**Outdoor Education: An innovative practice in experiential learning**.

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**Abstract**

Outdoor Education is a guided experience in the outdoor. It is a means of approaching educational objectives through direct experience in the environment using its resources as learning materials." (Hunt, 1989:17)

The concept uses nature and adventure as a powerful medium to create a link between academics and nature. The child living in the peer group may lead to personality development. The objective is to help the child find fun and meaning in academics through contact with aspects like camouflage and inter-species relationships, historical, scientific and cultural features, etc around the programme site.

There are a few schools advocating outbound adventure based programmes among students, to enhance personal growth through experiential learning and increase awareness about various subjects like the environment, ecology, wildlife, history, archaeology, geography and adventure sports. Some organisations that currently offer such programmes for schools are [OETS](http://oetindia.org) and [Wide Aware](http://www.wide-aware.com/schools-colleges/student-teacher.htm) in [Mumbai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mumbai).[Youreka](http://www.youreka.in) offers an open summer program based out of Delhi in north and Bangalore in South.

The whole focus of the Outdoor Education is to spark off changes in the child undergoing the experience. There is a hope that the child would take back home perspectives like ‘there is fun in academics’ – academics, which at times are perceived as uninteresting. Also, after having experienced joys of achievement in one or more activities, a child also goes back to school & home with a renewed self-confidence and also some degree of self-awareness.

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Education is the development of all those capacities in the individual which will enable him to control his environment and fulfill possibilities (John Dewey). Therefore the educational system should aim towards development of the child’s capacities and to self actualize his potentials.

The history of educational system can be traced back to the ‘Gurukul system’, where the child living with his peer group under the guidance of the Guru would help the students master various skills like art of warfare, philosophy, literature and also imbibe the values of life making it an experiential learning.

The modern day education system grew in the sanctity of the classrooms. The system developed into a highly competitive nature, emphasizing rote learning. The primary goals of education namely, awareness, empowerment, teaching values, holistic development, and self discovery withered away in the competitive world and restricting success to percentages and thus taking away the joy of learning. The use of computer based, ICT methods made learning interesting enhanced conceptual clarity among students but these techniques take the child away from the world he/she lives in.

Earlier educators like Rousseau, Pestalozzi advocated the importance of meaningful experience in the educational process. Ross, naturalist emphasizes that “Education is merely the fostering of natural development and true education takes place when the nature, power and inclinations are allowed to develop freely with minimum guidance.”

To briefly put it, naturalism follows nature, where the child is the focus. Freedom is given to the child, instincts form the basis of education and senses the gateway of knowledge. From this position it is necessary for us to take the child beyond the classroom boundaries in the natural settings where he can learn by exploring, questioning, experiencing and improvising. To inculcate this approach to learning the concept of ‘Outdoor Education’ can be helpful.

Outdoor education is referred to as a method or process involving direct learning experience. Julian Smith an outdoor educator describes outdoor education as a learning climate for the things which can be learned best outside. The Dartington Conference of 1975 (DES, 1975:1-3), often taken as a seminal moment in outdoor education, provided a working definition of outdoor education as “those activities concerned with living, moving and learning in the outdoors”. It went on to outline the three most important aims of outdoor education as heightening awareness and respect for:

• Self – through the meeting of challenge;

• Others – through group experiences and the sharing of decisions;

• The natural environment – through direct experience.

Outdoor Education broadly includes programs that are curriculum oriented, behavior oriented recreation oriented. The program may include activities like nature trails, rock climbing, rafting, orienteering etc. The purpose of these activities is developing knowledge, skills and attitudes concerning the world we live in.

Modern outdoor education owes its beginnings to a number of separate initiatives. [Organized camping](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Summer_camp) was evident in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in Europe, the UK, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand. The [Scouting](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scouting) movement, established in 1907 by [Robert Baden-Powell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Baden-Powell), employed non-formal education with an emphasis on practical outdoor activities. The first [Outward Bound](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outward_Bound)centre at [Aberdovey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aberdovey) in [Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wales) was established during the [Second World War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_World_War). The [Forest schools](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forest_schools) of [Denmark](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denmark) are examples of European programs with similar aims and objectives.

A key outdoor education pioneer was [Kurt Hahn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_Hahn), a German educator who founded schools such as the [Schule Schloss Salem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schule_Schloss_Salem) in [Germany](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany), [Gordonstoun](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordonstoun) School in [Scotland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland), [Atlantic College](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_College) in [Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wales), the [United World Colleges](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_World_Colleges) movement, the [Duke of Edinburgh Award](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duke_of_Edinburgh_Award) scheme (which emphasizes community service, craftsmanship skills, physical skill, and outdoor expeditions), and the Outward Bound movement

A primary goal of outdoor education is to contribute to the personality development of a child and to familiarize the child with its own environment, thereby creating a link between academics and reality.

Simon Priest, outdoor educator views outdoor education as a matter of many relations. Firstly through these activities interpersonal relations can be developed, how to co-operate, communicate and trust can be experienced. Secondly intrapersonal relations can be explored, how one relates to oneself, the level of independence, self confidence can be achieved, and one can know ones strengths and limitations.

Third, ecosystemic relation can be understood, which refers to all parts of ecosystems, hoe energy is transmitted, and how organisms depend on others for survival. Lastly the ekistics relations refers to interactions between people and their surrounding, that is, quality of land influencing quality of society and occupations of people.

There are two approaches to outdoor education. Adventure education involving activities like rappelling, rock climbing, river crossing, and caving, focusing on interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. Environmental education involves nature trails, study of rocks, soil found in the area which focuses on ecosystemic and ekistic relationships.

To form a bridge between classroom teaching and context of daily life, one can teach about mathematics, biology geology, history art, physical skills using adventure activities.

To address the need of the hour and create awareness about environmental issues, environmental studies are included across various levels of education system. Including camping in the curriculum students can get hands on experience about different environmental issues like global warming, deforestation. Students get to familiarize themselves with the natural environment, based on experiencing and discussing about the local geology, geography, and flora and fauna.

Trekking can be an ideal activity to get help children get acquainted with their campsite’s environment – both natural as well as historical-cultural. Another activity rafting, where a raft is built using bamboo and inflated tubes and actually use it in still water, highlights the team management capability and communication skills.

Activities like rock climbing, rappelling can help the students learn practically how to overcome fear and anxiety and experience a sense of triumph, which can lead to development of self confidence.

Nature trails can be a rich source of the diversities in the ecosystems, camouflaging in nature, taxonomies in the animal kind and similar topics can be discussed. Asking the students to draw a picture on a nature trail can be appealing to the aesthetic sensibilities in a child, asking students to draw a picture of animal which did not exist and which does not exist can lead to creative thinking n children.

These activities not only involve the physical co-ordination, involvement of the senses but also the cognitive and affective domains of an individual. The child living in the peer group itself is learning experience leading to an understanding of interpersonal relationships. Staying away from the protective family atmosphere will inculcate independence and self confidence in children.

These outdoor education programmes fits into David Kolb’s experiential cycle, model comprising of four elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts and testing in new situations.

[Outdoor education](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outdoor_education) is relatively new to schools in India, though it is quite well established in the western countries. Acceptance is slowly increasing with a few schools advocating outbound adventure based programmes among students, to enhance personal growth through experiential learning and increase awareness about various subjects like the environment, ecology, wildlife, history, archaeology, geography and adventure sports. Some organisations that currently offer such programmes for schools are [OETS](http://oetindia.org) and [Wide Aware](http://www.wide-aware.com/schools-colleges/student-teacher.htm) in [Mumbai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mumbai).[Youreka](http://www.youreka.in) offers an open summer program based out of Delhi in north and Banglore in South. Woodstock, Missouri has included outdoor education in their curriculum.

The state of Maharashtra is blessed with the Sahyadri range which is rich from a historical, geological and ecological perspective. Schools and colleges if include curriculum based outdoor education programmes would make learning a joyful experience for the students.

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