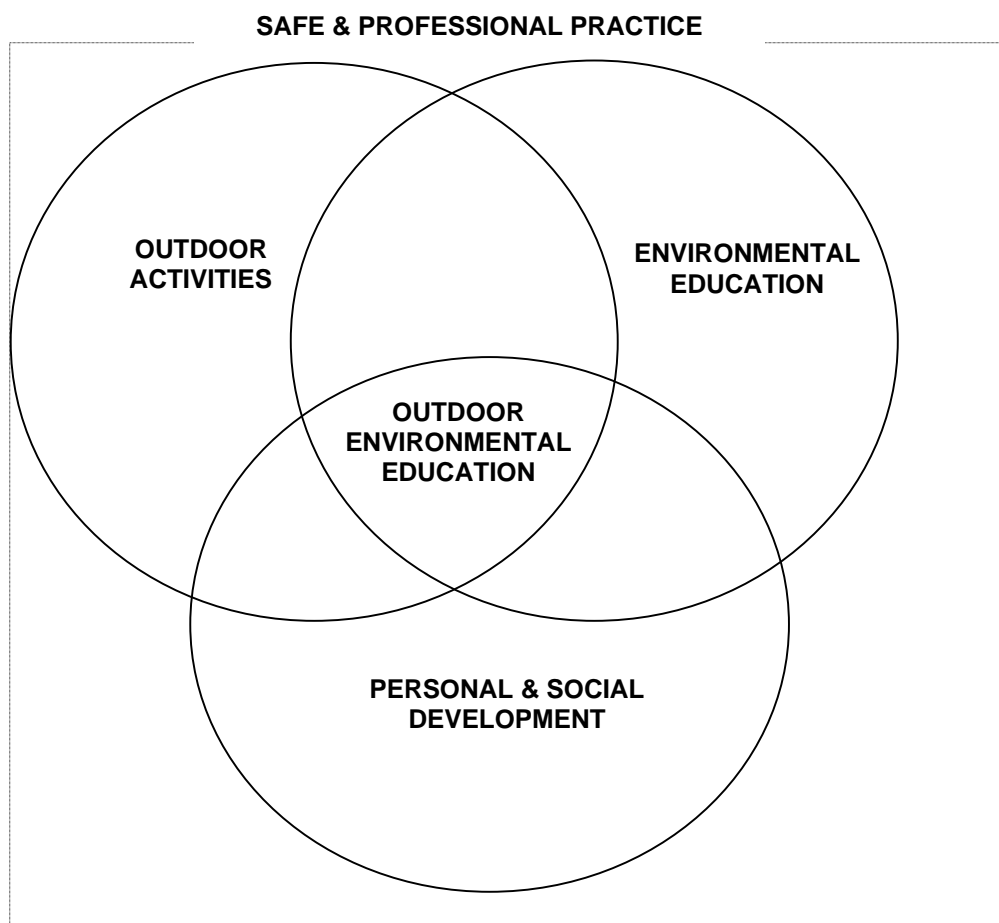


Outdoor Environmental Education: Using the Outdoors as a place to explore teaching and learning about sustainability issues and lifestyles

There are many different ways to define outdoor environmental education. On this course in Scotland we like to start with the idea that it is about outdoor activities, personal and social development and environmental education. The way these ideas are related is shown in the following model.



When we talk about outdoor activities we mean the practical activities that we do when we take learning out-of-doors. When these activities are used to encourage learning about individual people and their relationships with others we call this personal and social development. When these activities are used to encourage learning about nature and people we call this environmental education. As the model suggests outdoor environmental education happens when we learn about ourselves as individuals, our role in society and our relationship with the natural environment.

What is common to these ideas is that the teacher and pupils pursue learning outcomes beyond the classroom. This is not to say that outdoor environmental education is a better form of learning than class-based learning. It is to suggest that some learning is better suited to being out-of-doors and this course will help the teacher to identify these opportunities.

For example, when we are indoors we are separated from much of the natural world by the walls that surround us. These walls insulate us from the elements providing us with a comfortable space to do many important learning tasks. The problem with these walls though is that they also restrict the use of our senses. This is a problem because it is through our senses that we are most profoundly linked to the natural environment. The purpose

of going outdoors therefore is to use our senses to learn in different ways.

To explore this idea we use Patrick Geddes' model that education should not just be about the '3 Rs' of 'Reading wRiting and aRithmetic'. Instead he developed the model known as the '3 Hs'. The '3Hs' are the 'Heart, Hand and Head'. Geddes believed that traditional indoor teaching methods focused too much on developing cognitive thinking (head learning). Instead of starting with the head Geddes suggested that when teachers teach they should begin first by understanding what motivates their learners. He knew that feelings were extremely important in motivating people to learn. This is why he said that education must begin firstly with the Heart (feelings and emotions) and then focus on the Hand (learning by doing) and finally the Head ('book' or intellectual learning). Geddes was not saying that book learning was not important just that it had become too dominant as a method of learning. He was arguing instead for educating the whole person.

Geddes was a Scotsman but he was not alone in developing ways of learning that were based on direct experience. Nowadays there is a very well developed theory called experiential learning and many people throughout Europe have contributed to its development. Aristotle (Greece) is sometimes referred to as the founding father of experiential learning because of his work in soil science. However the roots of experiential education can be found throughout many European countries.

by book learning we use experiential activities as a method to learn about theory.

Throughout the programme the main theme is how we can use the outdoors to learn about ourselves and the planet and how we might live more sustainably on it.

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References

Several articles relating to these themes can be found on the University of Edinburgh Outdoor Education website:

<http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/outdoored/>

In particular see the following articles (found under the lead author's name)

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