

**School of Sport, Leisure and Travel  
Faculty of Enterprise and Innovation  
Buckinghamshire New University  
Brunel University**

**The Stoneleigh Project: a case study of outdoor youth work  
and its impact on personal and social transformation**

**By Christopher Loynes**

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**Abstract**

This research is a case study of the Stoneleigh Group; a partnership of voluntary youth work organisations that piloted a spiritual development programme for young people aged 18 to 25. The purpose of the research was to examine the claims made by the Stoneleigh Group to have developed a radical approach and outcomes of personal and social transformation within a programme of informal education out of doors. The research was undertaken in the contexts of reviews of research concerning outdoor education, informal education for young people, and youth transition. An ethnographic study of the retreat programme and its impact on the lives of the young people was combined with a critical study of the advocacy work of the Stoneleigh Group within the development of the National Youth Work Curriculum. The analysis was undertaken with the aid of Bernstein's theoretical framework for curriculum and pedagogic critique. The study of the programme claims that the pedagogic approach was radical in its ideology and practice. However, it is argued that the impact on the

young people depended on the ideology of the youth organisation for which they volunteered. A range of claims for a radical outcome are identified and discussed. The research argues that, despite the claim that the outcomes of social transformation were only partially achieved, the practices of the Stoneleigh Group were contested because of their perceived radicalism. The study of the advocacy work suggests that, despite these challenges, the Stoneleigh Group's contributions to the national discussions concerning the spiritual development of young people within the youth work curriculum resulted in proposals that supported a more radical pedagogic approach than currently practised. The research indicates that the Stoneleigh Group influenced statements made in the consultation. It is argued that the Group provided support for the concept of young people as agents of social change. In particular, it is suggested that the pilot was used to support a view of young people as capable of, and valued for, their challenges to the established norms of society.