

# Cultivating lived-body consciousness: Enhancing cognition and emotion through outdoor learning

*Malcolm Thorburn, Aaron Marshall*

**Abstract:** Through using school-based outdoor learning as the research context, the paper analyses the connections between bodily experiences and the embodied mind. Recent theorizing in outdoor learning, in reflecting phenomenology and Deweyian influences, has teased out how the relationships between the self, others and nature (environment) can be extended to include embodied experiences. This would, it is argued, add something extra to either the intrinsic pursuit of enjoying practical experiences or the instrumental quest for subject knowledge gains via cognitive-informed analytical cycles of action and reflection. While generally sympathetic to this critique, we consider there is a cognitive and emotional need for embodied experiences to demonstrate that they can be suitably contemplative as well. Through drawing upon Tiberius (2008) naturalist-informed theorizing, the paper reviews the part bodily experiences in outdoor learning can play in cultivating stable values and in developing reasoning practices that provide insights into how personal responsibility can be exercised in relation to how we live. Through referencing the Scottish policy context, the paper exemplifies how learning outdoors can flourish on the basis of a joint body-mind focus; where pupils review their relations with others and nature, as well as valuing times when they are absorbed in experiences which fully engage their personal interests, skills and capacities. To enhance the prospects of these learning gains occurring we provide a self-check set of questions for teachers to review to as part of appraisal of learning and teaching outdoors.

**Key words:** learning outdoors; the body in education; phenomenology; personal values

## Introduction

The notion that learning outdoors might yield exciting and varied educational dividends continues to energise educational thinkers. Three recent papers - Quay, 2013; Doddington, 2013 and Nicol, 2012 - have drawn upon a mix of phenomenology and Deweyian influences to support their theorising. Quay (2013) teases out how the relationship between the self, others and nature (environment), the typical trinity around which outdoor learning experiences are based, can be unhelpfully skewed towards particular points of this triangular relationship. He argues that our relationships with the world might be better cast as a simple phenomenological whole. Ontologically this would provide pupils with better opportunities to review their perspective on the world, and it would boost the prospects for enhancing aesthetic capacities as well as reflective abilities. In a similar vein, Doddington (2013) through reference to Deweyian perspectives on the educational nature of embodied experience and Shusterman's (2004) study of somaesthetics, reviews the benefits of a first person understanding of the body when learning takes place outdoors. Nicol (2012) ruminates on the relational possibilities of knowledge gained from nature-based outdoor learning experiences contributing to personal and social actions that enhance sustainable living. Nicol accesses different bodies of knowledge, among them phenomenology for exploring what it means to be fully immersed in nature. We consider that these philosophical enquiries are all interesting, as they prompt initial enquiry into how more sure-footed pedagogical initiatives in outdoor learning might take place. It creates a context as well where a more nuanced critique of aims and values can occur; one, for example, where dualisms are not presented as either/or positional dilemmas. Such dualisms have often blighted the field with programme arrangements either organising learning around the intrinsic (subjective) enjoyment and practical mastery benefits of participation in activities (e.g., canoeing, sailing, hill-walking, skiing) or by using practical contexts as the mere medium for accessing instrumentally-driven (objective) areas of knowledge (Nicol, 2012).

However, we also believe that further fresh thinking is required; especially in regard to identifying and clarifying the values which might best support experiential learning approaches in the outdoors. This is necessary as the work of phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty does not contain (quite properly) definitions of normative standards by which we can reference progress, and similarly the contribution of Dewey is limited at times by his failure to clearly define the criteria for personal growth (Thorburn & McAllister, 2013). In exploring how progress could happen, we draw upon the

naturalist-informed theorizing of Tiberius (2008), and the part her thinking can play in considering how stable values can develop reasoning practices that provide insights into, for example, how greater lived-body consciousness can become evident through our experiences. Making advances in this way could, we contend, add a form of values-ballast to future theorizing on the merits of outdoor learning. In mapping out our position, we argue for a middle path, where the acute dualism problems of learning engagement being either excessively subjective or objective are avoided, and where a mix of cognitive and emotional embodied experiences provide the basis for contemplation. In short, we concur with Searle's (2002, p. 1) view that we need to 'make our conception of ourselves fully consistent and coherent with the account of the world that we have acquired from the natural sciences'. Thus, our view of lived-body consciousness is one which appreciates that the physical and the mental should not be considered as distinct metaphysical domains. Furthermore, there is a need to recognise that subjective or first person ontologies can feasibly connect and relate to an objective science of consciousness in ways that are unified and comprehensible.

In assembling ideas in this way, it is realised in advance that our plans might upset the views of some experiential educators who are concerned by the notion of there being 'set' values and phenomenologists who might be uneasy that the desired 'middle path' continues to privilege certain values over others. Other philosophers or neuroscientists might consider that it is very difficult to adequately explain subjective feelings and thoughts. However, in educational contexts, as failing to address such critical questions is likely to result in pedagogical stasis, there is as Nicol (2012) notes, a clear challenge for those who view outdoor learning as a key contributor to personal growth to outline philosophically how change can happen. We intend to take up this challenge through critically reviewing how cultivating lived-body consciousness can be enhanced when a shared set of values are nurtured in outdoor learning contexts. In assisting with this exercise, we are defining outdoor learning as a progressive series of learning opportunities which are: based around the normal school day; take place in local environments; are free or low in cost and taught by pupils' normal school teachers. This distinguishes it from a version of outdoor education (learning) which is based around emphasising the benefits of undertaking outdoor activities with an associated focus on personal and social development and environmental education while residing at outdoor centres and where teaching is mostly conducted by unfamiliar in-situ instructors and teachers.

## The promise of phenomenology for outdoor learning: a critical introduction

Phenomenology explores the consciousness of intentional experiences from a first-person point of view e.g., the meaning of events, embodied actions and the importance of sensations as they are experienced by the body. Through trying to fully explain realities, preconceived ideas can be eliminated and replaced by a new non-subjectivist perspective which ‘has to do with the universal-personal, not the particular-personal’ (Martinkova & Parry, 2011, p. 194). This is not a straightforward task, as initial reflections on experiences can often be overly subjective. Nevertheless, if successful, a first-person ontology which is informed by rich narrative description and reflection can enable the links between experiences and knowledge to become increasingly sophisticated and helpful in forming general statements which are true e.g., in making general statements on the impact of human agency on the natural world. As such, phenomenology can provide the methodological foundation for experiences (thoughts, perceptions, feelings) which help us to look better *at* the world we live in.

Merleau-Ponty (1968) explored in most detail how the experiences and motility of the body can play a key role in our perception of the world. Merleau-Ponty contends that lived-body experiences should not be separated from cognitive learning; rather the holistic nature of the ‘body-subject’ provides a way of conceiving relations between the body and the world, which avoids over privileging the role of abstraction and cognition (concepts and rules) and under-representing the centrality of the body in human experience. Appreciation of this point enables phenomenological description to become more vivid than the “casual explanation which the scientist, historian or the sociologist may be able to provide” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. vii). Thus, rather than being bound by the dichotomies of reason/emotion and mind/body, Merleau-Ponty articulated a concept of lived space, where the body-subject’s experience is referenced through movement and language. While there is some recognition of the socially constructed nature of experience, it is the inclusion of pre-reflective knowledge (experiences) of the body that enable universal-personal meanings to develop. Consequently, knowledge is not something to be understood in a inert and detached way, but is founded upon integrated perceptual experiences which reveal ever more of the world as we live and experience it (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This enables our relations with our self, others and nature to become more visible. Thus, as pupils walk in a forest area, sensory experiences and bodily awareness exist together within a perceptual field, where at any one time parts of the experience e.g., the firmness of the forest track or colours in the forest are

temporarily more prominent than others sights, sounds and smells. In such instances, the continuous nature of comprehending our ever-changing perceptual field is made more revealing and understandable through our lived-body awareness, as the “body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my ‘comprehension’” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 235).

For clarification, Merleau-Ponty and other philosophers of phenomenology when writing about ‘the body’ are essentially referring to the ‘lived body’ rather than the ‘physical body’. The earlier German language used in many phenomenological writings enabled linguistically the lived body (Leib) to be separately described from the physical body (Körper); an option which is unavailable in the English language, where only one standard term (the body) exists. Consequently, it is important that justificatory accounts of the merits of outdoor learning, which are informed by phenomenology, avoid the pitfall of treating the human body as only a physical body that is investigated from the theoretical and experimental perspective of natural science, rather than conceiving of the body as a living body with its own inner point of view.

Pivotal to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception is that in making sense of experiences, we come to make more discerning universal-personal judgements of situations. For example, we can see how the shape of trees has been influenced by prevailing wind patterns or as Merleau-Ponty (1962) notes, how through the shake of a branch from which a bird has just flown, we can understand more about the trees flexibility and elasticity. The capacity of Merleau-Ponty’s ideas to identify how experiences which might otherwise have remained at the pre-reflective level (i.e., beneath the level of conscious cerebral awareness) can be brought to the reflective level has been of interest to those working in environmental philosophy. Some ecologists have come to see the benefits of Merleau-Ponty’s ideas not just in terms of their potential for human gains but more widely in terms of the “mutual well-being of all life forms” (Cataldi & Hamrick, 2007, p. 5). Nicol (2012) highlights this distinction as one which adopts a nature-centred view of the world (ecocentrism or non-dualist perspective) relative to the more prevailing people-centred view of the world where the world exists primarily for human benefit (anthropocentrism or maintained dualist perspective). In teasing out issues around the detail of this distinction, Nicol (2012) concurs with Toadvine (2009) in arguing that the case for claiming that experiential learning can increase personal action with regard to how we live requires both a degree of caution plus more refined philosophical analysis. We concur with this line of approach and consider that phenomenological informed ideas should not be exclusively considered as part of a radical ecological alternative, but

rather considered a worthwhile avenue for further theoretical and methodological analysis about how we can understand better the various ways young people can develop an enhanced sensitivity towards the qualities of the natural world. Such an approach involves connecting with a wider field of philosophy than is often the norm in many western countries. For example, in the United Kingdom the dominant analytical philosophical tradition can lead to an excessive focus on induction into pre-selected activities to the detriment of thinking through the benefits of experiencing a wider range of activities (White, 2011).

The three papers introduced earlier, have sought in their various ways to explore how young peoples' connections with nature-as-experience could be further enhanced. Quay (2013) combines a Heideggerian-informed phenomenological analysis alongside a more familiar Deweyian-informed means-consequence set of transactions that are reviewed through cycles of analysis and reflection. Quay (2013) considers that these two compatible but distinct approaches are connected (theoretically at least) by a form of ontological passageway. Thus, Heidegger's ideas that personal reflections arising from everyday experiences can connect with problem-solving type learning approaches that are informed by the objective conditions of the world can be used as the basis for pupils thinking about the sum of their experiences. These contrasting influences could, if supported by suitably skilful pedagogical approaches enable, for example, reflections generated from exploring green areas close to school grounds to be analysed as both a holistic felt experience as well via cycles of problem solving. Such experiences can also avoid being unduly exclusive or excluding in nature. In essence, Quay (2013) advances two accounts of how existence could be experienced as you move back and forth along the ontological passageway: one aesthetic, wholesome and holistic in nature; the other more integrated, balanced and relational in terms of the analytical connections between self, others and environment.

Doddington (2013) considers that Dewey's relevance to learning outdoors is aided by his focus on the transaction which takes place between the individual and the environment. Thus the continuous nature of open-ended experience is strengthened when pupils possess initiative and are curious to reconstruct their experiences in order to grow further. As experiences proliferate, Deweyian notions of continuity mean that pupils do not find themselves "living in another world but in a different part or aspect of the same world" (Dewey, 1938, p. 44), as their thoughts and feelings become part of a repertoire of flexible and suitably sensitised habits. Doddington (2013, p. 6), on balance, does not share Merleau-Ponty's belief that action requires more of "an unthinking spontaneity". Doddington (2013) follows instead the Dew-

eyian and Shusterman view that reflection plays a key role in developing mindfulness in lived-body consciousness. Specifically, she sees positive connections between Shusterman's (2004) strand of pragmatic somaesthetics and the capacity of pupils to cultivate interest and good habits as a result of their lived-body experiences when learning outdoors. Doddington (2013) also highlights how those who are inclined to follow more phenomenological informed methodologies would benefit, in the context of school education, of considering how analytical outcomes categories can be derived from holistic outdoor learning experiences in order that the standard metrics for measuring curriculum effectiveness can be achieved.

Nicol (2012) emphasises the particular contribution outdoor learning can play in environmental and sustainable education. He articulates how this could happen by teasing out a relational framework of epistemological diversity which is based around experiential, presentational, propositional and practical considerations providing the linkage necessary between the personal and the environmental (universal). Nicol's (2012) dualism views are different to Quay's (2013) and Doddington (2013) position, in that he argues for a form of pluralist thinking where there is a more definite role for abstract (objective) knowledge alongside personal experience, and where seeking dualist alternatives is not required. This approach is considered necessary given the rapid depletion there is in the world's finite resources. Thus, Nicol (2012, p. 4) sees the benefit of integrating the self with "a reality that is entirely independent of our thinking selves"; as possible, for example, by blending objective scientific data on climate change with our more personalised experiences of such matters. Nurturing such subjective and objective links could improve the interdisciplinary curriculum prospects for outdoor learning provided (once again) that they are accompanied by suitably nuanced pedagogical practices. Nicol's (2012) approach is one which tries to avoid placing an unreasonable burden of expectation on the elemental possibilities of phenomenological methodologies. Such thinking reflects Merleau-Ponty's view that it is not necessary to distinguish or prioritise the particular ways in which cultural and natural worlds should be viewed. It also connects with Searle's (2002) view that we should view consciousness holistically and not unduly separate out, for example, the visual and the tactile from our streams of thought.

In summary, the three authors from their contrasting perspectives engage with a range of epistemological and ontological considerations that have interesting implications for the ways in which teachers construct outdoor learning experiences. However, the focus in these papers is rarely on the specific values which might underpin pupils' personal growth, even though Nicol (2012, p. 7) recognises that to "discriminate between 'educative' and

‘miseducative’ experience one must turn to values or ethics for guidance”. This raises normative issues about the values we would expect pupils to develop in relation to their outdoor learning experiences. The next part of the paper considers such matters and specifically the types of personal values which could support the development of pupils’ cognitive, emotional and contemplative development.

## **Enhancing cognition, emotion and contemplation: The contribution of Valerie Tiberius**

We are attracted to the reflective wisdom theorising of Valerie Tiberius; as she is one of the first philosophers to consider at length some of the value-laden implications of trying to adopt a first-person informed account of how to live well and wisely in ways which avoid the ontological limitations of judgements being either excessively subjective or objective. Underpinning Tiberius’s critique are the sceptical and empirical influences of David Hume; as evident by her referencing that a self-directed account of living a life which you value should be based around there being coherence between reflections and life satisfaction values, in ways which ‘can bear our reflective scrutiny’ (Tiberius, 2008, p. 12). Tiberius (2008) is concerned by the relatively modest reasoning powers many people have and the limitation this places on them developing the reflective skills necessary to evaluate how well their lives are faring. The notion of interest and reflection being taken forward is one which Tiberius takes to include more than happiness or the hedonic pursuit of pleasure, and is based instead on human flourishing. This includes a mix of subjective and objective influences e.g., subjective concerns which recognise the importance of individual needs (such as being absorbed in experiences which engage fully our skills and capacities) as well as objective societal influences (such as positive psychological functioning and enjoying good relationships with others).

Tiberius (2008) position is that better quality rather than more frequent reflection is needed to cultivate stable values. Thus, as values become increasingly certain (as cognition and emotion develop in conjunction with each other), it becomes possible to progressively endorse and justify reasoning decisions as sympathy, understanding and empathy develop. Improving our reflective wisdom can help therefore to ensure that thoughts are accurate and that unnecessary illusions or excessively severe self-assessments are avoided. Such theorising progresses earlier subjective accounts of wellbeing where there the person-subject was considered the final authority on how their lives are doing (Sumner, 1996) and instrumental wellbeing accounts that often argued for the achievement of pre-determined outcomes



(Parfit, 1984). The hyper-idealized nature of these list theory challenges often limited motivational engagement due to their weakness in showing only a superficial regard for personal reflection and review. This weakness echoes Deweyian concerns that learning tasks should be kept as open-ended as possible in order to foster pupils' curiosity and continuous engagement with tasks. Overall, Tiberius's (2008) normative intention is that her thinking can inform a regulative set of ideas that can help people to make coherent and effective decisions about their lives, but which are not so idealized as to be off-putting. We consider that these aspirations match closely phenomenological notions of being able to improve the way we look *at* what we routinely otherwise look *through* (Martinkova & Parry, 2011).

Tiberius (2008) considers that four reflective virtues are necessary in order to cultivate stable values, namely: attentional flexibility; perspective; self-awareness and optimism. A person with attentional flexibility knows how to balance being lost in experiences with times when are more reflective in nature. This is necessary in order to discover your passions in life and to learn from experiences which capture your initial interest. A person with perspective knows when and how to review their future plans in a measured way. As such, perspective can help refocus thoughts, feelings and actions in line with one's overall values. A person with moderate self-awareness can make decisions which fit in with their interests, abilities and values. This helps ensure that they can avoid unhelpful self-absorption and wasteful over-analysis. A person with realistic optimism can live a life which is better from one's own point of view, but also one which appreciates the moral benefits of being good to others and of seeing the potential for goodness in human nature.

In trying to reconcile self-interest (subjective) vs. moral obligation (objective) concerns, the four virtues identified by Tiberius (2008) are ones which include more than living by instinct but which nevertheless are not constrained by over-thinking on being rationale. The virtues chosen adopt a middle path where there is a need to balance achievable norms in areas such as personal growth, relations with others and nature as well as recognizing the importance of being absorbed in experiences which fully engage with our interests, skills and capacities. The notion of identifying virtues (but not being overly restricted by them) is Aristotelian in nature even though the virtues Tiberius discusses in her account of reflective wisdom "are more like habits and problem-solving strategies than the robust character traits familiar in Aristotelian virtue ethics" (Tiberius, 2008, p. 18). As James (2009, p. 97) highlights that "Heidegger seems to share Aristotle's view that the good life can (for the most part at least) be cashed out in terms of the possession of certain character traits", the possibility exists of making connections bet-

ween the normative values of reflective people and the key ontological imperatives of phenomenology. For example, there seem plausible connections between notions of perspective (as advanced by Tiberius) and concepts such as releasement which Heidegger uses as a way of expressing how people use their settled disposition to find out and explain how things really are (James, 2009).

There also appear to be coherent links between Tiberius' four virtues and Doddington's (2013) recent paper; as evidenced by the strand of pragmatic somaesthetics outlined by Shusterman containing a focus on enhancing peoples' passions in life (interest) and improving the ability to embrace problem-solving challenges (perspective). These same Tiberius-informed virtues also connect with Quay's (2013) notion of an ontological passage-way, which operates as a *via media* for linking aesthetic and holistic experiences (e.g., sensuous and joyous experiences) with those of a more problem solving transactional nature (e.g., reviewing issues associated with the environmental fragility of the world). Overall, making such outdoor learning connections helps to links with Tiberius (2008) belief that there is a close connection between individual and moral agency i.e., to live well from your point of view is likely to be positively associated with living well with regard to others and with nature. However, inevitably, in the contested worlds of moral philosophy and education there are contrary viewpoints to recognise. Kornblith (2012), for example, considers that the emphasis attached to solving problems by self-reflection and reasoning is misguided and prone to a form of soft-psychological reasoning which is often overplayed in accounts of happiness and of being positive. Kornblith (2012) argues for a more realistic appraisal of what reflection can offer; one which is based on cognitive and scientific evidence, which he considers has a more impressive record in prediction and explanation. In light of these criticisms, the values Tiberius advances are not being taken forward in an unalloyed way; rather their focus on cognitive and emotional engagement is considered a viable starting point in beginning to tease out possible positive connections between personal growth and outdoor learning. In the final part of this paper, we outline how this might occur in the current Scottish policy content. However, prior to this we review how teachers' can become more alert to the ways in which phenomenological informed outdoor learning interventions can cultivate moral norms.

## Cultivating lived-body consciousness through outdoor learning

Consistent across the three papers - Quay, 2013; Doddington, 2013 and Nicol, 2012 - reviewed earlier is an encouragement for teachers to take measured pedagogical risks in their teaching; as necessarily, effective teaching in the open needs to “involve a degree of disturbance of the self” (Bonnett, 2009, p. 28). However, beyond this, the theoretical focus in the three papers means that the pedagogical pragmatics of how learning might take place is not advanced in any great detail. This, while understandable, is nevertheless a limitation, as phenomenology is primarily concerned with how the world can be looked at afresh and with how experiences can be sensed and felt, rather than analysing the content of experiences. In order to encourage teachers to engage with phenomenological approaches in outdoor learning contexts that are consistent with progressive notions of education, we consider that Merleau-Pontyian notions of freedom could help inform how pupils learning opportunities are designed. For Merleau-Ponty, freedom is not infinite; if it were then there would effectively nothing to choose and nothing coherent to reflect upon. However, degrees of pupil freedom provide the context to begin reflection and to describe and review our responses to new situations; such as walking in or close to school grounds. A Merleau-Pontian ontology therefore opens up ways and means to focus on not only scientific and socially common experiences of nature but also to include our lived-body relations and experiences with the natural world around us. Such a focus is also consistent with Searle’s (2002) holistic view of consciousness, and of how first person ontologies are best considered as a single unified feature rather than as a series of separate components.

Theorised in such ways, learning outdoors is most likely to yield meaningful gains when teaching is not overly constrained by the narrow pursuit of set objectives, but where pupils instead have some measure of active co-construction responsibility for the pace and direction of their learning (Thorburn & Marshall, 2011). Thus, over time and with repeated learning opportunities, pupils would have the chance to critique their outdoor learning experiences in more reflective ways. In essence, outdoor learning environments would provide the opportunity to discover oneself by leaving oneself behind, and looking at and experiencing the world afresh (Toadvine, 2009). Thus, the key methodological point for the skilled teacher is to perceive ways in which pupils’ initial enjoyment of simply being outdoors could transfer and later assist them to make greater sense of their natural world, with their uncertainties and hunches informing the later estab-

lishment of more rounded conceptual understandings (Barnacle, 2009). Learning practices can also be further shaped and developed through using strategic questions and facilitative discussion to help pupils critically engage with their experiences, recognize available choices and discern viable ways forward. Following James' (2009) outlining of how natural environments are inherently capable of making a virtue of exercising attention, a further key pedagogical requirement of teachers is to utilise experiential learning approaches that engage pupils in practicing reflection. This will aid the development of the cognitive skills and affective qualities required for pupils to construct coherent and diverse meanings, as well as helping them to make good decisions. Thus, when journeying by kayak on local rivers, this mixed approach can encourage pupils to engage with nature in different ways e.g., through exploring the sensitivity of habitats from a sustainable living perspective and by contrast using their attention to view the movement of the water in aesthetic rather than purely functional terms.

However, the pursuit of these ambitions can become unstuck if pupils make poor decisions which are out with a certain framework of stable values e.g., if pupils' poor deliberations lead to decision-making that fails to show some form of measured sensitivity and awareness towards others and the natural environment. This is quite possible to expect, as for many pupils making sense of their body and their contemplative mind outdoors will be a considerable point of departure from the norm of using their rational minds indoors. Therefore, teachers need to recognise and to some extent wrestle with the normative values framework which underpins their role. Under the phenomenology and Deweyian-based plans being scoped out in this paper, teachers' remit is one where they are guiding pupils towards discovering a normative set of values. This can be achieved in some instances by pupils leaving their past experiences behind and viewing new situations and experiences afresh and/or in a Deweyian sense by developing further their existing mental maps of the world through continued continuity and interaction. Both of these approaches are largely consistent with the broad tenets of constructivist approaches to learning.

To help teachers in these testing circumstances, it is useful if teachers have an accurate predictive understanding of the choices their pupils are most likely to make. For example, if teaching a group who are planning to venture onto an upland area of some scientific interest, fragility issues might exist about modes of travel. If the choices available are between walking (slow, quite physically demanding but relatively environmentally sensitive) or making use of mechanical uplift facilities available, the wise teacher would predict how the group would respond if a choice of modes of travel

were offered. If walking was judged by the teacher to be the most suitable way to travel, it would be prudent if choices were shared with pupils in terms of walking routes available, pace of walking, tasks which can be discussed on the walk, rather than on whether walking at all was a good idea. This level of anticipation, and the avoidance of situations where choices are offered but subsequently withdrawn (i.e., if the wrong option is chosen), requires a high level of teacher expertise in being able to predict pupils decisions and to continue to direct and redirect pupils' attention towards looking at and experiencing nature as well as developing positive relationships with other pupils. Developing and refining pupils language skills is also needed if teachers are to fully appreciate how pupils engage are reflect on their experiences, as language enables values description to provide insights into pupils' needs and longer terms goals. And, while Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 235) indicates this should be possible, as it is the body 'which gives significance not only to the natural world, but also to cultural objects like words', the pedagogical details of how experiences can connect with curriculum ambitions and statements of standards inevitably requires considerable pedagogical planning and forethought.

## Outdoor learning in Scotland: A brief review of curriculum and pedagogical possibilities

In common with many other western countries, school-based educational aims in Scotland have seen a "rebirth of progressive education" (Priestley & Biesta, 2013, p. 3). The new 3-18 years programme 'Curriculum for Excellence' (CfE) is a holistically-driven capacity-based model of education, which is defined by high levels of teacher autonomy and positive references to constructivist-inclined theories of learning. A further distinguishing feature of CfE is that all teachers have a responsibility for literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, and for teaching, where possible, to make greater use of integrated and inter-disciplinary learning approaches. CfE through outdoor learning guidelines are a new feature of the curriculum and provide a rationale and support for increasing schools involvement in learning outdoors (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010).

Priestley and Biesta (2013) however note that a certain tension is evident in CfE. The tension is between convergent notions of a mastery curriculum (where there is an emphasis on what pupils are expected to become i.e., achieving pre-determined set objectives) and a progressive process driven curriculum (where there is an emphasis on the richness of learning and how it can be experienced). Humes (2013, p. 8) considers that such operational confusion is to be expected as there "is no extended philosophical justi-

fication for the particular values” underpinning CfE. Furthermore, as the new style of streamlined policy guidance is characterized more by general aspiration than by detailed elaboration on implementation specifics, it has often proved difficult for teachers to comprehend how pedagogical change can happen (Priestley, 2011). These general findings match Thorburn and Allison’s (2013) outdoor learning findings which revealed only occasional evidence of teachers grasping the chance to create new learning opportunities. More typically, there was evidence of CfE policy aspirations not being fully met with prospects for pupils learning outdoors occurring as much by chance as anything else.

Despite the risk of policy innovation without pedagogical change, evaluations of teachers’ beliefs confirm that most teachers endorse the broad aspirations informing CfE (Humes, 2013). Furthermore, many teachers have reported on their increased pedagogical experimentation, along with their greater use of open and exploratory styles of learning and a shift away from more traditional, content-driven forms of teaching (Priestley, 2011). The evidence is therefore that most of the criticisms of CfE have taken “the form of grass-roots concerns about readiness” (Humes, 2013, p. 13). In an outdoor learning context, teachers seeking to infuse their teaching with greater levels of integrated and interdisciplinary learning have been helped by Beames and Ross (2010) scoping out some of the child-centred learning possibilities which can emanate for greater journeying outside of the classroom. The authors examined pupils’ reflections on their outdoor learning experiences in their local neighbourhood from both a social-cultural and geo-physical perspective. They found that real-life experiences enabled pupils to describe and share their thoughts on the influence of human agency in both urban and more natural environments. Scotland has strong possibilities for offering such experiences, for as Thorburn and Allison (2013) note over 90% of all Scottish schools are within one kilometre of a green space. Despite this good news, Beames and Ross (2010) also reported that teachers found it difficult to connect pupil generated experiences with the requirements of the CfE curriculum. We have sympathy with teachers on this matter through noting that the full schedule of experiences and outcomes defined within CfE comes in a hefty 317 page tome (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2009). So how in Biesta’s (2013) terms, can the beautiful risk of education be kept alive and reductive teaching to the test and ticking check boxes to indicate that achievement has taken place be avoided. We consider that an important component of progress, as far as learning outdoors is concerned, would be for teachers to reflect on the key questions highlighted below.

Table 1

*A self-check review for teachers using phenomenological-informed methods when teaching outdoors*

**Questions arising from observing pupils learning experiences**

- Did pupils engage with learning tasks and accept a degree of responsibility for their learning?
- Did pupils relish the opportunity to make choices and help co-construct their learning?
- Did reflections on personal experiences help pupils to review their future learning plans (perspective)?
- Did reflections on personal experiences help pupils to make decisions which fitted in with their interests and values (self-awareness)?
- Did lived-body experiences help pupils' cultivate good habits e.g., in terms of how they engaged with the natural world?
- Did lived-body experiences help pupils' cultivate good problem-solving strategies?
- Did lived-body experiences help pupils develop sensitivity towards the different qualities in the natural world?
- Did lived-body experiences help pupils to make a virtue of attention?

**Questions arising from reviewing planning and pedagogical practices**

- Were pupils enthused and interested in learning outdoors?
- Were pupils given sufficient freedom to experience and describe their experiences?
- How well did I plan learning activities and predict the choices pupils made?
- Were there any unanticipated benefits or limitations apparent in the learning approaches adopted?
- How effective was I in developing pupils' attention e.g., through use of strategic questions?
- Were pupils provided with opportunities to reflect in holistic (subjective-led) ways and well as by cycles of problem solving (objective, blended approach to learning)?
- How successful were opportunities for reflection in enhancing pupils' conceptual understandings?
- How interested were pupils in sharing their reports?
- Were there ways in which learning activities could be further extended?

Reflecting on these questions could enhance the prospect of various situational experiences (which might originate from something as simple as walking in the local neighbourhood) becoming part of shared learning transactions. This would involve pupils learning experiences moving from ambiguous beginnings to something which could be described and reflected upon in more structured terms in due course.

## Conclusion

Thorough the context of outdoor learning, this paper has analysed the potential for enhancing cognition and emotion through strengthening the connections between the lived-body and the embodied mind. We argued that recent related research on phenomenology and Deweyian influences on learning can help advance understanding of embodied experiences in the outdoors. However, these influences by themselves are insufficient, as they provide too little guidance and insight on values and pedagogical engagement. We consider that Tiberius (2008) naturalist-informed theorizing, can when extrapolated provide insights into how outdoor learning experiences can play a constructive part in cultivating well-rounded and relatively stable values. These values when supported by phenomenological-informed reasoning practices can provide insights into how personal responsibility can be exercised in relation to how we live. Merleau-Ponty's work is also helpful to review in this context as it distils how engagement with the natural world can stem from the most every day experiences and our sense of being-in-the-world. Teachers play a crucial role in connecting theory with practice and of drawing pupils' attention to the qualities of the natural world and to the stable values which can underpin and support their experiences.

## References

- Barnacle, R. (2009). Gut instinct: The body and learning. In G. Dall'Alba (Ed.), *Exploring Education through Phenomenology* (pp.16-27). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Beames, S., & Ross, H. (2010). Journeys outside the classroom. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 10 (2), 95-109.
- Biesta, G. (2013). *The Beautiful risk of education*. Paradigm: London.
- Bonnett, M. (2009). Schools as places of unselfing: An educational pathology. In G. Dall'Alba (Ed.), *Exploring Education through Phenomenology* (pp. 28-40). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Cataldi, S.L., & Hamrick, W.S. (2007). Introduction. In S.L. Cataldi & W.S. Hamrick (Eds.), *Merleau Ponty and environmental philosophy* (pp. 1-15). New York: State University of New York Press.



- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York: Touchstone.
- Doddington, C. (2013). Education in the open: The somaesthetic value of being outside. Retrieved August 10, 2013, from: <http://www.philosophy-of-education.org/uploads/2013%20Conference/Papers/Doddington.pdf>
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Humes, W. (2013). The Origins and development of curriculum for excellence: Discourse, politics and control. In M. Priestley & G. Biesta (Eds.), *Reinventing the curriculum: New trends in curriculum policy and practice* (pp. 13-34). London: Bloomsbury.
- James, S. (2009). *The presence of nature: A Study in phenomenological and environmental philosophy*. Hampshire: Palgarve, Macmillan.
- Learning and Teaching Scotland (2009). *Curriculum for excellence experiences and outcomes*. Retrieved August 10, 2013, from: [http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/all\\_experiences\\_outcomes\\_tcm4-539562.pdf](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/all_experiences_outcomes_tcm4-539562.pdf)
- Learning and Teaching Scotland (2010). *Curriculum for excellence through outdoor learning*. Retrieved August 10, 2013, from: [http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/Images/cfeoutdoor-learningfinal\\_tcm4-596061.pdf](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/Images/cfeoutdoor-learningfinal_tcm4-596061.pdf)
- Martinkova, I., & Parry, J. (2011). An Introduction to the Phenomenological Study of Sport. *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*, 5 (3), 185-201.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception*. London: Routledge.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968). *The visible and the invisible*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Nicol, R. (2012). Entering the Fray: The role of outdoor education in providing nature-based experiences that matter. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Retrieved August 10, 2013, from: <http://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/doi/abs/10.1080/00131857.2012.753383>
- Parfit, D. (1984). *Reasons and persons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Priestley, M. (2011). Whatever happened to curriculum theory? Critical realism and curriculum Change. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 19 (3), 221-237.
- Priestley, M., & Biesta, G. (2013). Introduction: The new curriculum. In M. Priestley, & G. Biesta (Eds.), *Reinventing the curriculum: New trends in curriculum policy and practice* (pp. 1-12). London: Bloomsbury.
- Quay, J. (2013). More than relations between self, others and nature: outdoor education and aesthetic experience. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 13 (2), 142-157.
- Searle, J.R. (2002). *Consciousness and language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shusterman, R. (2004). Somaesthetics and education: Exploring the terrain. In: L. Bresler (Ed.), *Knowing bodies, moving minds: towards embodied teaching and learning* (pp. 17-31). London: Kluwer Academic.
- Sumner, L.W. (1996). *Welfare, happiness and ethics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Thorburn, M., & Marshall, A. (2011). Evaluating adventure education experiences: The outside view. In Berry, M., & Hodgson, C. (Eds.), *Adventure education: An introduction* (pp. 105-125). London: Routledge.

- Thorburn, M., & Allison, P. (2013). Analysing attempts to support outdoor learning in Scottish Schools. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 45 (3), 418-440.
- Thorburn, M., & MacAllister, J. (2013). Dewey, interest and well-being: Prospects for improving the educational value of physical education. *Quest*, 65 (4), 458-468.
- Tiberius, V. (2008). *The reflective life: Living wisely with our limits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Toadvine, T. (2009). *Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of nature*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- White, J. (2011). *Exploring well-being in schools*. London: Routledge.

**Authors:**

Malcolm Thorburn, Dr.  
University of Edinburgh  
College of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Moray House School of Education  
St Leonard's Land  
Holyrood Road  
Edinburgh EH8 8AQ  
Scotland  
email: Malcolm.Thorburn@ed.ac.uk

Aaron Marshall, Ph.D. Candidate  
University of Edinburgh  
College of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Moray House School of Education  
St Leonard's Land  
Holyrood Road  
Edinburgh EH8 8AQ  
Scotland  
email: aaron.r.marshall@gmail.com