenagers raised in the workhouse, this setting would have been a revelation. Kay-Shuttleworth’s Romantic views on the beneficial aspects of nature were not based on theory alone. As a student he had experienced fainting fits brought on by stress, which were only alleviated by walks in the countryside accompanied by his father (Selleck 1995). Incidentally, he also instituted what might be the first recorded example of formal student support, ordering that £2-10 shillings (approximately £250 today) should be set aside per year, for the purchase of tonic wines and spirits to administer to “students who were low and nervous at the time of inspection” (Battersea College Minutes 1847) perhaps in memory of his own demanding student life, or of his time as a GP when wines and brandy were frequently dispensed as remedies for nervous disorders. His emphasis on student welfare and interest in encouraging national wellbeing is a remarkably modern viewpoint for the time.

Battersea College was a successful experiment and an expensive one. By 1844, Kay-Shuttleworth and Tufnell had handed over the running of the college to the *National Society* (The National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the

Church of England) when it became known as St John's College. The National Society were also responsible for the founding of another English teacher training college, St Marks.

An imaginary risk of inconvenient excellence - Derwent Coleridge and St Mark's College

Derwent Coleridge was the second son of the famous romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He was born in 1800 into the full flood of Lakeland romanticism and had an unconventional upbringing in the Lake District (Hainton & Hainton 1996). He had a profound love of nature and reverence for his father's poetic circle which never left him. He is the only Coleridge who tried throughout a long and significant public life to put into practice his father's philosophy. The son of a famous romantic poet in the 1800s would be the equivalent of being the son of a hedonistic rock star in the late 20th century; with family instability, financial and emotional poverty, drug addiction, domestic conflict and estrangement.

After student life in the Cambridge of the 1820s, Derwent obtained his first job teaching in a school in Plymouth. He felt an immediate affinity with the place and enjoyed spending time in its natural amenities of countryside and sea. His passionate courtship of Mary Pridham (the daughter of a prominent Plymouth family) led to newfound religious convictions and a remarkable marriage partnership. Under her influence he entered the Anglican clergy and became curate and schoolmaster in the Cornish town of Helston. For a decade the Helston grammar school defied its geographical isolation attracting some distinguished pupils and building Derwent's skills and reputation. The school was not helped by Cornwall's lack of railways and in 1841 Derwent moved to Chelsea in London to become Principal of St Mark's College; the first national Anglican teacher training college (Hainton & Hainton 1996).

Derwent soon found himself embarked upon his greatest life's work. He became committed to putting into practice his father's national and religious faith in the 'educatability' of all people and the social powers of education. His teachers of the people were to be educated men in the highest and best sense. Government policy in 1862 put a brake on such aspirations. Coleridge did not approve of this claim that they were over educating the teachers of labourer's children. He stated that "I will never consent to educate down to any standard, to avoid an imaginary risk of inconvenient excellence" (Coleridge 1862, p.15). The Code of Regulations for 1862 (commonly known as the *Revised Code*) introduced the

‘payment-by-results’ system. It stipulated that every scholar for whom grants were claimed must be examined according to one of six ‘standards’ in the ‘three Rs’ - reading, writing and ‘rithmetic (Gillard 2018). The Revised Code is sometimes referred to as *Lowe’s Code*, after its creator, Robert Lowe (1811-1892). Because of Lowe’s opposition to religious influence in education, grants were dependent only on regular school attendance and proficiency in the three Rs; they were not awarded for religious instruction (Gillard 2018). However, this was not before Derwent had written and practiced his philosophy into educational history. The debates he began and the controversy over the higher education and training of teachers, for example the influence of the Church and the state in curriculum, continue to this day.

Romanticism and Outdoor Education

The Romantic period saw the emergence of a new activity, *mountaineering*, and a new identity, the *mountaineer* both of which are crucial to Romanticism, to the writers’ sense of their identities and to their literary outputs (Bainbridge 2012). Specifically, it was Derwent Coleridge’s father, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who on 9 August 1802 returned home at the end of his famous nine-day ‘Circumcursion’ of the Lake District, a vigorous tour that had included a ground-breaking ascent of Scafellⁱⁱⁱ, who sent an excited account of his adventures to Robert Southey^{iv} in which he made the first recorded use of the verb “mountaineering” (Ibid p.1). Coleridge was using a new word for a new activity; the ascending of mountains for pleasure, rather than for economic or military purposes; a pursuit that had originated in Britain and Europe in the previous few decades. Additionally, the meaning of *mountaineer* is in the process of changing from specifically denoting someone who lives in a mountainous region to also include a description of someone who engages in mountain climbing. These two linguistic developments are significant events as they have direct and inevitable implications about the way in which English speakers can make meaning of mountains in the social world. During the earliest mountain explorations, no self-respecting explorer omitted to gather data on botany, geology, meteorology, or any other part of this new adventure. However, with the emergence of Romanticism, the notion of a different and less scientifically instrumental relationship with the mountains became increasingly prevalent (Telford & Beames 2016).

Coleridge and his fellow poets participated in this new activity known as mountaineering, which was distinctly different from the scientifically motivated explorations of high places inspired by the Enlightenment. The Romantic form of mountaineering was not motivated by

the prospect of new scientific knowledge, rather by an embodied, visceral and “quasimystical” relationship of the poets with mountains (Telford & Beames 2016, p. 484). Bainbridge (2012) highlights that many of the major male Romantic poets were active and dedicated mountaineers, and most of those that were not at least attempted to present themselves as such. The Romantic poets developed something of a symbiotic relationship with mountains, the literary expression of which was then publicly communicated. As a result, their perspective has provided an enduring and highly influential lens through which mountains are perceived (Telford & Beames 2016).

In Samuel Taylor Coleridge we have, if not the first, then one of the most important English pioneers of both mountaineering and mountaineering literature, a form of writing that has now become a genre (Bainbridge 2012) and this Romantic influence on his son Derwent, as well as British culture, has had a lasting impact on St Mark’s College and later the University of St Mark and St John.

Brief timeline of Marjon’s name, title and geography

The physical location of the teaching college campuses and the titles used have been a factor of politics and personal connections, from Plymouth to London and back again.

- 1824 Derwent Coleridge takes a teaching post in Devonport (formerly known as Plymouth Dock), Plymouth, Devon, England, and marries into a Plymouth family.
- 1840 Battersea College, London (later renamed St John’s) founded using private funding by James Kay-Shuttleworth and E. Carleton Tufnell.
- 1841 St Mark's College opened, Chelsea, London.
Derwent Coleridge is invited to become its first Principal, relocating his household from Cornwall in the South West of England to London.
- 1844 The National Society take over the running of St John’s College.
- 1923 The two Colleges agree to merge. Following the Great War, student numbers were too low to support two separate institutions, and Battersea required extensive repairs.
First use of the term “Marjon”
- 1926 The merger was complete, and all students were finally situated on the St Mark’s campus in Chelsea, London.
- 1960’s Proposals to bisect the St Mark’s campus via a road-widening scheme in London prompted a plan for relocation. Plymouth is chosen for its potential,

and its natural advantages, re-establishing links originally made with nature and the outdoors for learning, and the City of Plymouth.

- 1968 An 'Advance Post' of 35 students, mainly mature women (returners to education), is established in Plymouth, opening in January 1969.
- 1973 The College of St Mark and St John (Marjon) makes a full relocation to the Derriford Road campus on the outskirts of Plymouth in state of the art buildings - described in the local press as 'the most modern college in Europe'.
- 1991 Affiliated to the University of Exeter. Government policy necessitates an awarding body for undergraduate degrees.
Still known as Marjon.
- 2007 University College status gained with *Taught Degree Awarding Powers* - the legal ability to award Marjon's own degrees
Still known as Marjon
- 2013 University status awarded - University of St Mark and St John
Still known as Marjon
- 2018 Plymouth Marjon University is adopted as a trading name of the University of St Mark & St John.
Still known as Marjon

Adventurous Learning

For many of the first students located in Battersea and Chelsea, merely sitting in a classroom was an adventure. The earliest register for Battersea includes students of markedly mixed age, anywhere between childhood and 30's; one student reports himself as 'not quite 12'. Some were married with families, others were teenagers and pre-teenagers and straight from the workhouse. Many had moved from former occupations both manual and clerical, including blacksmiths, carpenters, shoemakers and 'map dissectors' (College Register collections, unpublished). Some were from overseas including Malta, Bermuda and Syria. It is believed that Marjon has the first recorded Black teacher trainee in the U.K - William Robinson Tucker - and the first Black Inspector of Schools - Henry Rawlinson Carr. Levels of literacy and numeracy were varied, but provided the student was willing to learn, the colleges were willing to take them. As one student recalled in his college memoir, some of his fellows were "ill-furnished with the commonest rules of arithmetic [and] scarcely able to read" (Atkins 1906, p.64).

Examination of the registers reveals a diverse geographic population, too. Students came from all over England and Wales, from Cornwall to Carlisle, making lengthy coach journeys which could take days in a time before the expansion of the railway network; one student recorded a regular coach trip of 17 hours between Plymouth and London (College Register collection). This rich and stimulating mix of ages, backgrounds, accents and abilities, all partaking of the same educational advantages saw the early classrooms as microcosms of a wider, more exciting world. By the 1880's both colleges had student magazines where students could share accounts of notable experiences. Many are travelogues of journeys made by students within and outside the UK - the original 'wandering minds'? Volume II of the St Marks Magazine (1892) includes entries such as "A Trip to Switzerland" (W. Lawson), "A Journey Up the Nile" (anon.), "A Ramble in Lewes" (R.R. Smith) and a tour of "Western Barbary", or Plymouth and Cornwall, as it is more commonly known today, ("R.H.F").

Recent History: Marjon in Plymouth

The move to Plymouth

In March 1967 the Greater London Council announced the details of an urban motorway development scheme; an eight-lane highway to be run from Holland Park to Chelsea Basin. The chosen route would effectively slice right through the college, destroying buildings and bisecting its grounds. A complete relocation seemed inevitable. Though many mourned the loss of 120 years of tradition, others, including the Principal Rev. W.H. Mawson, saw the undeniable potential and "wonderful opportunity to give the College physical facilities which are worthy of its future" (College Yearbook 1967, p.13). In reality, the college would have had to move anyway, in order to survive. By the late 1960's and early 1970's, teacher training colleges were being urged to become more entrepreneurial and wider-ranging in their offer to students, culminating in the Department for Education and Science's (1972a) White Paper *Education: A Framework for Expansion* and the (1972b) James Report on *Teacher Education and Training*, both commissioned by the then Secretary of State for Education Margaret Thatcher. The move towards mixed sex education also required more accommodation and campus teaching space. Positioned as it was between the King's Road and the Fulham Road, and with a road potentially carving up the existing site and buildings, the college simply had no physical capacity to expand. By October 1967, the college council had examined nine different potential sites for relocation. Plymouth was something of a last-

minute ‘wild card’, but it’s potential was immediately apparent as a “lively and vigorous place” offering as it did a “fine site...with a view over Plymouth Sound to the Eddystone lighthouse” (College Yearbook 1968, President’s Address). Some students at the time, who had begun their courses at Chelsea and were now obliged to relocate to a new site over 200 miles away from London and 3 miles outside of Plymouth city centre, labelled the move as being from “the middle of everywhere ... to the middle of nowhere”. However, the move not only allowed greater physical expansion, it also permitted a nearer alignment with the aims and ambitions of the earliest college days. There would be greater opportunities for Kay-Shuttleworth’s “lessons from Nature ... with an intelligent interpreter” with this physical relocation.

The evolution of outdoor education courses at Marjon

The arrival of Marjon in Plymouth, starting in 1968 and completed in 1973, was at a time of growth and recognition for outdoor education nationally. Nicol (2002a, p.38) describes the 1960s as “The Golden Years” of outdoor education in the UK, and the 1970s was when the use of the term “outdoor education”, as opposed to “outdoor pursuits” or “outdoor activities”, became more prominent, directly attributable to the formation, in 1970, of the National Association for Outdoor Education (NAOE) (Nicol 2002b). Marjon, specialising in teacher training, renown for physical education, with outstanding natural resources on the doorstep during this golden age, provided the catalyst for outdoor education courses to develop at the university. This was highlighted in the 1975 college prospectus “The new 53-acre site is within easy access of areas of outstanding natural beauty and commands impressive views of Plymouth Sound and Dartmoor National Park (Marjon Prospectus 1975, p.4). On the physical education page “the varied local environment provides many opportunities for outdoor activities which include sailing, canoeing, camping and mountain exercises” (Marjon Prospectus 1976, p.22).

In the UK, the theoretical foundations at this time were summarised by the National Association for Outdoor Education (NAOE). When formed in 1970 they suggested that outdoor education was a means of approaching educational objectives through guided direct experience in the environment using its resources as learning material. This was supported and adopted as a template for courses throughout the existence of the NAOE (Barrett & Greenaway 1995; Hopkins & Putnam 1993). Another influential landmark of this era was the 1975 *Dartington Conference* convened by the Department for Education and Science (DES).

This was the first “systematic attempt ... to identify and categorise the different goals of outdoor education and to identify the processes by which they may be achieved” (Hopkins & Putnam 1993, p.45). The conference raised the concern that the NAOE definition did not “help to identify and emphasise certain important educational aims” (DES 1975, p.1). Instead, they suggested that outdoor education was “education out of doors ... including disciplines such as geography, history, art, biology field work, environmental studies and physical education”. The concentration on ‘the means’ of outdoor education by the NAOE suggested that the process, rather than the subject[s] of the course, was the defining element of outdoor education. Parker & Meldrum (1973) suggest that this method was generally considered in terms of integrating school subjects along with involving direct experience of the outdoors, thus placing outdoor education within the context of formal education. Although there was no suggestion of exclusivity, the notion that outdoor education could be part of a school curriculum places the teaching of it to trainee teachers firmly within the curriculum structures of Marjon. The Dartington Conference further confirmed these curricular links specifically for physical education, a Marjon area of expertise, and led to the evolution of outdoor education as a specialism for physical education secondary school trainees. For example, by 1983 the College boasted “a purpose-built Outdoor Education Centre and outdoor pursuits form an integral part of the [physical education] programme. ... The College is an RYA Sailing School and runs certificated courses. It is also recognised by the Mountain Leadership Training Board as a centre for its award bearing courses.” (College of St Mark & St John 1983, p.40).

The approach to outdoor education was experiential; to fully and directly experience the outdoor natural environment. The philosophical roots and importance of experiential pedagogies in education continues to be discussed (e.g. see Ord & Leather, 2018 for the influence of John Dewey). This experiential pedagogy was evident with courses both practical and reflective in their structure. By the 1980s the range and scope of outdoor education was indicated by using the model of the National Association for Outdoor Education (NAOE) and from the Local Education Authorities (LEA) of Devon and Cumbria as shown below. These were influential to the course design at Marjon

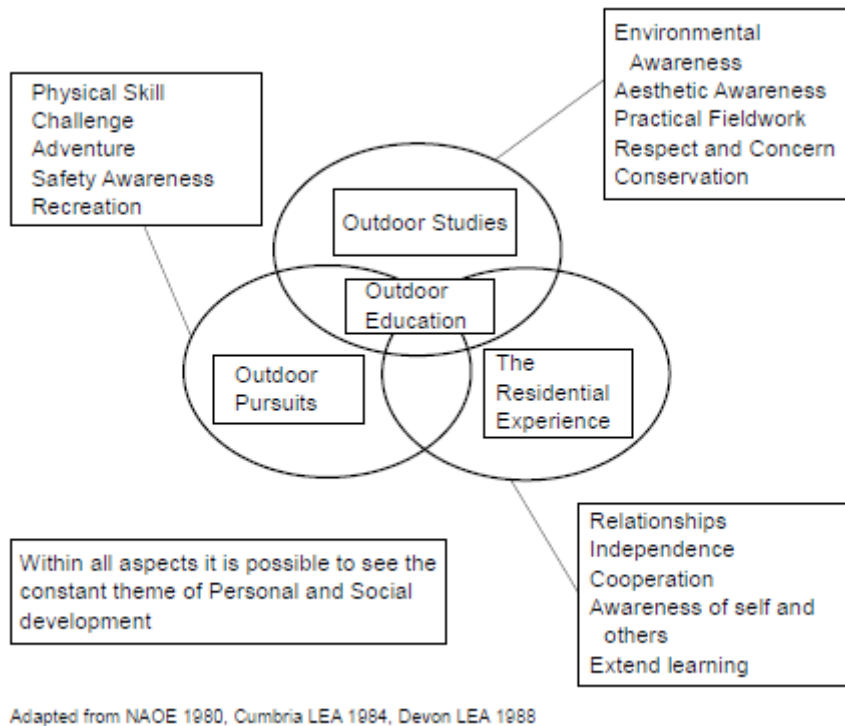


Figure 1. A version of the NAOE three ring model to define outdoor education. (Leather & Porter 2006, p. 56)

Course development: Teacher Training Courses

The Education Reform Act for England and Wales (ERA) of 1988 was a seismic event for the content and ethos of formal education. The ERA formalised the *National Curriculum* and made explicit and compulsory an entitlement curriculum for those aged 5 – 16 years. It referred to the spiritual and moral development of the child in the context of a ‘broad and balanced’ curriculum. By the 1980s, all students undertaking physical education teacher training (Bachelor of Education ‘BEd’ or postgraduate certificate in education ‘PGCE’) participated in outdoor education modules (classes). At Marjon in 1989, outdoor education was introduced to the secondary Physical Education BEd as a supportive/second teaching subject to meet the needs of the new National Curriculum. The 1989 college prospectus highlighted the advantageous geographical location stating: “Consider first where we are. The sea on one side, behind us the splendour of Dartmoor National Park. The setting makes Marjon a natural choice for all who love the outdoor environment: rambling, rock climbing, sailing or simply ambling along the shore” (College of St Mark & St John 1989, p.6). The National Curriculum Council (NCC, 1990) highlighted the value of outdoor education experiences describing how they could make significant contribution as a focus of cross

curricular work.^v However, in the following years of curriculum development, the position of outdoor education was altered and its structure fragmented. Outdoor education was one of the cross-curricular themes of the original National Curriculum (DES 1989) that followed the Education Reform Act (1988). The *Dearing review* led to a revised slimmed-down version of the National Curriculum (SCAA 1994) that saw the demise of outdoor education and all cross-curricular themes.

Teacher education at Marjon today

Physical education students at Marjon on teaching qualifications still receive modules on the relevance of outdoor & adventurous activities (OAA) in the PE curriculum. For example, for those on the professional BEd (Hons) Secondary Physical Education, the Marjon website (Plymouth Marjon University^{vi} 2019a) highlights the current module *Holistic Development through Outdoor and Adventurous Education* where students understand “... the unique role OAA has in developing physical, social, emotional and cognitive characteristics”. The emphasis is on the understanding and facilitation of outdoor activities, particularly with an emphasis on a non-competitive approach to skill development and as an option for lifelong participation in physical activity. However, even with the highest levels of student motivation and passion for outdoor education in its fullest sense (i.e. more than just OAA skills), it is not possible to do it the justice it arguably deserves within a short time allocation in a teaching degree.

Course development: BA (Hons) Outdoor Adventure Education

The outdoor sector in the UK includes educators who do not work solely in formal education. It includes elements of outdoor recreation, adventure tourism, educational visits and tours, outdoor learning, as well as using outdoor settings to teach sustainability, bushcraft, forest schools, creativity projects, and the increasing therapeutic uses of the outdoors for physical and mental wellbeing. The nature of inclusive, lifelong participation in the outdoors for learning, saw *outdoor adventure education* developed at Marjon. The course evolved from the BA Physical Recreation programme where “outdoor physical recreation programmes also provide practical and theoretical insights into such pursuits as mountain walking, expeditioning, orienteering, kayaking and sailing” (College of St Mark & St John 1986, p.39). And by the 1990s this had become “an extensive outdoor Physical Recreation programme” (College of St Mark & St John 1991, p.37) with photographs of rock climbing,

sailing, cycling and walking prevalent throughout the prospectus, including kayaking on the front cover (College of St Mark & St John 1991, 1995).

In 2003, following an ‘Academic Portfolio Review,’ *Outdoor Adventure* was a subject and was introduced as a minor route (in a combined honours programme) and by 2005 as a major route on the BA (Hons) combined programme (Leather & Porter 2006). The degree was vocationally oriented, engaging in the traditional adventure activities (canoeing, climbing, sailing, mountaineering etc.) all underpinned by the academic study of theoretical and conceptual ideas and issues. The degree developed students’ experiences, confidence and ability, with a broad base of knowledge and a critical understanding of educating outdoors. “Its aim was to enhance career prospects in the outdoor adventure industry and community-oriented professions, in line with the College’s commitment to developing links with industry, commerce and the public, and voluntary sector institutions” (Leather & Porter 2006, p.60).

Following university college status in 2007, and another curriculum re-structure, a single honours degree programme, BA *Outdoor Adventure Education* was offered (University College of St Mark & St John 2009). The ethos, values and approach to an experiential pedagogy, grounded in practical fieldwork in nature, underpinned by a sound theoretical base continues to develop as new ways of thinking and being emerge within the wider social, cultural and political context. The degree was designed to have many transferable interpersonal people skills, and these provide students with graduate employability or *graduateness*. As such the course is first and foremost an academic degree, rather than an instructor training course. These key graduate skills are evident and include; positive attitude, independence, self-management, creative problem solving, co-operative teamwork, communication, including extended writing in a variety of styles, researching key questions, reflective thinking and critical analysis. This is a “set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy” (NUS 2011, p.14).

Full circle: Resonances between past, present and future

Romanticism is arguably still the strongest and most powerful theoretical current in experiential education and the reason “is because it works” (Roberts, 2012, p.47).

Experiential education pedagogy is fundamental to outdoor education at Marjon today and thrives as a subject – Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Outdoor Adventure Education, Masters in Research (Outdoor Education), or PhD study – and classes incorporating outdoor experiential pedagogies are found in many other degree programmes. *Adventure education and outdoor learning* is a broader conception of what is on offer, and reflects the academic underpinning seen in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Adventure and Outdoor Learning*. Informal outdoor recreation sees Marjon students involved in adventure sports clubs, climbing, kayaking, hiking, sailing, surfing and mountain biking. Some 21st century students have greater personal resources (cars, money and equipment) for leisure time activities and sees them taking advantage of Dartmoor National Park, local beaches, rivers, and the parks and nature reserves in Plymouth, Devon and Cornwall. Many students travel internationally for summer employment, such as summer camp programmes in the USA.

The legacies of romanticism are evident at Marjon today – direct unmediated experience, reflection upon this, learning outdoors in nature and the power of individual choice. However, the teaching staff are mindful of the critique and discussion around how challenging this pedagogy can be in contemporary society and within current education practices. Roberts (2008) defines *neo-experiential* education and argues that it is problematic. Experience becomes *neo-experiential* as it fits effortlessly with the current neoliberal ideology that dominates our educational structures and their organisation. From this perspective, “the ‘means’ of experience become secondary to the dominating ‘ends’ of economy, efficiency, and control” (Roberts, 2008, p.30). It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss neoliberalism and education other than to acknowledge that this dominates the political and economic landscape within which universities and colleges of higher education operate. For examples, discussion and critique of neoliberalism and education, from the critical discourse within social theory and education that studies the ways in which the free market, competition, and the student as an individual consumer are constructed, see Apple (2014), Gewirtz (2003), Giroux (2014) and Tight (2019). For critique of outdoor education practices, where teaching and learning have become commodified and the experiences become *neo-experiential*, see Beames and Brown (2014), Leather (2018) and Loynes (1998).

Current curriculum and pedagogy for outdoor education at Marjon are experiential by design and contain direct unmediated experiences, reflection upon these, learning outdoors in nature and the power and opportunities for individual choice. Critiques of the oversimplification and use of experiential learning cycles are pertinent when designing curriculum and teaching students. For example, Seaman (2008) reviews the criticism that stepwise models inadequately explain the holistic learning processes that are central to learning from experience, and that they lack scientific or philosophical foundations. Additionally, criticism also centres on the way complex cultural, social, and physical processes during experience and learning are reduced to a rational, excessively cognitive, individual phenomenon. Seaman (2008) argues that existing cyclic models might be better valued for their important historical contribution, rather than as active theories of learning in experiential education. Ord and Leather (2011, p.13) argue for a reconceptualisation of “experience learning” and a return to the work of John Dewey. They highlight how simplistic learning cycles are problematic and to understand experiential learning fully a return to Dewey is necessary as he conceives of an experience “as a transaction between the individual and their environment and is therefore a consequence of their ‘trying’ and ‘undergoing’ within that experience” (ibid, p.13) and the subsequent meaning making from this. Marjon programmes are strongly influenced by the work of John Dewey and these critiques. For further reading about the importance and influence of Dewey for outdoor education, see Quay and Seaman (2013) and Ord and Leather (2018).

Another foundation of the Marjon curriculum is adventurous learning. Beames and Brown (2016) highlight how adventurous learning is accomplished by weaving together authenticity, personal agency and responsibility, uncertainty, and mastery. These are directly experienced on the BA Outdoor Adventure Education degree and help students to understand the Marjon values which “are at the heart of everything we do” (Plymouth Marjon University 2019b). These values are *Curiosity, Ambition, Humanity, Independence* and their articulation was inspired by “the stories of our students, by our history and by our hopes and ambitions for the future. They encourage both the ability and the aspiration to improve lives for all”. From the days of Kay-Shuttleworth and Coleridge to the present, the belief in the value of education for all, especially embracing nature and the great outdoors in the *uncovered schoolroom* continues to be recognised as being of value for physical and psychological health and wellbeing.

Also, pertinent when designing curriculum and teaching students, is the lasting influence of the Romantics (e.g. Rousseau, Wordsworth, Coleridge) and the Romantic Transcendentalists (e.g. Emerson, Thoreau and Muir) where constructions of nature are seen as sites of sublime experience, belief in the innate goodness of children and the power of individual choice. Roberts (2012) provides a thorough account of these in *Beyond Learning by Doing*, as well as discussing the limitations and critiques of this influence on experiential outdoor education. For the contemporary Marjon curriculum, the romanticised child and power of the individual has seen the development of the Forest School approach to outdoor education (e.g. see Knight 2009) where children are taken into nature and allowed to engage in child-initiated play. This is considered within a broader context of outdoor learning - younger children, close to home and low technical activities in nature – and is considered alongside other brands of outdoor education such as the Scout Association, Outward Bound and The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Additionally, the constructions of wilderness, wildness and what is ‘real’ or ‘natural’ nature for outdoor education are woven into the curriculum. Dartmoor National Park is adjacent to the campus and provides multiple opportunities to explore these concepts. A high moorland environment that is often wet, windy and wild has been inhabited by human endeavour since the Bronze Age. The legacies of farming, tin working, Victorian granite quarrying and the contested use of the land for outdoor recreation provides many physical experiences to consider how we construct nature. Culturally the popular fictional story of Sherlock Holmes and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is set on Dartmoor, inspired by original English folk tales, this helps us understand how nature is culturally and socially, as well as physically and biologically constructed. In the 21st century age of social media, Leather and Gibson (2019) explore how image circulation of outdoor experiences through social media, and parents acting as agents of consumption, provide greater affordances with nature. They argue that utilising the French sociologist Baudrillard’s concept of nature as hyperreal might help deepen our understanding of contemporary affordances with nature. The use of images in meaning making has long been used, however the age of the selfie and live streaming suggest that students are meaning making and reflecting in the moment in ways that are different and new. With the rapidly changing technological world the future is an uncertain and exciting adventure.

And so, to the future

The original mission of both colleges was to take young people in extreme poverty, often found in the workhouse, and educate them to become teachers; the use of nature for physical

and mental wellbeing and direct experience of children being taught lessons in the ‘Normal school’ . Training colleges were first set up in the early 19th century and many came to be modelled on Battersea Normal School (College of St John), established in 1841 (National Archives, n.d.). The university continues to attract students from poorer and less educated backgrounds than average. For example, the number of entrants whose parents have not participated in higher education background averages 56% and the university ranks in the top 10 for social inclusion (Plymouth Marjon University 2019c) in the league-table performativity measures popular with government. However, as research has highlighted (Elvy 2019), access to outdoor education is severely limited for those in poverty. If you are a child living in poverty, and there is daily uncertainty about food and hunger, then accessing a school or community outdoor programme becomes difficult. At university, how inclusive is outdoor education? The course requirements for joining are academic standards, and a positive attitude – essential for fieldwork. Some experience is preferred, but not essential as not all school students have the same access to outdoor education experiences. All technical equipment is provided by Marjon, however, there is an expectation that students attend fieldwork with a packed lunch and drink, and that they own a waterproof coat, trousers, suitable walking footwear and a small rucksack to carry spare items and the essentials for fieldwork. However, the question is how is this inclusive when four million children and young people, almost a third of children in the UK, live in poverty - with the situation getting worse, with the number set to rise to five million by 2020 (The Children’s Society 2019). The data suggests that two thirds of children living in poverty have at least one parent in employment. If a young person chooses to attend university from these backgrounds it is conceivable that their student loan for maintenance will go to help support the family, not the purchase of the “essentials” to keep warm and dry.

Roberts (2008) highlights how the shifts in experiential education theory and practice are indicative of larger shifts within educational progressivism. He argues that “if experiential education practitioners are to address real concerns of inequality, marginalization, hegemony, and injustice, we must learn a new civichood, one that is based upon the ideals of participation, deliberation, community, and responsibility” (p.31). Perhaps it is time for us to reconsider our romanticised view of outdoor education, let go of our romantic notions of nature and engage differently with people, developing our new ‘civichood’, if we want to hold true to our original mission. How we do this remains to be seen and will be a matter of

reflection, debate, and action. It is intended that this paper will be a catalyst for those debates.

As we finish writing this paper we are in the middle of a global pandemic, where universities and colleges have moved their teaching online. What this means for the future of an experiential pedagogy and direct experience in nature (whether real or hyperreal) is unclear and uncertain, but undoubtedly the future will look different; and yet again those from the poorest backgrounds are hit the hardest. Owning a computer, having fast internet access and, arguably more importantly, a safe space at home where it is possible to work, are evidently more challenging for the poorest in society. The future of outdoor education is uncertain. The history of outdoor education for this time is yet to be written.

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ⁱ In England and Wales, a workhouse was a place where those unable to support themselves were offered accommodation and employment. In Scotland, they were usually known as poorhouses. Life in a workhouse was intended to be harsh, to deter the able-bodied poor and to ensure that only the truly destitute would apply.

ⁱⁱ Rickburner is an arsonist who sets fire to hayricks [haystacks].

ⁱⁱⁱ Scafell is a mountain in the English Lake District, part of the Southern Fells. Its height of 964 metres (3,162 ft) makes it the second-highest mountain in England.

^{iv} Robert Southey was an English poet of the Romantic school, one of the Lake Poets along with William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and England's Poet Laureate for 30 years from 1813 until his death in 1843. Mark Leather is a distant relative of his!

^v See Leather (2018) for a detailed discussion on the political policy impacts on outdoor education in England.

^{vi} Plymouth Marjon University is the trading name and brand of the University of St Mark and St John.