

Appendix 3:

A Personal Narrative in the Context of the Study of The Stoneleigh Project

Introduction

The purpose of this appendix is to provide a reflexive account of aspects of my personal and professional history in order to provide some insight into the views that I am conscious of holding that have an influence on how I understand and interpret the Stoneleigh Project. The study of the Stoneleigh Group involves thinking about knowledge and power in an informal education context. The participants are understood by the Stoneleigh Group as young people in transition from youth to adult. The development of my own values as a young person at the same stage in my life were also influential on my relationships with power in educational and work settings. How I understand myself and how I think about the topics of knowledge, power, communities, and the outdoors in informal education are all interpreted through these lenses. This biography therefore has an influence on the values I hold in relation to my work as an outdoor educator and these studies as an academic.

My work as an outdoor educator involved me for over thirty years in various outdoor projects concerning youth development. This continued a practical engagement with these topics and led in part to my choice of study for this thesis. It also colours the narratives I choose and the way I interpret them. I will conclude by outlining how my interest in this study arose from this background.

Childhood

My parents were both displaced by the Second World War. My father was evacuated at 12 to the New Forest from Norwich and never went to live at home again joining the Royal Navy just as the war ended. After two years as a bank clerk my mother joined the Wrens at 17, also in the last half of the war, and likewise never lived at home again. For my parents,

as well as for myself as a child in a naval family, fragmented social networks were very familiar.

My earliest memories are of sitting on various yachts sailing along the Devon coast. These are followed by images of gardens, seaside, and moorland adjacent to our various homes and out into which I went with my brother and the neighbours' children whenever we could. Naval life led us to move house every three years or so. I have no visual memories of family until after puberty.

My father was at sea most of my childhood. My mother looked after us. My parents chose villages in which to live deliberately so that we could have the run of the neighbourhood; a Cornish seaside village, a house on the edge of Dartmoor, another backing on to deciduous woods in Kent, and then a house at the foot of Cheddar Gorge in the Mendips. I became used to making and then losing friendship networks. We had no television until I was seven by which time I was too interested in other activities to pay it much attention. Although mostly my mother raised me the existence of a father and his globetrotting exploits were constantly in front of me. He was a big influence on me especially during his brief visits home.

I was not christened, a deliberate act on my parents' part. They felt it should be a decision I took for myself when I was old enough to make it. We never went to church as a family though as a young teenager I sang in the church choir for the pleasure of singing and the pocket money. This is an early sign that my parents, perhaps along with many others, had a different sense of the future. Established cultural norms could be different and it was seen by them as not their place to make those decisions on behalf of their children. A significant element in building an identity had been transferred from my parents as guardians of their community's values to me. It may be that because they were displaced from their communities as young adults they felt a greater sense of authority to question established norms as a result.

My father did establish my first and most persistent hobbies. On a longer visit home than was normal, when I was nine, he told me I should take up some hobbies. Within the space of a few months, and at his suggestion, I took up gardening and bird watching. Both require a person to know their own patch intimately. I took enormous pride in this. At the age of 13 my patch was the southern slopes of part of the Mendip hills, including Cheddar Gorge, and the levels to the south of them. In that year the British Trust for Ornithology set out to produce the first atlas of British breeding birds. Birdwatchers were thin on the ground in rural Somerset. My adult bird watching mentors had no hesitation in giving me a ten kilometre patch and accepting my records for that area for the atlas data. When I produced no records for two rare species that they believed were breeding in the area I was sent back to try again. My conclusion was that, at this time, one did and one did not breed. This result was also accepted without question. I still occasionally look up the page for Cirl Bunting in the atlas and check the red dot that states that this bird did in fact breed on my patch. I look with equal pride on the blank on the same patch for Raven.

An interest in, and respect for, my own local knowledge has perhaps been a result. I have a tendency to apply my personally experienced view of the world to a wider world, perhaps counter to the experience of others. One of my geography teachers was at the receiving end of this 'arrogance' during a disagreement about how clouds moved. My evidence was empirical and available for all to see out of the classroom window. Hers was quoted from a book. I have yet to reconcile the possibility that I was right in practice whilst she was right in principle. It remains counter-intuitive and theoretical and so less reliable in my mind.

I was expected to get a part time job as soon as I was old enough. The notion of a work ethic was certainly a value that was being upheld. I delivered meat for a butcher and then worked all season round with a strawberry grower; a job that suited me very well. The personal knowledge of a farmer who knew his land, his crop, his market, and his workers impressed me. This was stuff you couldn't find in books.

Before the war both my parents held casual jobs and put the money into the housekeeping. When he was evacuated my father caught snakes and sold them for their venom. He financed his leisure and personal needs from the money he made. I was expected to use the

money I earned to finance my leisure interests. It bought and ran a motorbike that gave me an unusual degree of freedom for a teenager in my village.

I avoided some school trips, especially field trips, much to the consternation of my teachers. I did go hill walking with the school twice following the teachers blindly wherever they took us. I loved the exercise, the mist shrouded views, and the feel of rock. It was a sensual delight. As a sixth former I also went on retreat to a convent. I loved the open-minded and openhearted philosophical debate with monks, nuns, and my peers.

My experience of youth work came in the form of Venture Scouting. This was an unconventional experience with a charismatic leader who attracted boys with no interest in uniforms and badges but a great deal of energy for outdoor and social activities. I may have acquired the conventions of the various activities we practised; caving, climbing, camping, hill walking, archery and so on, but I did not acquire a conventional approach to leadership. Our Venture Scout leader led the first caving trip I went on. It was also his first caving trip. We approached everything we did in the same way. If a boy made a suggestion about where to go or something to do then that became our plan. Within a year, at 16, I was leading Cubs (children aged nine or ten) on caving trips.

With my parents breaking with tradition by moving away from home to work, moving us to a new home every three years, an absent father, adults who trusted the knowledge of a child, and a leader who broke with the established practices of an organisation as established as the Scout Movement, my experiences were of conventions regularly broken. I was increasingly aware of this until, by Venture Scouting days, I took pride in it. Breaking with tradition suited the purposes of my youth transition yet it was accomplished within the structure of an extended network of adult support. Even when I was less aware, my expectations of how things should be were based on my own experience and so were sometimes unconventional for my age group, sex, and class.

This creative work applied largely to my leisure time. As someone who had no established roots in one place or with one community, creating relationships with people and

landscapes was something I was used to doing. There is a difference in the way this works for a 'rolling stone'. The implicit knowledge or informal network of indigenous villagers is replaced by explicit knowledge of the landscape acquired through a hobby and a more formal set of relations established through work and leisure time clubs rather than through neighbours and extended families. This approach has much in common with the individualised management of transition now being reported for a wider range of young people.

My parents were rising through the middle classes and, once the eleven plus was hurdled, the path was set, O- and A-levels willing, on higher education; a new trajectory for both sides of my family. I had no career in mind and, as with my choice of religion, my parents saw this as a choice for me to make. The only contribution my parents made, other than being good listeners and in full support of my ideas, was to suggest I join the navy or be an accountant. Both were suggested in order to put me off the idea of either. I took a subject, geology, simply because it caught my imagination. Whilst the degree path was new to our family it was a well-worn path for others and so was easy to follow. Our affluence coupled with post-war educational policies and the new, post-war optimism had opened the door to a growing middle class.

Professional life

I think of my development as nearly stalling at 20 when I graduated. My parents found me a job and I was displaced enough to have no other leads (my parents moved away from the West Country to Essex the month I went to university and I went home as little as possible). Later conversations with my university friends suggest that many of us found this step difficult. In one sense all the stepping stones were in place; profession, marriage, homeowner, then family. In another our experience was somehow incomplete. We were looking for more personal development. We were not brave enough or inclined to 'drop out' and the gap year and backpacker's trail had not yet developed. Work was still constructed as a career or profession for life. Most of us opted for convention with an uneasy sense of dissatisfaction.

I became a teacher without any training in the last year in which this was possible for a graduate. I joined the school as the leaving age was raised from 15 to 16. It was an old secondary modern school just shifting to comprehensive. As a result it had a strong pastoral system and was shocked by the truancy that resulted from the rise in the leaving age.

The role models around me were deeply caring professionals. Their expectations of the students were high in moral terms and hopeful but not pushy academically; a typical secondary modern. Sufficient discipline was provided to make a classroom environment functional. Taken outside of this on the sports field or a field trip it was clear these teachers liked the students they worked with and tended to see things from their point of view rather more than the stereotype of teachers might suggest. As a secondary modern in origin a high value was still placed on practical subjects and approaches.

I was asked to set up a truancy prevention programme based on outdoor activities. As the head teacher pointed out he was not in any way an outdoor enthusiast. His belief was in optimising the potential of enthusiastic teachers; as I had outdoor skills and was thought of as someone who could relate to boys with negative attitudes to school he simply capitalised on that.

Even in such a caring environment the kind of relationship that enables outdoor education to work still needed some help. The liminal space was provided in the form of the potting shed of the old rural studies programme. It had become the smokers' corner, out of sight of the rest of the school behind the gym. Somehow, the outdoor gear and I became accepted in this space and not viewed as trespassers. Once the students' ties came off first names were standard. Yet, after two years of participation in the outdoor programme, not once in the ten years I ran it did a boy or girl leave his or her tie off or use my first name once back around the corner and into the gym corridor.

The programme was credited with reducing the truancy rate by 90 percent. I think this may have been more to do with the fact that, the second year the programme ran, the students

had more time to get used to the idea of staying on to 16. Local employers had also got used to the idea of taking these young people on a year later. In any case not long after that jobs for young people started to decline and staying at school became the only choice for most young people.

However, the programme can certainly take the credit for the second effect. These young people, who had been labelled 'non-exam', started passing CSE English Language. They were writing and talking about their outdoor experiences. Over ten years my team raised the school's expectations of these young people from no results to an average of three CSE passes. An informal education strategy affected attendance and performance in a formal educational setting and influenced post-school pathways to college and employment. Anecdotal evidence from the local police service also suggested that petty crime rates were lowered.

Post-graduate study

At 25 I took a year's paid sabbatical to study adventure education full time for a postgraduate qualification at Charlotte Mason College. Colin Mortlock and Jack Parker taught it. As role models they were passionate individualists. Although Colin had developed his personal philosophy into an educational approach (Mortlock, 1984) it was founded on his own world-view and you were either drawn to work with him or not. Initially an enthusiast for his ideas I later became an enthusiast for valuing the approach of each person, much as my first head teacher had done when he set me on the road to outdoor education.

At this point my own development seemed to reawaken. My peers and teachers on the course became friends and, for the first time since leaving university, I became active in my leisure time outside of a small circle of old university friends. I began to look for a new job working full time in the outdoors. It took five years, largely because the outdoor centres I visited had cultures that placed the activities and not young people at the centre of their work. Most of them ran a more disciplined and unforgiving regime than the school and the instructing was unfriendly. I eventually found Brathay, where the young people were treated like young adults and were located at the centre of the courses being offered. I

worked in the new youth development team. Our brief was to work with as wide a range of young people as possible and to be as creative as we could with our course designs. Later we were asked to disseminate our work to other practitioners. It was this that began my interest in providing a consultancy service for professional and programme development.

A year of personal development afforded by higher education with the support of Essex County Council had a significant impact on my values. My attitudes to family, work, leisure, and property all shifted in that year. A question about the meaning of my life, somehow implicitly asked by my teenage upbringing, was resolved and enacted with the consequent impacts on the conventions of family and profession. My biography shifted into the patterns of the new trends of the time instead of remaining in the groove of tradition. I divorced, moved sideways into work without a career path, worked for less income, and then became self employed.

It was Colin Mortlock who suggested I start a professional magazine for the outdoor education field. He added that I was the first 'academic' the course had produced. The magazine evolved into *The Journal for Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership*, which I edited for 15 years. This gave me opportunities to meet other people writing about and studying the outdoor education field. It also gave me a chance to visit practice in other countries where I was often asked to comment critically on practice in the UK. Colin Mortlock's comment together with invitations to lecture in universities abroad made me curious about academic work. This led to a lecturing post at Edinburgh University and now at St. Martin's College (the new name for the college I had studied at) on the courses that developed from the course I had taken when I was 25.

From my perspective modern British life is not an established order out of which our culture is currently breaking. The post-war years feel like a time of change between a pre-war set of conventions disrupted by the war and unsure of their relevance and an emerging post-war culture founded on optimism, physical and social mobility, and an increasingly rapidly changing socio-economic context. As an educator in my early 50s I understand myself as the holder of a set of values amongst a wider set of complementary and conflicting values that make this culture. I have seen it as my role to represent these values

in my work. Lately, I have seen it as also important to critique these values and to be more prudent about those I hold. It is this reflexive element as well as my continued curiosity for outdoor education practice that reflects the values that underlie this study.

As this case study is introduced and unfolds I would like the reader to hold in mind the links between my personal and professional history and my interpretation and critique of the context in which the people who are the subject of this study reside. At this point I will consider the early development of my research interest which is also informed by this narrative.

My research interests

This research is influenced by my own interests as much as by the interests of the Stoneleigh Group as outlined in Chapter 2 or the views of certain authors on the desirable nature and direction for outdoor education research as discussed in Chapter 3. As an untutored outdoor educator I developed, as I have outlined above, a student-centred, community-based approach to working with teenagers. This I later found to be at odds with much of mainstream outdoor education practice which I also found to be dissatisfying. My work, and now my research, has always revolved around understanding, developing, and advocating for what appeared to me to be normal but were understood by others to be liberal or even radical practices. I have written several papers in which I have explored my thinking about outdoor education as it has emerged from these experiences (Loynes, 1998; Loynes, 2002; Loynes, 2005). These were philosophical and critical in approach and largely constructed from my own professional experience and the accounts of other professionals without any rigorous underpinning.

I am also interested in constructing new approaches to working out of doors as well as deconstructing some of the structural elements of traditional practice in order to consider and develop its value for current provision. This has led my consultancy services into staff- and programme-development projects and, lately, into evaluative work. As I began to work in an academic world and thought more about the best ways in which I as a researcher could support the field I wanted a stronger position from which to voice my ideas. My early research and evaluation efforts were embarked on in order to develop my capacity for

rigorous and critical thinking and writing as well as to develop my research aims for this study.

As an educator with strongly held values around student-centred learning it is not surprising that I was drawn to methodological approaches such as participative enquiry (Reason, 1994) for the evaluative projects I undertook. This also suited the interests of the Stoneleigh Group, both in relation to the kind of experience they wanted the evaluation to be, and for the kind of understanding of their work they were hoping to generate.

During the first phase of evaluation for the Stoneleigh Group I became interested in how a sociological and critical perspective could inform this study and a wider understanding of outdoor experiential learning. I therefore set out to develop this study from a critical perspective.

References

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