

Re-Placing Outdoor Education: Diversity, Inclusion, and the Microadventures of the Everyday

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Abstract

With the increased emphasis on sustainability and place-based education, along with a heightened sense of awareness of diversity and inclusion issues in outdoor education, the time has come to critically examine the long-held trip and expedition construct within the outdoor education field. This paper will explore the theoretical influences of Romanticism on the field and connect these influences to long-standing and unresolved issues of diversity and inclusion in outdoor education. Using the romantic concept of the “sublime,” I argue that outdoor and adventure education have traditionally settled around the organizing motif of the trip and the expedition in contrast with local and everyday experiences, and as a result, these frameworks have caused the field to miss opportunities for wider acceptance and usage as well as solidarity with like-minded pedagogies in environmental and place-based education. In this paper, I claim that a critical awareness of the romantic legacy, combined with a renewed focus on the concept of place and everyday experiences, will allow the fields of outdoor and adventure education to expand in influence and inclusion.

KEYWORDS: place-based education; diversity; outdoor education; microadventure

The popular American history of outdoor education has some well-trod and often repeated territory. A survey of the theoretical work in the field points to the influence of early American progressivists—particularly John Dewey and his oft-cited *Experience and Education* (Quay & Seaman, 2013). Practitioners of adventure education often reference Kurt Hahn and Paul Petzoldt as influential to the development of that subfield. More recently, the “experiential learning cycle” has emerged as an emblematic model of a variety of approaches (Seaman, 2008). Some have noted the limitations of such historical framing of the field (Fenwick, 2001; Roberts, 2008, 2011), but it has become somewhat of a taken-for-granted “folk history.” Some people may get the impression that contemporary outdoor education is like a three-legged stool held up by Dewey, Hahn, and the experiential learning cycle as popularized by Kolb (1984). Dolan (2015) cited what she refers to as a “classic” definition of outdoor education “provided by Donaldson and Donaldson in 1958, when they stated that ‘outdoor education is in, about, and for the outdoors’” (p. 49). To Quay and Seaman (2013), however, outdoor education remains a “confused” field that has yet to resolve basic conflicts around whether it is predominantly a content subject (the outdoors) or a unique method (teaching through the outdoors). This is certainly borne out in the jumble of terms that are often used in the field. Outdoor education, environmental education, adventure education, experiential education, expeditionary learning, and a host of related approaches and terms are often used interchangeably (Adkins & Simmons, 2002; Itin, 1999; Priest & Miles, 1990).

The American Educational Research Association, for example, includes special interest groups such as Ecological and Environmental Education, Outdoor and Adventure Education, and Service Learning and Experiential Education. Louv (2005) labeled these various approaches a “movement” and suggested, “The definitions and nomenclature of this movement are tricky. In recent decades, the approach has gone by many names: community-oriented schooling, bioregional education, experiential education, and, most recently, place-based or environment-based education” (p. 204). I won’t go into depth here on the issues of this conceptual haze, and I have argued elsewhere (Roberts, 2011, 2015) for ways to better construct lines of demarcation between these approaches. For the purposes of this paper, I see outdoor and adventure education (OAE) as distinct approaches that draw from the common intellectual “taproot” of experiential education.

Regardless of how a person chooses to bound the scope of these fields and its various approaches, an examination of current scholarly work in “mapping” its intellectual history yields surprisingly little recognition or discussion of the influence of Romanticism to the field. One relatively recent work (Smith & Knapp, 2011) discusses the influence of several Romantic thinkers on the field, but the analysis emphasizes the histories of the individuals themselves rather than more conceptually examining Romanticism as an intellectual movement and its influence on experiential education. I will argue, on conceptual grounds, that what Hay (2002) dubbed “the Romantic current” is hugely influential to the historic and contemporary constructions of OAE. Further, the lack of awareness of the Romantic influence on the theory and practice in these areas has led to a certain operational and conceptual naïveté about the possibilities and limitations of this intellectual history.

Against this backdrop, two recent movements are important. First, the rise of place-based approaches (Gruenewald, 2003; Sobel, 2004) have refocused attention on what Gruenewald termed the pedagogical power of place in education. As Quay and Seaman (2013) noted, this movement has begun to be taken up within outdoor education scholarship (e.g., see Hill & Brown, 2014). Second, and more specifically within the fields of OAE, the intriguing advent of “microadventuring” (Humphreys, 2014) has taken the place-based approach and stitched it to the historical framework of the adventure, which, until now, has had a tendency to be defined against the local through activity in exotic and distant locales (more on that later). Both of these recent trends placed alongside the Romantic legacy of the field suggest new questions and direc-

tions for OAE. What are the implications of Romanticism on the way the field thinks about adventuring in the outdoors? How have the somewhat dominant pedagogical units of measurement in outdoor education of the extended trip or expedition limited the ability of the field to bring in new participants, new voices, and a more inclusive pedagogy? Finally, this paper concludes with a commentary on the possibilities and limitations of the Romantic legacy, as well as suggested ways forward as the field attempts to re-place outdoor education.

Romanticism and Outdoor Education

It is difficult to legislate a single accepted use of a term such as *Romanticism*. Berlin (1999) described it as a “dangerous and confused subject, in which many have lost, I will not say their senses, but at any rate their sense of direction” (p. 1). Various writers have described the mood, movement, or ideals of the Romantic period in vastly different, and sometimes contradictory, ways. Yet Berlin also argued, “There *was* a romantic movement; it did have something which was central to it; it did create a revolution in consciousness; and it is important to discover what this is” (p. 20). Hay (2002) spent the better part of his introductory chapter detailing “the romantic movement,” defining it as “a nineteenth century movement of reaction against the values, tastes, and ideals of the preceding century . . . the so-called ‘Age of the Enlightenment’” (p. 4). This, he admitted, is a rather imprecise definition. McGann (1985), in a highly influential work in literary studies, dubbed the Romantic period as an ideology and went on to claim “informed persons *do* generally agree on what is comprised under the terms Romantic and Romantic Movement” (p. 18). Mellor (1993), also in literary studies, argued that this particular historical period included several distinctive romantic tendencies including the valuing of creative imagination, a belief in the unity of being and transcendence, a particular (autonomous) sense of self, and a desire for political (though not social) revolution (p. 2). Within education, Hirsch (1996) detailed a “Thoughtworld” that he believes forms the intellectual foundations of progressive thought and went on to define Romanticism in the following way:

First, Romanticism believed that human nature is innately good, and should therefore be encouraged to take its natural course, unspoiled by the artificial impositions of social prejudice and convention. Second, Romanticism concluded that the child is neither a scaled-down, ignorant version of the adult nor a formless piece of clay in need of molding, rather, the child is a special being in its own right with unique, trustworthy—indeed holy—impulses that should be allowed to develop and run their course. (p. 74)

Thus, authors from various fields of study have variously described Romanticism as a movement, an ideology, a set of values, and a thoughtworld. Indeed, it can be the “dangerous and confused subject” that Berlin (1999) described. Nonetheless, it is equally clear that a set of sociohistorical conditions gave rise to a worldview of enormous power and influence—one that Berlin described as a “great achievement . . . that, unlike most other great movements in human history . . . succeeded in transforming certain of our values to a very profound degree” (p. 139). It is somewhat surprising, then, that given the influence of Romanticism on Western thought, its influence has remained more or less unexplored in the field of outdoor education—this despite the fact that key figures in the history of the field such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, John Dewey, and Kurt Hahn clearly employed elements of the Romantic worldview in their thinking. Indeed, I argue that in Romanticism the single strongest intellectual antecedent to curriculum projects in outdoor education can be found. Furthermore, outdoor education has been operating in somewhat of a conceptual “blind spot” in terms of its Romantic legacy, yielding naïve conceptual understandings and operational practice as to the limitations of its assumptions. As Niebuhr (1938) once remarked, “Every philosophy is under the illusion that it has no illusions because it has discovered the illusions of its predecessors” (p. 107).

In particular, the Romantic concept of the sublime gives the field a lens by which to understand some of the thoughtworld of the movement and its influence on outdoor education. Because of the centrality of this concept to Romanticism and outdoor education, it is worth exploring. That said, the *sublime* is a complex and deeply theorized term in literary theory and well beyond the scope of this article to explore in depth. Here I examine how the sublime has been used to develop a particularly Western and American version of outdoor education that has come to be influential in the field as a whole. I explore how the sublime influences three concepts central to Romanticism and outdoor education: wilderness, learning, and transformation.

Wilderness and the Sublime Mistress

Muir once noted that the solitude of the wilderness “is a sublime mistress, but an intolerable wife” (as cited in Nash, 1982, p. 126). Embedded within this striking quotation are important ways in which the sublime intersects with a particular construction of nature in Romantic thought. Nash argued, “The concept of sublimity gained widespread usage in the eighteenth century. As an aesthetic category, the sublime dispelled the notion that beauty in nature was seen only in the comfortable, fruitful, and well-ordered. Vast, chaotic scenery could also please” (p. 45). Beyond the well-kept English garden, the wild places far removed from the cultural comforts of urban and even rural life held the key to transcendence and a closer association to God. Because these new sublime places were set apart from civilization and the city, it often took a journey (either real or sometimes metaphoric) to access these feelings. A person had to leave the more debased material realm and ascend to a higher plane. Mellor (1993) noted, for example, that

confronted with such overwhelming natural phenomena as the Alps, huge dark caves, a blinding sunset, or a towering gloomy ruin, the human mind first experiences terror or fear and then—as our instinct for self-preservation is gradually relaxed—astonishment, admiration, reverence, and respect. (p. 86)

Theorists and practitioners of OAE cannot help but read these descriptions of the sublime and note its connections to the well-trod debates over the wilderness concept—particularly in the American context (Callicott, 1998; Cronon, 1996; Nash, 1982). It is beyond the scope of this paper to relitigate this rich intellectual terrain that has recently been reinvigorated (see Kahn & Hasbach, 2013; Monbiot, 2014; Wuerthner, Crist, & Butler, 2014). What is important here is the connection between the Romantic notion of the sublime and what Callicott (1998) described as the “received wilderness ideal”—a particular construct of nature as remote, pristine, untouched, and devoid of human beings (or at least White people). This notion of wilderness, as Cronon (1996) famously argued, is a *cultural product* of civilization. In producing it, equating it with nature, and setting it against society and city life, people end up defining nature as something exotic and distant from everyday human activity. As Cronon argued, “This, then, is the central paradox: wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural. If we allow ourselves to believe that nature, to be true, must also be wild, then our very presence in nature represents its fall” (p. 484). The result of this dualism, brought about by the Romantic construction of sublime nature and a particular cultural construction of wilderness, can leave outdoor education with an environmental ethic akin to exotic tourism. As Hess (2010) argued, “There are few positive imaginative and ecological models to encourage deep commitment to the unspectacular, developed, aesthetically ordinary environments where most of us live and work” (p. 4).

Further, sublime wilderness framed as exotic and other is vulnerable to colonialist and imperialist ideologies (Guha, 1998). In the 19th century United States, for example, perspectives such as this from the Big Horn Association of Cheyenne were commonplace:

The rich and beautiful valleys of Wyoming are destined for the occupancy and sustenance of the Anglo-Saxon race. The wealth that for untold ages has lain hidden beneath the snow-capped summits of our mountains has been placed there by Providence to reward the brave spirits whose lot it is to compose the advance guard of civilization. The Indians must stand aside or be overwhelmed by the ever advancing and ever increasing tide of emigration . . . (Wuerthner et al., 2014, p. 42)

Passages like this, along with Muir's description of wilderness as a "sublime mistress but an intolerable wife," are uncomfortable to read but important to bring to light. The historical legacy of American environmentalism more generally and the expedition-into-wilderness construct more specifically have racial, gender, and class overtones drawn from escapist and romanticized notions of nature and Western colonial power. From Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 work *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* to Ramachandra Guha's 1989 critique in *Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique*, there is a connection between the influence of Romantic thought on a person's notions of nature and how that particular thoughtworld manifests itself in systems of oppression. When planning and executing expeditions in remote lands, do outdoor educators realize how little has changed from the days of the Big Horn Association of Cheyenne? Although the racial ideology is clearly not as overt, the field of outdoor education in the United States and in many other parts of the Western world continues to be heavily defined by the extended trip and expedition motif—that is, well-off, predominantly White folks from the West driving or flying by countless urban and rural spaces to find "astonishment, admiration, and reverence" (Mellor, 1993, p. 86) through sublime interactions with a pristine and exoticized nature. Even the typical nature center, which serves as a common location for more localized outdoor education, is often set outside and away from developed human spaces and capitalizes on its retreat-like setting and beauty as part of its allure. But the point here is not just to make a fairly easy critique of the privilege associated with certain kinds of outdoor learning. More important, it is to draw attention to the influence of Romanticism on *the way we have come to think* about learning in the outdoors so that we as educators can better understand the possibilities and limitations of the legacy.

Education and the Learn'd Astronomer

In 1865, American poet Walt Whitman took pen to paper and wrote the poem "When I Heard The Learn'd Astronomer":

When I heard the learn'd astronomer;
 When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
 When I was shown the charts and the diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
 When I, sitting, heard the astronomer, where he lectured with much applause in the lecture room,
 How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick,
 Till rising and gliding out, I wander'd off by myself,
 In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
 Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

Here the Romantic notion of the sublime connects to a particular construct of the process of education and schooling. In Whitman's poem, the speaker rejects the "proofs," "charts," and "lectures" of the "learn'd astronomer" for the "perfect silence" of the stars. It is clear from the speakers' perspective that he gets much more from his solitary walk than he does from the formal lecturing of the expert. To Whitman and many Romantics, particularly within the American tradition, individual exploration and experience in nature form the good life. Such freedom is contrasted with the constraints of the social realm—that of civilization, formal schooling, and the corrupting influences of society. In Whitman's poem, the speaker becomes "sick" and "tired" and then "rises" and wanders off by himself into the "mystical moist night-air." To Whitman, the

social gathering of the lecture hall is degenerative, and it is only when he physically “rises” and moves outside into nature that he finds a degree of freedom and regeneration. This characterization of nature as freeing and transformative on the one hand and culture as corrupting and constraining on the other is a central feature of the Romantic transcendental movement in the United States, but it can easily be traced back at least to the Enlightenment thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his classic educational treatise *Emile, or On Education* (1979). It has also influenced the pedagogical and practical foundations of the OAE fields.

Often, the reform discourses around OAE set formal schooling as a corrupting influence against the more liberating aspects of learning in nature. Here again, though, nature is more often than not defined within a framework of Romantic sublimity. One example of this is the recent media attention given to the “forest school” movement. In many of these pieces, outdoor learning is contrasted with the constraining and corrupting aspects of formal schooling—standardized testing, overuse of screen-based learning, prevalence of learning disorders (e.g., see Barkham, 2014). Other examples from popular culture are the ways outdoor experiences are represented more often than not as individual experiences. Indeed, the representation of the lone White male staring off into vastness remains one of the most commonly seen and repeated media images related to activity in the outdoors.

Here again, as with the wilderness ideal, this framework has its roots in the Romantic notion of the sublime. To Hess (2010), the trope (in literature) or the meme (in this particular case of media images) comes straight out of the Wordsworthian nature writing tradition by emphasizing

moments of heightened aesthetic and spiritual experience by the isolated individual self . . . This solitary observer, removed from his own social, familial, and economic contexts, experiences these moments of pure transcendent vision in a moment of leisure, through lingering visual appreciation. (p. 93)

Although it is true that OAE most often takes *groups* into nature, the experiencing subject remains the primary unit of measure. Theoretical studies in the field continue to emphasize a sort of radical individual subject despite evidence that this is not an accurate representation of social phenomena (Fox, 2008; Seaman, 2008). Even with the more practical context of outdoor and adventure trips and expeditions, these are more often than not framed and organized, as Hess (2010) described, as leisure activity isolated from “social, familial, and economic contexts” (p. 93). Leave No Trace techniques and minimum impact camping become isolated skills to be practiced but with limited connection to larger questions of institutionalized power and privilege, not to mention the obvious irony of driving or flying to remote, wild locales only then to “leave no trace” in nature. Questions of race or other forms of identity and power rarely surface either because the participating group itself is homogeneous or because it is not considered appropriate or relevant to the more valued aspects of individually experienced sublimity. When nature activity becomes isolated and separated from these social, familial, and economic contexts, from everyday activity, and instead becomes something special and sublime, it comes with a cost. Hess wrote,

This split . . . is not only a product of how we see ourselves, but also a product of how we understand society, including, for instance, a perceived split between the professional intellectual class, which tends to envision its work as in harmony with or at least not damaging nature, and the working class whose direct physical involvement and transformation of nature is often stigmatized even as it supports the activities of these professionals. (p. 97)

People backpack in the National Forest and (later) protest mining operations on federal land. They paddle on wild and scenic rivers and (at another time) argue against mountain top removal. The radical, sublime-experiencing self “forgets” (or chooses to ignore) the people who are involved in those industries and the ways he or she relies on and is implicated in their eco-

nomie and social activity even when learning and adventuring in the outdoors. Whitman's rejection of society to have his sublime individual walk and experience among the stars comes at a cost.

Transcendence and Transformation

"Things do not change; we change." Henry David Thoreau

Beyond constructions of wilderness and a particular notion of learning in the outdoors, the Romantic notion of the sublime influences the way we think about the outcomes of particular outdoor activity. As the Thoreau quotation reveals, the Romantic transcendentalists viewed personal transformation and societal transformation as intertwined. Rothenberg (2002), for example, argued in regard to Thoreau:

[He] realizes on the climb up Katahdin that he treads upon an earth that was not made for him or his ilk, a land of Titans, the clouded tablelands of sublimity above the cliff falling down to the timid plains of humanity . . . And yet there is a need for the visit, the place serves a purpose, and affects him . . . It is the country for philosophy. We need raw wilderness in order to learn how to think. (p. 46)

The experiences connected to the sublime—those of confrontation and challenge, followed by some form of transformation and individual renewal—are common in OAE. They are reminiscent of the classic children's tale *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak (1963). In it, Max leaves his room and goes on a journey "in and out of weeks and almost over a year to where the wild things are" (p. 15). While he has quite an experience there (including a wild rumpus), Max eventually longs for home and sails back "in and out of weeks" to his room where he finds his supper "and it was still hot" (p. 35). Max's journey is emblematic of a certain Romantic framework. The transformational journey often involves a trip to another place (not the classroom or the home), and that place is often strange and/or exotic—the location of a more powerful, sublime, and thus transcendent experience. Because of the heightened awareness of sensorial experience, the trip becomes something "special" as opposed to something "everyday." Drawing from the Romantic tradition, truly transformative experience takes people away from the everyday and the typical. Thus, the most powerful lived experiences happen somewhere else, not "here." They require a "strange lands experience" (Kraft, 1992, p. 8). This framework is evident within outdoor education. Wilderness expeditions, outdoor adventure trips of varying lengths, and service-learning trips to distant and exotic locales rely in varying degrees on this kind of journey to self-discovery. A departure from the material and ideological constraints of hearth, home, and a four-walled classroom is necessary for a person to truly learn and become transformed.

But by emphasizing the sublime, Romantic constructions of experience tend to de-value so-called everyday experience. Herein lies the problem. Sublime experiences are never constant or ever present—the feelings they evoke are always temporary. Like Muir's construction of the relationship between the mistress and the wife—the mistress, while potentially pleasurable, can never be permanent—the experience inevitably must come crashing down to the realities of domesticity and the everyday. People may have powerful, transformative experiences in distant, sublime, and wild places, but upon return and reentry into "civilization" and debased local spaces and places, do the feelings linger? Does the construction of sublime outdoor experience as other preclude its transference back to the so-called real world? It ought to come as no surprise that sustained transfer of learning or behavior from such experiences to the everyday remains a problematic outcome for the fields of outdoor, environmental, and adventure education (Sibthorp, Furman, Paisley, Gookin, & Schumann, 2011). Too often, students who have such sublime experiences struggle upon return to the real world. We should also question why people differentiate between the real world and wilderness world, the backcountry and frontcountry, and what mental models and frameworks those binaries present for learners. It is not as easy as Max's

return to his room where he finds his bowl of soup “still hot,” in *Where the Wild Things Are*. With strange-lands experiences, the more we seem to amplify the differences, the more we make it difficult for learners to reconcile those differences upon return. Further, with the prevalence of so called at-risk youth wilderness therapy programs, it is worth questioning the ways the educational outcome of “individual transformation” is wrapped up in issues of race and class. Who is being asked to transform? From what and into what? Can we acknowledge that people of color or people from differing economic backgrounds may see nature and activity in the outdoors differently? Are there ways we can construct a new sense of activity and learning in the outdoors that is less focused on the Romantic sublime and more inclusive of “everyday people”?

The Microadventures of the Everyday

The result of the unexamined Romantic legacy on the field of outdoor education has yielded a pedagogical practice struggling to find relevance and inclusion in an increasingly diverse and urbanized society. One response to this is to double down on the historic Romantic construction of wilderness and learning in nature to argue *against* technology and urbanization and *for* increased wilderness protection for sublime outdoor pursuits such as multiday backpacking expeditions and the like. Within the environmental fields, this line of thinking has been roundly critiqued as exclusive and ineffective to meet the challenges of the 21st century (Kareiva, Marvier, & Lalasz, 2011; Shellenberger & Nordhaus, 2005). There is, of course, a false dichotomy between protecting wild spaces on the one hand and protecting people on the other that has been well elucidated by Wuerthner et al. (2014) and others. Nonetheless, within the field of outdoor education, it seems clear that the limitations of the sublime nature thoughtworld suggest the need for new imaginative conceptions of learning in nature. Recognizing this, theorists and practitioners in outdoor education have increasingly become enamored with the field of place-based education in an attempt to find new modes of learning and doing in the outdoor context.

Place-based approaches have been the subject of recent attention in the outdoor education field (Brown, 2012; Dolan, 2015; Quay & Seaman, 2013). Brown (2012) noted from the particular context of place-based outdoor education in New Zealand,

A place-responsive approach moves the focus from viewing outdoor education as a set of activities to outdoor education as a way to view relationships; both with people and place(s) . . . Thus outdoor education can, and should, differ in different places rather than being viewed as a set of activities “imposed” or artificially constructed. A place responsive approach to outdoor education potentially frees educators from technically demanding activities and allows educators, members of the wider school community and students to contribute to appropriate activities . . . (e.g., it could be waka-ama, fishing, weaving a kete, or mountain biking). (p. 5)

A place-based outdoor education allows for history and socioeconomic context integration in a way the traditional expedition construct often does not. Although it is possible to be “place-based” away from home (as well-designed study abroad experiences demonstrate), the expedition construct seems *more vulnerable* to Romanticized exoticism than does the everyday engagement in the local (see Sobania & Weinberg, 2015). Illich’s (1968) famous speech, “To Hell With Good Intentions,” demonstrates the vulnerability of the strange-lands trip. In this speech, Illich criticizes seemingly “innocent” notions of service and mission work that do not take into account who is doing the service “to” whom and for what purpose. Illich (1968) noted:

All you will do in a Mexican village is create disorder. At best, you can try to convince Mexican girls that they should marry a young man who is self-made, rich, a consumer, and as disrespectful of tradition as one of you. At worst, in your “community development” spirit you might create just enough problems to get someone shot after your va-

cation ends and you rush back to your middleclass neighborhoods where your friends make jokes about “spits” and “wetbacks.”

You start on your task without any training. Even the Peace Corps spends around \$10,000 on each corps member to help him adapt to his new environment and to guard him against culture shock. How odd that nobody ever thought about spending money to educate poor Mexicans in order to prevent them from the culture shock of meeting you? (para. 23–24)

Avoiding this kind of neocolonialism is hopefully on the mind of every good experiential educator designing such experiences. But the point remains—we are on ethically more solid ground when we work in our own communities, in our own places, and on our own issues.

But what of the foundational concepts in outdoor education of expanding the comfort zone, risk taking, and developing a tolerance for adversity? Aren't these the hallmarks of much of what works in the field? Are we left, then, with an everyday nature that provides little in the way of adventure? Perhaps not. The recent popularity of the microadventure yields intriguing imaginative possibilities for outdoor education. We might define a microadventure as a local, outdoor excursion that is relatively easy to access that, following Beames and Brown (2016), still includes the more classical elements of adventure (risk taking, uncertainty, discomfort, etc.). Humphreys (2014), the explorer and adventurer who coined the term *microadventure*, doesn't think it even needs to be overnight and defines it as “an adventure that is close to home, cheap, simple, short, and yet very effective” (p. 2). To Humphreys (2014), microadventures retain much of the animating qualities of more traditional expeditions but in a much more accessible and achievable format. Typically, microadventures involve activities such as camping out in the backwoods close to home, canoeing an unlikely stretch of water, and going for a hike or walk off-trail along a stream. Humphreys (n.d.) noted, “If you are too busy, too stressed, too broke, too tired or too unfit for an adventure, then you definitely would benefit from a microadventure” (para. 26). There are no particular rules with microadventuring other than the desire to “rewild” the human spirit and defend against “ecological boredom,” as Monbiot (2014) argued. The key to a microadventure is the way in which it can push people to go “off-script” *even among the everyday*. Monbiot pointed out an example of this everyday rewilding, noting an older woman on the beach:

Beyond the cars I saw a wonderful sight. An ancient woman wearing iridescent ski goggles and a blanket over her knees was riding her electric wheelchair at full tilt. Sand spurted from the wheels. She skidded around in tight circles, jolted forward and fishtailed through the ruts left by the cars. Someone's heart was still beating. (p. 17)

To Monbiot, even among the cars on a touristy beach in England, a person can find a microadventure—an experience that is at the same time every day and wild.

While we wring our hands in the outdoor education field regarding issues of diversity and inclusion, all around us are people, Sly Stone's “everyday people” from the song of the same name, participating in nature. The family that picnics in a state park and swims in the nearby river, the inner-city community that rallies around an urban garden, the kids fishing for bass in a farm pond—these everyday nature experiences and microadventures have the potential to yield the same kinds of outcomes we are after in the outdoor education field—a closer and more positive relationship with the more than human world. Do we really need more tightly scripted and guided outdoor education trips run by adults on children's behalf? Perhaps we need to return to the basics of what play in nature, at its most wild, its most spirit led, is supposed to be. As Bekoff (2014) argued, “Play is essential for the psychological well-being of the child, and not just any type of play, but social activities that are *unscheduled, unplanned, and unmanaged by adults* [emphasis added]” (p. 128).

Conclusion

It seems clear, then, that the microadventure, combined with the rise in interest in place as an imaginative category, yields significant opportunity for the outdoor education field while resisting some of the issues of the Romantic sublime. But what of the traditional expedition? What of the strange-land trips to big, wild spaces and places that stir the soul? In my own experience as an outdoor educator, I find it difficult to dismiss outright such activity. I see the value in experiences of sublime beauty. It *does* turn the soul in ways that can be sustainably transformative. But it is equally clear that such a construct of outdoor education has significant limitations. At the most pragmatic level, it is simply not scalable. People are already loving pristine wild spaces to death and are already loving so-called pristine wild. “Industrial strength” outdoor activity is threatening public lands across the United States and in many other locales around the globe. In addition, and what I hope I have made clear, the Romantic legacy associated with this kind of learning in nature projects a pedagogical stance and structure that is exclusive and ethically insufficient.

So, if we *are* going to continue to commit to forms of outdoor education that align with the Romantic expedition into the sublime, we must do so with eyes wide open—as instructors and with our students. In other words, if we are going to go there, then at least we ought to be *overt* about it. This approach asks students and instructors to be metacognitive—to know that they are experiencing and moving through a relationship with nature that has possibilities and limitations. Yes, people romanticize nature (in many ways this is unavoidable in the same ways that many mind-sets are culturally prescribed), and yes, this can be an effective means for personal transformation. But even when experiencing nature and the outdoors as romanticized, people can acknowledge that process and its effects on their perception and behavior—both positively and negatively. Much more than a loose equation with “critical thinking,” it is best described by White’s (2004) two-commitment minimum. Kadlec (2007) recounted, “Any genuinely critical theory or research tradition will . . . 1) cultivate a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ and 2) view ‘social structures of inequality’ as manifestations of power relations” (p. 14). Cultivating a “hermeneutics of suspicion” allows people to check lived experience against their understanding of how that experience might be shaped and framed by larger sociocultural forces.

In this way, people might simultaneously allow for the sublime while maintaining a healthy skepticism and resistance to being carried away by the experience. Rather than leaving economic and social contexts behind on such trips, they must overtly carry them *in*. Also, students must be given the tools to analyze within those contexts even as they experience the exoticized awe and grandeur of a place that is not their home. This approach, then, involves several key attributes:

1. pre-exposure and framing that prepares students for the experience, labels the potential concerns, and asks students to think critically about them;
2. integrated learning, throughout the experience, that brings to light the ways the experience does not exist outside issues of history, society, power, and privilege;
3. purposeful and overt teaching of metacognitive strategies for students to act as participant observers moving between subjective experience and objective analysis and critique of the experience; and
4. meaningful reflection, throughout the experience, that connects individual insight and group awareness of the sublime experience into everyday social responsibility and action.

Many educators recognize these attributes as good old-fashioned critical pedagogy, and to a large degree, that is true. But critical pedagogy has largely not been taken up in practice in outdoor education. If outdoor education is done well, students can be moved by the experience and return critically aware of the privilege and responsibility that comes with that new knowledge.

In 2009, I taught a course at my university entitled Pedagogies of Place, in which, for part of the semester, the students purposefully engaged with place-based learning activities by using the local river that runs through town. Three months after the course, as part of a research grant, I asked students to reflect on what, if anything, still resonated from the course. One student remarked:

In reflecting back on the Pedagogies of Place class, what stands out most to me are the “field trips” and the opportunities we had to be outside and meet people who were in direct relationship with the places and concepts we were studying. When I think about the highlights of this class my mind is immediately flooded with images of the Farris [*sic*] family farm, particularly of sitting around the fire together that evening and telling stories, having both faculty, alumni, students and community members reflecting and sharing in a way that seems impossible to find in a classroom. Under the stars and camped out cross-legged in a circle, it seemed we were experiencing something somehow especially “real” and meaningful, an experience that, if nothing else, would stay with me and mark a powerful moment in the course as well as my semester and perhaps all of my time at Earlham.

Thinking about this as I write I am reminded of our class conversations of Thoreau and other romantics and our discussions of the tendencies and challenges of “romanticizing” nature and the natural world. While perhaps I am doing this now, there is something undeniably striking about the direct experience of being in and learning from the outdoors. Interestingly, these experiences were not limited to and hardly included moments in the “Great Outdoors” as an expansive wilderness, but rather simply anything outside of the four walls of the Earlham classroom and “in” and among the greater space, place and community we were exploring. While the theory and readings assigned in class certainly deepened and gave meaning to the other activities, it is the moments outside and with other people that most stand out to me. It seems that with my hands wet and my clothes dirty, the ideas and concepts we were studying began to take shape and come to life.

The student exemplified many of the themes discussed in this paper. She spoke of the power of “direct experience” and the realness of being “under the stars,” and she set this against her everyday experiences at college. But she did not stop there. She continued in the second paragraph to reflect critically on that particular view of education and nature and reinscribed the enterprise as “anything outside the four walls” and “in’ and among the greater space, place and community.” She demonstrates, I believe, the metacognitive and critical approach explored in this paper. The reason the romantic sublime is such a powerful construct in outdoor education is, quite simply, because it works. But our responsibility as educators and as citizens dealing with a rapidly changing world full of wicked problems suggests that we must resist the temptation to replay old scripts. It is time to re-place outdoor education by moving beyond the love affair with the Romantic sublime and, in doing so, discover new, more inclusive and effective ways of learning in nature.

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