
On The Construction, Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Experience in 'Critical' Outdoor Education

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Abstract

Experience is at the historical heart of outdoor education, caring for the environment/nature is a new moral imperative for 'critical' outdoor education, yet the activity basis of the outdoor/nature experience/imperative and the discourse(s) in which they function are rarely examined. To rectify this oversight, different constructions of critical outdoor education are contrasted to highlight the potency of the ecopolitic and (socio-)environmental ethic embodied in each construction. The essay concludes reconstructively with an elaboration of some critical dimensions of outdoor education. The paper invites 'reflective' and 'critical' outdoor/experiential educators to scrutinize the meanings they give to 'experience', how they construct it pedagogically in and through selected activities in certain environments and how, in turn, there are individual, social and ecological consequences for the 'experiencer', (outdoor) education's role in constituting such subjectivities and, subsequently, how 'inner', 'social' and 'outer' natures are constructed, often in contradiction.

Introduction

The 'postmodern' discourse of 'critical' outdoor education in Australia has recently been broadened by a number of essays that, in different ways, examine or challenge the field's educational assumptions and aspirations. Care for the environment, for example, is a focus. The term 'culture' is also prominent in this critical discourse that seems to have distanced itself from the 'social' equity and justice concerns of 'modern' critical theory (Martin, 1999, p. 464). This critical discourse also appears to have non-problematically imported from other cultures the 'deep' imperative for living in harmony with the environment while rehearsing various deconstructions of a range of cultural myths associated educationally with the so-called 'ecological crisis' (Bowers, 1987, 1993). Criticisms, presumably of Australian culture and its historical development and educational institutions are, in general, directed at the dominance of western, anthropocentric, positivist, patriarchal, industrial, progressive and dualistic thinking. Culture, it seems, in both Australia and the Pacific North-West of the USA, from where Bowers is writing, is at odds with nature and its care. The trend to 'cultural

criticism' in outdoor education in Australia mirrors broader academic developments in the Humanities and Social Sciences, including educational theory. Yet, despite the many vantage points available for examining the formative development of critical outdoor education, the infamous exchanges between Bowers (1991a, b, c) and the critical theorist of education Peter McLaren (1991) and feminist theorist of education Maxine Greene are not acknowledged. Nor are the various critiques of 'deep ecology' in environmental philosophy, social and feminist theory that have come from various parts of the (western) world, at least (Beck, 1995; Biehl & Staudenmaier, 1995; Ferry, 1995; Heller, 1999; Salleh, 1993; van Wyck, 1997). These 'lacks' point to a number of conceptual problems with practical consequences in the emerging culturally critical discourse of outdoor education in Australia.

As might be expected, the study of culture is a dynamic, as has recently been demonstrated in Roger Sandall's (2001) pro-(western)-civilization critique of the relativism of what he calls 'the culture cult'. Writing in Australia, about Australia and New Zealand, Sandall, a

culturally conservative anthropologist, argues amongst a litany of complaints that the 'romantic primitivism' associated with the culture cult has ushered in the phenomenon of 'designer tribalism' to the 'new age' practices and discourses of some disaffected segments of contemporary postmodern society. These include radical, mystical and spiritual elements of the environmental movement, of which critical outdoor education may be a candidate for membership. From the 'other' side of politics, the 'leftist' German critical theorist Jurgen Habermas (1989) differentiates between 'old', 'new' and 'young' conservatism in cultural criticism. Old conservatives long for a return to premodern forms of life. New conservatives accept the economic and technological features of modernity while minimizing the explosive elements of cultural modernism. Habermas associates young conservatism with the rise of human subjectivities freed from the constraints of rational cognition and purposiveness from the imperatives of labor and utility. Another critical theorist, the North American Thomas McCarthy (1991), identifies the latter postmodern phenomena as constituting an 'aesthetics of self invention' of which Sandall's 'designer tribals' may well be a peculiar social manifestation with an environmental mission. Again, culturally critical outdoor educators might fit one or more of these old, new and young categories.

The young, critical discourse of outdoor education in Australia does not acknowledge any of these broad sorts of differences, or the relevant conceptual issues and practical problems they present to the reader, the teacher, the student, the curriculum developer and so on. To be sure, the above survey of 'culture' and its 'criticism' is far too brief; much more could be said about cultures and their constitutions. But the point about cultures' problematic status, and the need for a range of context driven critiques of it/them, should be apparent. Viewed against this backdrop, to this reader/writer/teacher there is something 'totalizing' in the discourse of critical outdoor education—culture is typically treated in the singular and static form, is usually wrapped up in a blanket of negative generalizations that obscure or erase particular aspects of cultures and their human (re)constitution over time, place and space, be it through individual or collective endeavours, for 'good', 'bad' or otherwise. If particular issues of cultural significance are obscured in a discourse that totalizes then, for example, allegations about young conservatives and tendencies to

designer tribalism and/or an aesthetics of self invention, amongst numerous 'cultural' possibilities, a point this essay partially responds to by comparing and contrasting three constructions of the experience of kayaking in outdoor education in Australia.

Before proceeding to that more specific task, there are some broad questions that might be asked about the totalizing tendencies of critical outdoor education. Are there different ways in which the now pejoratively used concept of 'anthropocentrism' might be morally, socially and politically understood; is its valorised alternative 'ecocentrism' intrinsically good and, if so, for whom? Moreover, what practical meanings do cultural critics in outdoor education ascribe to the 'culture(s)' they discuss selectively and so broadly? What, therefore, is the practical focus, value and utility of cultural criticism? Put plainly, can or should outdoor education, or an experience of it, be non western, ecocentric, less than rational, non progressive, gender neutral and negate or avoid dualistic thinking, as is implied in the culturally critical discourse of outdoor education? Formidable theoretical and practical challenges, indeed, for this new 'player' in the discourse(s) of outdoor education.

Undoubtedly, outdoor education in Australia is a 'set' of social and cultural constructions, whose activity base borrows from diverse histories and has numerous aims that now tend to stress the development of adventure recreation skills, personal therapy and spiritual growth, social or 'community' development, profit-making or, more recently, environmental relationships. The cultural assumptions and expectations of outdoor education are, therefore, worthy topics of investigation and mark out a new and academically seductive focus for theoretical discussion and debate. At the same time, the 'culture of outdoor education' is always practical, meaning that if critique is to be relevant it might need to be more mundane and less lofty in its cultural aspirations. Activities like kayaking, rock climbing, bushwalking/tramping and cross country skiing all have disparate historical 'roots' and are a stable feature of outdoor education in South East Australia (despite few rivers and the briefest of snowy conditions in a very hot, dry, flat continent) and New Zealand (where rivers and snowy mountains are far more plentiful). These core activities have not received the critical attention they demand for their environmental appropriateness if, in fact, they are significant

'experiential' contributors to the very 'culture' and 'nature' the new wave of critics in outdoor education are concerned about. If so, (cultural) 'theory' and criticism in outdoor education appears to be moving much faster than (actual) 'practice'; 'discourse' may be at odds with its 'grounds'. This is fertile ground for a 'rhetoric-reality gap'.

This essay aims to bridge that looming theory-practice gap, a gap that might be fuelled by the critical discourse of outdoor education. This bridging occurs through a practical re-examination of the *nature of experience* as it is 'constructed' in and by one of the major 'cultural' activities of outdoor education. A specific objective is to invigorate critical insights into the problematic nature of experience by examining the 'material conditions' and 'social positioning' of the activity of kayaking.

There are limits to this task. The 'ethos' of kayaking cannot be adequately addressed here, noting the dominant 'culture of adventure' in rockclimbing has been discussed elsewhere (Payne, 1994), as have elements of gender constructions and relations in rockclimbing in Australia (Kiewa, 2001; Preston, 2001). Nor will the costs, including environmental, associated with travelling lengthy distances to wild rivers or snowy slopes be criticized. Nor will the historical roots of kayaking be considered here apart from noting that kayaking can be traced to the subsistence and warring demands of indigenous peoples in the sub-arctic and the leisured interests of the affluent classes of England and Europe in the nineteenth century. In schooling, Lynn Cook (1999) has examined how the post Baden-Powell and Kurt Hahn formalization of outdoor education in the UK in the 1940s and 50s was dominated by a moralizing policy elite who saw a class-driven need to build 'ideal' male and female adolescent characters through physically challenging and adventurous activities. Modern kayaking in Australia appears to be a post WW II hybrid of British military influences, Eastern European recreational pursuits during the building of the Snowy River Hydro-electric scheme and the importation of specialized exhibition and competition kayaks and canoes for the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. A number of private schools in Australia imported the anglo character building practices of outdoor education mentioned above. More recently, technological developments in design and materials, sourced from various 'other' unknown and invisible parts of the world, have

significantly shaped the nature of kayaking and its experience. In all, there is a real need for definitive 'activity histories' in outdoor education in Australia and New Zealand (and other parts of the world) which critically examine the 'recreational/environmental' role of various activities, the use of nature/place settings, the significance of equipment and its demand for 'skilling' as they interrelate and have been shaped by a range of broader educational considerations, material developments, social factors and cultural forces (Payne, 2001).

Lack of historical detail aside, this paper aims to be practical, ethical and political in the sense of developing a 'grounded philosophy' of the kayaking experience while satisfying the criteria of being 'critical, (socially) scientific, practical and non-idealistic' as developed in Brian Fay's (1987) metatheory of critical social science. Fay's criteria act to 'objectively' temper this author's subjectivities. The following critique is 'critically realist' in the sense that those dominant activities like kayaking used regularly in the practices of outdoor education also require critique—a critique that excavates and interrogates the embeddedness of culture in the material artifice of those activities. A basic premise of this essay is to ask how a (learning) activity, like kayaking, *in-it-self* physically 'orders' human action and interaction while materially 'shaping' human, social and environmental 'experience'.

The major point of this contribution to the critical discourse of outdoor education is, therefore, to highlight the culturally problematic 'nature' of outdoor activities in human experience. Put simply, the activities privileged in outdoor education are also a product of the culture now criticized in outdoor education and should not be immune from criticism in any discourse that lays claim to being critical. Theoretical *and* practical reflexivity is required now if the emerging rhetoric-reality, theory-practice gaps are to be bridged, as I am recommending. Thus, a core assumption of this contribution is that outdoor activities like kayaking enframe human experience and, when embodied in human action and interaction, reproduce (or sustain environmentally) the material, social and symbolic basis of the 'culture' and 'culture-nature' relationships that are of concern to 'critical' outdoor educators. Put differently, this 'grounded' analysis of the kayaking experience is an attempt to lay bare the 'practical' ethics and politics of that activity.

To achieve this, different discursive, textual or storied constructions of kayaking are examined and contrasted.

The method for this analysis of the nature of experience claimed in outdoor education activities is, initially, descriptive and 'case' driven. Different 'stories' about kayaking are contrasted by broadly allocating them to the constructivist (Thomas & Thomas, 2000), deconstructivist (Payne, 1996, 2000), and reconstructivist (Wattchow, 1999, 2001a) perspectives of (post)modern educational theory. A descriptive strategy is used because priority is given to the practices, or activity basis, of outdoor education. That is, following Fay's metatheoretical conditions, an emerging theory-practice gap in the critical discourse of outdoor education can be avoided by moving from a 'grounds' (in this case, rivers) 'up' analysis of three constructions of kayaking to cultural critique consistent with the emerging aspirations of critical outdoor education. Theoretical development of this grounded analysis is deferred to the final part of the essay. Hence, the broad strategy used here for examining the 'nature of experience' from within 'larger' social and cultural frames is to engage a multi-layered interpretation of the 'duality' of agency in human activity and socio-cultural structures of that experience (Giddens, 1984). *Agency* might simply be understood as including perception, consciousness, habit, action, communication and interaction while *structure* addresses the historical, material, social, linguistic, environmental and cultural conditions that are (differentially) embedded or implied in educational institutions and policies, curriculum documents and embodied in pedagogical practices.

The selection of the activity of kayaking and its three textual constructions in this 'grounds up' theoretical analysis of the *nature* of experience is not coincidental. Initial 'moves' in the critical discourse of outdoor education align kayaking with 'nature' and claims for its 'caring' and status as 'friend' (Martin, 1999) and 'environmentally sustainable living' (Thomas & Thomas, 2000).

Experience, experiential learning and outdoor education: Some challenges

Brief mention of the problematic status of experience (Dewey, 1938), experiential learning (Usher & Edwards, 1994) and outdoor education (Kraft, 1981) is needed to set the scene and mood for this (critical) investigation of the activity

basis of the outdoor/wilderness/nature/environmental experience.

'Experience' is undoubtedly at the pedagogical heart of curriculum areas like outdoor, physical, environmental and health education. The importance of learning through 'hands on' experience is also found in the science laboratories at schools, constructivist pedagogies in mathematics and science, the studio for artistic creations, field trips for social educators and in the competencies developed by vocational educators. Experiential educators delight in the traditional Confucian saying, 'Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand'. But, equally, that delight requires tempering when further consideration is given to the meanings of postmodern experience and how it/they are enacted in experiential education.

There are discussions in education about 'direct', 'raw', 'native', 'second-hand', 'vicarious', 'contrived', 'cyber' and 'mediated' experiences, to name just a few of many versions. 'Personal', 'individual', 'social' and 'group' experiences are mentioned. Discussions in outdoor education often revolve around 'wilderness', 'adventure', 'ecological', 'risk' and 'nature' experiences. Others focus on 'flow', 'peak' and 'spiritual' experiences. These terms are used easily, conceptual clarification is rare, empirically based insights are lacking.

Some time ago, John Dewey in *Experience and Education*, best summarized an appropriate mood for examining the concept of *educative* experience when, in anticipating the problem of 'social control' in schools, he noted:

I have said that educational plans and projects, seeing education in terms of life-experience, are thereby committed to framing and adopting an intelligent theory or, if you please, philosophy of experience. Otherwise they are at the mercy of every intellectual breeze that happens to blow (Dewey, 1938, p. 31).

If Dewey is correct, two contemporary commentaries about experiential learning and outdoor education further establish a critical mood for examining the three constructions of kayaking. More generally, in *Postmodernism and Education*, Robin Usher and Richard Edwards (1994, p. 205) argue that the relationship of the postmodern and experiential learning is undertheorized. Usher and Edwards link the recent interest in experiential education to the economic and social fragmentation initiated by

increased scepticism about the 'foundational' and 'universal' knowledge/truth claims of western science and modern philosophy, the limits of technical rationality and the consequent failings of the modern 'rational' project. They argue that modernity's preoccupation with reason and autonomy is being replaced in the postmodern age with the 'cultivation of desire', a contemporary force targeting the satisfaction of 'wants', mostly market-based, and some 'needs', driven by competing and conflicting interests. Experiential learning, they argue, has become a 'space' where the assumptions, values and strategies of the 'new right', the 'new middle classes' and other 'stakeholder' interest groups engage in an ongoing struggle to construct a 'common sense' of the world. Additionally, experiential learning provides a safe harbour for vocational training, competency-based exercises that serve dominant economic interests and whose 'instrumental logic and practice' is a persistent concern for those critical educators who believe individuals should be treated as 'ends' and not as mere 'means' (for others' controlling ends). Usher and Edwards add, significantly, that now 'meaning is constructed through experience rather than simply being conveyed by it' and is often associated with the practices of 'guidance' and 'counselling'. Usher & Edwards assert that experiential learning in postmodernity strategically reinvents modernity's culture of autonomy as a new form of 'self discipline' where self-monitoring, self-reflection and self-evaluation become principal activities for these hyperindividualized agents/actors. This hidden disciplining and marketing, they go on to argue, operates within the seemingly autonomous cultivation of desire underpinning the adoption of experiential learning pedagogies.

In all, Usher and Edwards' critique of the conservative, often economically driven underpinnings of the allegedly progressive tendencies of experiential learning alert us to the many double-edged swords experiential learning has become. On one hand they assert that the use of experience in education is a postmodern challenge to the metaphysics and dominant epistemologies of modernity. On the other hand, postmodern experience is ambiguous, open, uncertain, fluid and often contradictory. Postmodern 'disciplined' experience, they argue, is increasingly 'governed', 'surveilled' and imaged by different icons, markets and 'experts', including curriculum leaders, knowledge and activity specialists, teachers, corporate sponsors, well

meaning therapists and other personal 'counselling' mediums. All 'compete' for the postmodern self within many of the consumer imperatives of a commodity culture. Usher and Edwards provocatively conclude '...experiential learning is fast becoming a central object in a powerful and oppressive discourse'.

Zygmunt Bauman (1997), in *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, philosophically extends the questions Usher & Edwards pose about postmodern educational experience and Dewey about social control when he asserts, '...the bitter experience in question is the experience of freedom'. Bauman is concerned about the rise of 'meta-experience', a term he uses to describe the religious-like pursuit of what he claims is an increasing tendency in individuals to pursue 'this-worldly transcendence' and 'postmodern serenity'. 'Flow' and 'spiritual' experiences are examined critically by Bauman, reiterating the prominence of these terms in outdoor education. Says Bauman about the growing demands for 'teachers of experience' that 'experiencing', albeit sensation-gathering and sensation-enhancement, has become a 'technical problem' aimed at the training of the 'perfect consumers' by the 'paragons and prophets' of the postmodern market for the peak experience.

Seen in this potentially oppressive and/or escapist transcendental 'cultural' light, Richard Kraft's (1981) rarely cited, provocative and prophetic comments about trends in outdoor education are worth reiterating. Kraft editorialised in *The Journal of Experiential Education* that John Dewey '...would bridle at the extreme individualism of today's experiential educators, who appear to emphasize the individual, the mystical experience of the mountaintop and the narcissistic pleasures of the wilderness, rather than the arduous task of building a just and democratic order'. Intriguing thoughts indeed for philosophical and practical discussion in critical outdoor education, particularly when Usher & Edwards (1994) more recent expression of worries about the popularity of experiential learning and Bauman's about the prophets of meta-experiencing endorse the aesthetic hyperindividualism Kraft detected two decades ago in outdoor education.

Put simply, the ideas of educative experience, experiential learning and experiential education in the postmodern are extremely complex, their (various) meanings are easily confused, their practices diffuse and open to interpretation and

manipulation. Yet, in fields like outdoor education, a consensus about the importance of 'experience' often presumes tacit agreements about its meaning(s), rests on totalising and ahistorical critique, endorses key, stable practice(s), follows an almost formulaic approach to its 'delivery' and processing/'debriefing' and perpetuates major cultural assumptions and outcomes, not least of which is the probable reproduction of the technical reduction and commodification of 'experience'.

Three 'paradigms' of constructionist, deconstructionist and reconstructionist thought are now loosely employed to 'read' and, ultimately, compare different 'stories' about the activity of kayaking and claims about the 'nature' of the kayaking experience in 'critical' outdoor education. Following the summarizing of the three constructions of kayaking, each 'story' about kayaking, experience and nature will be contrasted to highlight strengths and weaknesses in the critical construction. The paper concludes with further theoretical and practical development of a notion of 'critical outdoor education'.

Constructionism

At the risk of oversimplifying complex ideas and their educational practices, constructivism typically refers to the active meaning-making and knowledge creating capacities of individuals (McInerney & McInerney, 2001). 'Social' constructivism shifts the locus of meaning-making to the dynamics of the group in the 'public' (re)negotiation of subjective understandings that in no way deny the inevitability of individualized 'personal' knowledge. Constructivist epistemologies have a long history in the human-issues, experience-based and normatively predisposed curricula. Problem-based, inquiry driven, group engaged and knowledge/values oriented pedagogies are common. Science and mathematics educators and teachers are belatedly extolling the virtues of constructivism, a new 'industry' in education that rarely scrutinizes its recent self-construction (Osborne, 1996). Likewise, given the critical focus of this essay, the (social) construction of nature, for example, features prominently in environmental history (Cronon, 1995), environmental philosophy and ethics (Soper, 1995) and social theory (Darier, 1999). Effectively, constructivism and constructionism stand for the historically active role of agents in making individual and collective meaning of human, social, cultural and environmental

experiences. The role of human subjectivity is acknowledged and often highly valued; debates about meaning can, therefore, be expected. Constructionists stand against the mere receipt of 'given', 'fixed', absolute or foundational truths. Detachment and objectivity are regularly challenged.

Glyn Thomas and Jeff Thomas (2000) construct a notion of 'moving water paddling as critical outdoor education'. Three characteristics of critical outdoor education are explained while others are briefly listed. The initial critical construction is that moving water paddling should be environmental, promote sustainability and escape the nature-culture dualism. A second major construction takes the form of a list of recommendations about how moving water paddling should be used as a way of exploring specific riverine environments and developing participants' understandings and relationships with nature. Hints include observation of different environmental features, collecting information of a natural history type, 'experiencing' the river in its totality by journeying its length and recording the experience in a journal, examining the river dynamics and morphology and, prior to the experience, conducting localized research on historical, management and environmental issues. A third construct, drawing directly from Karen Warren's (1990) account of a rock climbing experience, exhorts the moving water paddler to view the river with 'loving perception', if paddlers are to learn to 'co-operate' with the water.

Thomas and Thomas's cultural considerations highlight the power of language in constructing (and deconstructing) particular culture-nature relations. For example, leaders/teachers are encouraged to avoid terms like 'shoot this drop'. This language or 'naming' promotes those 'arrogant' perceptions, following Warren, which, according to Thomas and Thomas, are part of the contentious culture-nature dualism. Re-naming is authorized. About 'nature' and by implication 'environmental sustainability', the authors' need to be interpreted. Thomas and Thomas's recommended exploration of 'specific riverine environments' is located in 'steep, well forested country' where moving water paddling is the 'most environmentally appropriate' method of travel. The implicit construction of nature conveyed to the reader is of an environment that is relatively inaccessible or vulnerable to other modes of mechanical/technologically-driven exploration,

presumably (relatively) natural or remote and, probably, of the wild or wilderness type.

Nineteen 'dot point' suggestions about moving water paddling are offered to the reader so as to 'enhance' the meaning-making ability of moving water paddling and its potential contribution to critical outdoor education. Thomas and Thomas conclude that the 'quality' of critical outdoor education 'lies firmly with the teachers and leaders'. They add, '...the richness of that contribution will be determined by the way the moving water paddling experiences are designed, framed, and facilitated.

In the introductory conceptualisation of 'critical', Thomas and Thomas offer fleeting mention of the image consciousness, gear intensive and regulated nature of activities and environmental harm of modern outdoor recreation. The authors also describe the dilemma of overemphasizing skill development (for reasons of safety) at the expense of 'thoughtful' critical outdoor education. One of the dot point suggestions encourages teachers and leaders to be careful about how playfulness with the river might be encouraged in a manner that does not foster a consumeristic mentality. Thomas and Thomas surmise, 'The difference all lies in the way the experience is framed' (by the teacher/leader).

Deconstructionism

Deconstruction(ism) also comes in numerous forms. It is not the simple opposite of constructionism. It promotes 'different' ways of making meaning. At the risk, again, of oversimplifying a highly complex term and practice, one common purpose of deconstructionism is to destabilize given meanings, challenge the historically accepted processes of reason, knowledge production and representation, and what counts as fact or truth. It is anti-foundational thought, anti-universalisms and anti-metaphysical. In stressing the ambiguity of concepts, textual contradictions, discursive regimes and, ultimately, the power and fallibility of what is counted as knowledge/truth, deconstructionists in curriculum theory aim to create new 'spaces' for meaning and understanding through phenomenological or poststructural investigations (Pinar & Reynolds, 1992). Not surprisingly, deconstructionist texts can, in turn, easily be deconstructed, highlighting the infinite regress, constant deferral and indeterminacy of meaning and, therefore, social understanding. Relativism, cynicism, nihilism and solipsism are

possible consequences. 'Poststructural deconstruction' is increasingly influential in educational and curriculum theory where texts, language, stories, narratives and discourse occupy centre stage. This particular textual/linguistic slant in cultural criticism is now evident in 'critical outdoor education' and is glimpsed above in Thomas and Thomas's efforts to 'rename' problematic aspects of moving water paddling such as 'shooting' the rapid.

My (Payne, 1996, 2000) 'phenomenology' of kayaking is an alternative deconstructive strategy that is more concerned with interpretations of human bodies, subjects, agency, action, interaction and experience and less about texts, subjectivities, talk and discourse. This phenomenology of kayaking, following Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology of perception, aims to reveal the 'facticity' of the 'already there' through 're-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world' as we 'live' it. Also influential in Payne's deconstruction is Heidegger's (1977) questioning of technology. Following Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and the phenomenological philosopher Don Ihde (for example, 1983, 1990), I reveal technology's invisible moral, political and ecological 'work' in the activity of kayaking. Despite the inherent limitations of language, Payne's 'interrogation' of kayaking tries to reveal the existential core or roots of the experience of the activity of kayaking *before* the 'jargon' of kayaking is used to name or rename that experience. So, I employ a linguistically-mediated interpretation of the experiential 'essence' of kayaking to deconstruct the dominant social practices and cultural underpinnings of kayaking.

Payne's phenomenology focuses on two experiential dimensions of kayaking, namely the 'embodiment' of kayaking and the 'embodied-relations and cultural corrections' of kayaking. Three experienced kayakers contributed to the interpretation and writing of the phenomenological description of kayaking. For illustrative purposes, the following extract highlights the invisible 'work' of technologies in 'ordering' particular spatial perceptions and environmental relations:

A kayak is a cocoon-like plastic tool used for moving-on-rivers...Spatially, kayaks and their artefactual means of propulsion, like the paddle, are designed in such a way that the paddler's visual field and range of physical movements and receipt of

sensations are inclined to the front. The field of visual and physical reference is highly selective according to the linearity of the kayak's design to move and the rotational ability of the paddle to constantly catch the water to move the kayak down-the-river. That is, the arrow-like linearity of the kayak tool, its cockpit/seating position, rotation of the catching paddle blade physically align the paddler up, in a forward position above-the-water and in-motion down-the-river (Payne, 2000).

This very brief and awkward description of what I call the 'technics of experience' points to the way in which the paddler is 'ordered' by the kayak-tools of river-use/travel. In so doing, this socially-constructed and named 'kayaker' or enculturated 'paddler' and his/her time/place/space relations highlight the impossibility of the activity of kayaking 'escaping' from the material, historical and social conditions of its technological form of production. These enculturated actions, interactions and relations are 'designed' into the tools we call kayak, paddle and so on, are embodied in the user and, as such, are 'experienced' phenomenologically, as such. Payne (2000) 'extracts' from the phenomenological description a number of general or invariant propositions about the relationship of technology, experience and nature (inner and outer). Again, for illustrative purposes, some of these propositions include; the non-neutrality of technologies and invisibility of their moral, social, political and ecological 'work' in the human body; the ambivalence of technology in extending and/or limiting human perception, ability and experience; the ability of technologies to structure and order human experience in accordance with the intentions of the designer, design and production/manufacturing of the 'tool'; the capability of technology to 'manufacture' human action and experience, 'order' action, 're-order' environmental perceptions and consciousness, 'structure' 'ecological' relations and, inevitably, 'reconstitute' the ethos and culture of kayaking-nature 'relationships'.

I conclude that the embodied relations of paddler/kayaker, the tools of kayak, paddle, wet suit, spray deck and so on, and subsequent environmental relations are mediated in various ways. This mediation qualifies, if not challenges, positive claims about the strong ethical and political relationship that might exist 'relationally' between the activity of kayaking and the proximal/temporal environment in

which the activity occurs and is perceived. I do not use the term nature. Nor do I mention rocks, water and use other conventional namings of 'nature'. My theoretical development of the phenomenology of kayaking cites a number of critically-disposed authors who attribute blame to technology for its instrumental role in the domination and exploitation of 'nature'. Payne, therefore, theoretically develops the practical links between the material conditions of conventional forms of kayaking and the cultural resources and designs of environmental disenchantment and despoliation.

Reconstructionism

Reconstructionism often follows deconstruction. Some deconstructionists avoid reconstruction because they want to defer meaning and allow for its 'play'. Having deconstructed something, a reconstructionist might offer an alternative or an *end-in-view*, a concept central to John Dewey's pragmatic logic of inquiry. In the postmodern era, social reconstructionism in education continues to grapple with a number of problems. These are the political nature of schooling, the possibility of resisting dominant interests that are inequitable or unjust, the transformative role of teachers, the ideological construction of knowledge and the ability to develop an ethical position (Stanley, 1992).

Brian Wattchow's (1999) account of 'feeling for water' is one such example of a reconstructive praxis in critical outdoor education. Inspired by van Manen's notion of the 'pedagogical good', Wattchow describes how he fashioned a (canoe) paddle out of some old, left-over red cedar and alpine ash using his grandfather's tools. Wattchow's story about a 'pedagogy of production' is finely focussed on the shaping of the timber and crafting of the paddle. His story is set against the backdrop of the commodification of outdoor education and, in doing so, exposes the differences between craft experiences that work with nature and the dominant practices of canoeing/kayaking.

Wattchow is concerned about the specialization of industrial life. According to Wattchow, industrial mechanisms erode individual understandings and collective memories of our productive capacities. He connects this loss with trends in outdoor education that, increasingly, are highly dependent on technologies and specialization. The disconnections of contemporary life, mind from

body, people from people, people from their places is a recurring concern in Wattchow's text.

Wattchow's reconstructive pedagogical good highlights the importance of 'reconnection'. Bodily knowing is, therefore, an important feature, not only in terms of the paddler's potential role in shaping and crafting a paddle, or boat or canoe, but also in appreciating how the acting body can be extended into feeling the water through the crafted medium of the paddle. For example, shaft length is calculated from a measure of part of the body; shaft ovalled through a similar procedure which Wattchow doesn't want to tell or name because to do so would rob the learner from engaging in a communal activity where 'body to body' meeting and information sharing is to be encouraged.

Wattchow views the crafting of the paddle as a 'true' extension of himself. He contrasts this self with that of being 'dimensioned off' as is now the case with specially designed, mass manufactured and purchased paddles. This hand crafted extension of the self allows Wattchow to feel the watery world, the river's undercurrents and eddies. Wattchow's narrative emphasizes the sensory dimensions of the paddle in the water and its primary role in the river journey. In crafting the paddle in its production and use, Wattchow highlights the importance of creation, the practical experience of discipline and self limitation, and the cause of environmental attunement or immersion. Here, lies the pedagogical good in experiential learning.

Critical contrasts

Thomas and Thomas's mildly reformist, 'new conservative', philosophically liberal construction of critical outdoor education stresses the individualized need for learners to identify 'deeply' with the river, change their attitudes, values and relationships with the environment, the importance of environmental sustainability, the significance of 'adding on environmental studies/natural history to the activity of moving water paddling' and the need for greater perceptual/sensory/linguistic acuity during the activity/experience and in (re)naming the nature experience. Nature is constructed in the natural or wilderness form while the transmission of problematic culture resides mainly in the use of language in the common vernacular of mainstream kayaking/paddling. The activity basis of moving water paddling is barely considered

while the meanings of experience and education in the outdoors for it remains vague. The Thomas and Thomas scenario is teacher centred and emphasizes the quality requirements of what teachers and leaders *ought* or *should* do in planning, conducting and unpacking' the experience. The authors' method is subjective and self-determining where they admit to 'personal struggles and resolutions' on the place of moving water paddling in critical outdoor education. While these tribulations are possibly a consequence of reflective practice, no empirical findings or methodological insights about learners' experiences are offered to sustain their claims for a critical practice. Their 'theoretical' text is essentially rhetorical and speculative, is an example of critical thinking as subjectivity/personal knowledge and is suggestive only of a possible practice of critical outdoor education.

Payne's deconstruction highlights how technologies required in kayaking materially, socially and symbolically structure human experience and consequential environmental relations. Unlike the Thomas and Thomas construction, Payne's essay is devoted to the nature of the activity *in-it-self*, stressing the visible and invisible moral, political, social and ecological 'work' of such a 'manufactured' and 'technologically-replete' activity. He conceptually and 'theoretically' describes the *is* of the activity of kayaking. His phenomenological emphasis is clearly on the mediated relationship of the activity and human experience. Despite the necessity of his own language-use, Payne's *is* phenomenology steps beneath various discursive explanations and claims made about the activity. His method sought empirical soundness. Three experienced kayakers, two male and one female, assisted in the writing and rewriting of various drafts of the 'hermeneutic' phenomenology. Payne's more theoretical critique draws from a range of critical theorists. In so doing, his critical 'objectivity' alludes to the broader contexts of kayaking, namely its dominant 'ethos' within the 'culture' of adventure which he also sees as environmentally problematic because of its historical embeddedness in various frameworks of individual, social, environmental and cultural consumption. Implications for critical outdoor education can be guessed at.

Wattchow's reconstructive method is largely autobiographical and presented in a narrative form. Wattchow is concerned about the production of human experience through the

'hands on' medium of crafting a paddle. His text is both critical of the unbridled role of technology and the industrial complex and is prosaic in embellishing a sense of nature and a desirable relationship with it. Wattchow's central concern is a 'pedagogy of the good' in which the material and social construction of the paddle is highlighted. He is concerned about the nature of experience, of which the sociability of collective experience figures prominently. Wattchow's reconstructive contribution is both an *is* and *ought*. He does not say a great deal about the situationally specific and broader contexts of canoeing. There is no indication of how the paddle was subsequently used; be it in other crafted boats or in mainstream canoeing. In a later essay, Wattchow (2001b) discusses how a journey involved 'drifting' in individual canoes or in rafts of boats. By and large, his radical reconstruction of the experiential basis of outdoor education addresses a number of historical, material, social, cultural and environmental concerns. As such, his objectively tempered critical subjectivity touches on a number of concerns that suggest a reconstructive efforts towards a 'social ecology'. Implications for critical outdoor education are clear.

Because this essay focuses on the links of three texts and their respective constructions of the nature of experience, some sharper contrasts are offered to further the cause of critical outdoor education. The Thomas and Thomas text and rhetoric is an example of critical subjectivity which Habermas might align with 'young conservatism' in addition to its 'new' reformist agenda. It would be easy to dismiss any claims Thomas & Thomas might make about experience because their text is essentially a statement of *ought*. There are other problems in pinning down Thomas & Thomas's speculations about the nature of experience in 'moving water paddling'. The reader cannot be sure what activities the authors are discussing, or have in mind. They exclude 'flat/open water paddling' from their discussion and claim that moving water paddling is 'not craft specific'. Lilos or rafts are mentioned as possible 'alternatives'. Nature in the form of the river and its immediate environs seems to be offered in 'fixed' form of the more remote or wilderness type. This reader suspects Thomas and Thomas are still discussing white water kayaking and, therefore, privileging high skill levels and the need for technical 'performativity'. Suspicions are aroused when Thomas and Thomas seek to eliminate namings (for plastic kayaks) like

'Dagger', grading systems and the use of aggressive paddling terminology. Those suspicions are confirmed in the mention of 'play'. Play, in the type of rivers and craft implied, invariably signals the skilled performance of technical manoeuvres that sometimes are spontaneous but hardly imaginative, and more often than not are a repetitive, rehearsed response to the 'affordances' of the proximal environment, or river 'attributes' in this instance.

Gibson's (1986) 'theory of affordances' is an important concept worthy of brief elaboration at this point because the term 'perception' is used frequently in outdoor education discourses and is an essential element of human experience and the postmodern valorization of 'subjectivity'. Unfortunately, like so many terms in outdoor education, the idea (and practice) of perception is rarely qualified or is 'given' subjectively, as is the case with, for example, the Thomas and Thomas borrowing of 'loving' and 'arrogant' perception from Karen Warren's (1990) 'first-person' narrative account of a rock climbing experience. Gibson, therefore, is helpful in, at least, 'opening up' for discussion the ways in which the role of (visual) perception in experiencing 'nature' might be understood, and how such perceptions are represented subjectively. Put simply, according to Gibson, environments contain physical properties and information that are perceived according to the motivations, needs or interests of the experienter. They imply and/or reflect certain values and meanings. Exactly the same part of a river, for example, will probably be perceived but valued differently by the paddler, the artist, the engineer, the farmer and so on. To the skilful paddler, a 'stopper' might perceptually 'afford' and physically 'offer' the play of 'pirouetting'; the artist might see the play of light, reflection and sense of movement that calls for a particular type of representation on a canvas while an engineer might see an appropriate location for the building of a bridge or dam wall to be played out. Similarly, to my different plays on the idea of play, there are different ways in which constructions like the wilderness, place or bioregion will be perceived, experienced and valued. The common denominator is that different perceivers will perceive and 'construct' nature in different ways that are, invariably, subjectively and socially constructed. 'Play', now in scare marks because of the vastly different ways it can be represented textually, on the subjective 'perception' of a 'rapid' by the skilled kayaker is a

socially/culturally conditioned 'behavioral' response to a particular social construction of nature. Ironically, in regard to Warren's use of a first-person narrative and Thomas and Thomas's appropriation of 'loving perception', the environmental ethicist Roger King (1991) challenged Warren's subjective/textual construction of 'loving perception' and the metaphors of 'conversation', 'partnership' and 'friendship' by asking the fundamental but seemingly forgotten question for an environmental ethic/politic of 'what is in it for nature?' King concludes that the ultimate beneficiary of Warren's subjective sense of aesthetic appreciation, reiterating McCarthy's allegation and critique of the rise of aesthetic self creationism, is still the climber, and not nature which, if so, retains no particular moral importance.

There are other concerns with the Thomas and Thomas construction of critical outdoor education and the type of experience they imply or recommend. By de/renaming moving water paddling, the activity of kayaking and its relationship with some assumed notion of experience remains intact; its foundational role in outdoor education is likely to be reproduced in critical outdoor education, irrespective of its (re) naming as 'moving water paddling'. Thomas and Thomas valorize a 'natural' nature and, through language, mystify and abstract particular modes of 'moving' or 'journeying'. They decontextualize the technical nature of the activity and the experienced use of its tools. A clear account of experience (of the learner) is lacking, while the responsibility for experiential learning resides primarily with the teacher/leader. It is difficult to see how Thomas and Thomas reconcile the authority for learning they seemingly bestow on the teacher/leader and their 'power' in constructing 'knowledge' with that of the knowledge producing capacities and capabilities of the learners under that authoritative 'control'. Effectively, Thomas and Thomas pay little direct attention to the nature of educative experience in critical outdoor education while obfuscating the 'objectively' broader material, historical and symbolic contexts of the activity. That is, text as con(text) is not a good fit; *ought* replaces or withdraws from *is*, and rhetoric masks reality.

There are, however, other ways the Thomas and Thomas construction might be read, perhaps 'critically'. There could be a pragmatic fit between their version of moving water paddling and the linking of outdoor education and

environmental studies, as is now the upper secondary school curriculum case in Victoria. That it be pragmatically critical as a different curriculum offering presumes the previous curriculum was less environmentally concerned, a claim difficult to substantiate but which cannot be addressed here. Nonetheless, the Thomas and Thomas version may be 'critical' in respect to outdoor education curricula in other states or countries where the 'environment' is not a consideration, nor is the idea or practice of critical outdoor education a priority. Students of history, biology and so on might creatively use Thomas and Thomas's version of moving water paddling to further their studies. But this might be named 'critical science' or 'critical history'. Similar possibilities might exist in eco/nature tourism where the activities used for leisure/recreation might be supplemented with studies of nature. Despite these practical, non-idealist and, potentially, scientific possibilities, the Thomas and Thomas version effectively maintains the status quo in that it leaves so much of the historical, social and material bases of moving water paddling and the kayaking culture intact. A philosophy of 'experience' in (outdoor) education is ambiguous and elusive.

The Payne deconstruction is radical in the sense that kayaking is 'objectively' and 'culturally' called into question because of the way the activity *in-it-self* orders and corrects human experience, possibly outside the subjectivity of the experienter. It reveals how the experiencing human subject/learner is 'de-centred' but does not go 'missing' in the activity, as can be argued against Thomas and Thomas's construction. Payne's phenomenology wants to 'get at' the heart of the human experience of kayaking before it is manipulated by the leader/teacher in the (instrumental) naming of the outdoor experience (in the briefing, debriefing and 'processing' of experience). Payne's examination of the 'embodied relations' of the activity is a major point of departure from the more customary 'discursive positioning' that occurs *about* kayaking. The constructed meanings of a core activity in outdoor education are challenged. Payne's deconstructive challenge to critical outdoor education lies in the disclosure of the invisible work of technological tools foundational to mainstream outdoor experience. His findings about the 'technics of experience' in kayaking are generalizable to other outdoor activities, including mainstream canoeing, and extend to the use of any technology, be it in rock climbing or the use of a camera. Payne does not challenge kayaking's

claims about adventure, risk, environmental exposure or personal development, nor how the activity might be used to 'add on' an environmental study. While 'nature' deliberately remains vague in his text, he does confront the 'standard' objection to the nature-culture dualism. In fact, Payne's deconstruction highlights the duplicity of unexamined outdoor education activities in 'reconstituting' a problematic *nexus* of culture and nature, a *nexus* that highlights the de-naturing of nature or, conversely, the enculturation of nature through the kayaking activity.

Pragmatically, Payne's deconstruction of kayaking is unlikely to influence many outdoor educators. Too much is historically at stake. That kayaking is foundational assures its place in outdoor education. Fay's metatheory, for example, recognizes the 'hold of history' and how 'strong' versions of critical theory are unlikely to succeed practically because of the 'embeddedness' of individuals and groups in particular ways of knowing, doing and being. Fay's philosophical critique of critical theory has been confirmed empirically in certain teaching aspects of environmental education (Walker, 1997) and personal/professional circumstances in outdoor/environmental education (Payne, 1997). Fay's metatheory is a 'limits' to rationality and change thesis, typical of much postmodern theory and is, therefore, a point of departure from some of the strong assumptions of modern critical theory. Nonetheless, if critical outdoor education does take the question of a socio-ecological politic and ethic seriously, Payne's deconstruction of the activity of kayaking raises important questions about the 'nature' of experience in kayaking, the 'place' of kayaking and 'moving water paddling' in the curriculum, and its 'sustainability' in outdoor education.

Wattchow's reconstruction is both radical and 'old conservative'. It is radical in the sense that Wattchow pays precise attention to broader questions about the design of the paddle used in outdoor activities and how it subsequently orders human experience of the water and river. He develops these themes elsewhere (Wattchow, 2001a). Wattchow's reconstruction is also radical in the sense of illustrating how the productive sphere of human endeavour can be re-created as part of the paddling experience. His reconstruction might also be viewed, following Habermas, as 'old' conservative in that it displays a certain nostalgia for the past where craft work and resourcefulness were viewed as attributes of human labor and certain

forms of social association and exchange. Seen against the contemporary backdrop of the vexed relationship, individually and culturally, of (over)consumption, identity seeking in youth and the environmental problematic, Wattchow's reclaiming of a craft-like pedagogy of the good in the activity basis of outdoor education is worthy of consideration, notwithstanding the fact that other (higher) technologies might have figured (prominently) in the production of the crafted outdoor experience.

Wattchow's reconstruction is unlikely to influence many outdoor educators unless they are strongly committed to a crafting role in and for (critical) outdoor education. A craft basis to the outdoor experience is time intensive while the resources in question may be difficult to obtain. Many outdoor educators are unlikely, unwilling or unable to trade the adventure/wilderness logics, or even the add on of environmental study, for a craft/dwelling praxis. The 'hold of history' and the foundational 'grip' of kayaking in outdoor education discussed above does not hold true in regard to the 'sustainability' of a craft basis in contemporary outdoor education discourses and practices.

Undoubtedly, there are different constructions of outdoor education that lay theoretical claim to being critical while there are considerable variations in their potential for practical uptake, given the cultural grip in outdoor education of a particular activity base and its dominant modes of outdoor experiences. The process of contrasting different constructions of kayaking undertaken above combine to restate the critical intentions of this essay. They are best stated in question form. How might we better understand and act on the materially and socially constructed nature of experience in outdoor education?

Critical outdoor education

Modern critical theory has historically been concerned with human transformation and emancipation, equity and social justice, and the critique of various historical and social mechanisms that reproduce what critical theory finds oppressive. Fay (1987) asks that it broadly be (socially) scientific, critical, non-idealist and practical, all at the same time—a task I return to in this conclusion. Critical theory, therefore, seeks to inform an appropriate individual and collective praxis. Environmental considerations have only recently been re-incorporated into the interests of social theory (Beck, 1995; Dickens,

1992) although the problem of 'nature' is a long-time concern of critical theory (Vogel, 1996). Modern critical theories of education have long understood education's role in reproducing the inequitable and unjust in policies, curricula, schools and pedagogy. Postmodern theories of education, with a cultural persuasion, have further articulated the underlying sources of the knowledge-power problematic (for example, Symes & Preston, 1997). In so doing, education provides one of the few accessible avenues for critical theory of whatever persuasion to contest socially reproductive logics and practices. The 'shift' to a 'culturally' critical theory of outdoor education needs to be seen in this historical light.

Given the three constructions of kayaking contrasted above, how might the new, postmodern discourse of critical outdoor education be located in the historical trajectory just outlined? One possibility is to consider 'culturally critical' discourses within an eclectic mix of framing ideas like Habermas's old, new and young conservatives, Sandall's 'designer' tribals, McCarthy's possessive and aesthetic hyperindividuals or Bauman's meta-experiencing postmodern 'tourists' and 'vagabonds'. This paper has alluded to that sort of interface of modern: postmodern critique. Another alternative is to consider closely related curriculum histories. Like outdoor education, the field of environmental education in Australia lacks a definitive curriculum history, a history that tracks the particular rise and peculiar development of various 'movements of thought' or discourses about practice(s). Nevertheless, subsequent to interest in 'ideology critique' in the 1980s, three characterizations of environmental education exist; namely the 'applied science' approach which ostensibly is the linear accumulation of mainly scientific knowledge 'about' the environment, the 'practical-interpretive' approach which occurs experientially 'in' the environment for which outdoor education is a serious candidate and the 'socially-critical' perspective whose social and political imperative is 'for' the environment. Each approach has its boosters and detractors, noting 'for the environment' has generated considerable debate about the politicisation of environmental education and the manner in which the teacher-student relationship is cast (Fien, 2000; Jickling & Spork, 1998). Conversely, environmental education 'about' or 'in' the environment have attracted critique on the basis of the ideological assumptions and outcomes they promote. The practical utility of the

socially-critical perspective has been challenged (Walker, 1997) and critically de/reconstructed as a 'humanly-constructive' endeavour (Payne, 1995, 1999).

Reviews of recent trends in environmental education research and curriculum/pedagogical development now converge on the importance of 'getting right' the basic (ontological) assumptions about human experience made through the 'complex arrangements that connect larger social structures and the daily lives of learners and teachers (Hart & Nolan, 1999) and paying greater attention to students experiences of learning and perceptions of nature (Rickinson, 2001). This paper 'picks up' on that trend as there might be lessons that the discourse of outdoor education can learn from studying certain issues in environmental education (which, in turn, draws from educational, social, psychological and cultural theories). For example, the Thomas and Thomas construction of outdoor education is suggestive of an 'applied science' extension of environmental education's practical/interpretive approach with a very small dose of 'poststructural' textual/naming deconstruction thrown in.

Nonetheless, if outdoor education is to be critical in the normative sense of endorsing some version of an environmental ethic and/or ecopolitic, both keen interests of critical environmental educators, more attention must be paid to incorporating historical, material, social and ecological considerations into the 'cultural' dialogue of theoretical and practical analyses of the 'outdoor/wilderness/nature experience'. The subject matter of (theoretical) critique must be embodied in the actual practices of critical outdoor education, most of all in the activities from which experiential learning is largely derived. Recourse to 'theory' might be used to help 'translate' an experience and extend 'personal knowledge' as subjectivity into a more objective understanding about, for example, the morality, sociability, politics and ethics of that experience. For example, given the concerns about the aesthetics of self invention mentioned earlier, my (Payne, 1994) qualification of Karen Warren's use of a first-person narrative about rock climbing to script a change from 'arrogant' to 'loving perception' shows how Warren failed to fully address the criteria she herself had established for claiming ethical accountability (and the power of first-person narrative). Her personal text did not accommodate the contextual considerations she

argued for. 'Private' practice and relevant 'public' theory might therefore more productively 'test' each other in 'experiential education'. 'Ways of knowing/thinking/feeling' requires supplementation with 'ways of doing' and 'ways of being'. Alternately, theoretically-driven cultural critics cannot simply wish away or merely rename the culture that concerns them. 'Talk' about experience is insufficient; 'de-naming' activities will not dismantle how activities in themselves materially frame and order experience. Instrumental debriefing/counselling should not dispossess the experiencer of the experience. Texts about experience demand contextualization; social/cultural theory requires localized grounds while the learning experience will only be as good as the assumption made about the learner and his/her environment or nature by the teacher.

That outdoor educators now feel the need to add the prefix 'critical' highlights the extent to which the field endorses a historical world view that, in environmental terms, is troubling. Outdoor education that aspires critically to an ecopolitical and ethical praxis can only be an effective form of cultural criticism if it embarks more earnestly on a 'reflexive turn' about its 'own' activities and constructions of experience, learning, education and nature. Culture, that which is criticized for its role in the so-called ecological crisis, materially and symbolically impregnates the plastic kayaks, carabiners, cambered skis, goretex jackets, geodesic tents, maps/compasses, neoprene wetsuits and kevlar paddles in design, purpose, manufacturing, retailing and, inevitably, use in the outdoor experience and 'penetration' of 'nature' This *nexus* of culture and nature might well be far more troubling for critical outdoor educators than the dualisms they now concern themselves with where, for example, 'depicting the world as a unified system' (Thomas and Thomas, 2000, p. 47) is an overly simplistic proposition, let alone solution. On the material grounds of outdoor activities alone, there is an irrevocable 'duality' of culture and nature that already is (socially and) environmentally problematic which no amount of de or renaming can de-materialize. Put bluntly, outdoor education might well be part of the socio-environmental predicament and not part of the solution, a problem compounded when outdoor education renames itself as critical without any real or deep consideration of the meaning and practices of different versions of 'critical'.

The more important question for critical outdoor educators to ask, and answer, is what constructions and consequential dualisms and nexuses of 'cultures' and 'natures' can reasonably be repaired in a just manner and what dualisms and nexuses of 'cultures' and 'natures' are worth perpetuating? Only when these two interrelated questions are grappled with historically, socially, materially and symbolically might outdoor education with a critical disposition to environmental responsibility, duty, care, or relationality (or even sustainability, as slippery as that concept is) be able to act de/re constructively in accordance with its rhetorical aspirations.

Based on the grounds de/reconstructively theorized above, one candidate for this critical pedagogy is (the development of) humble activities that enframe a 'low' technics in their design and structuring of individual and group experience; embody a resourceful, craft-like material, social and symbolic production of minimally consumptive modes of environmentally attuned travel and living; and are more in keeping with the unfolding affordances of daily/seasonal time and presence of proximal spaces and places. Moreover, we might even let such experiences talk for themselves rather than process the experience in ways that (dogmatically) act to confirm the teacher/leader's *other* 'worldview' or *different* 'way of thinking'. In regard to 'nature', we might turn our attention to the enigmatic interplay of its 'inner' (embodied, human), 'social' (interactive, communicative and associative exchange) and 'outer' (external, environmental) forms as each is historically and circumstantially circumscribed. A 'reconciliation' of inner, social and outer natures is worth pursuing in critical outdoor education. Absolute 'outer' natures warrant scepticism for the probable misanthropic moral, gendered, social, political and environmental 'templates' such foundational 'nature determinism' or 'natural law' recommends for the human condition and its individual, social and 'cultural' experience (for example, Beck, 1995; Biehl & Staudenmaier, 1995; Ferry, 1995; Giddens, 1994; Heller, 1999; Salleh, 1993; van Wyck, 1997). So too do those 'pure' derivatives such as the wilderness, the bioregion and de-humanized versions of ecological science for what they deny about the complexity of human experience, social structures, cultures and their environmental consequences, as troubling as they might be.

On the other hand, the environment might not be a priority for critical outdoor education. Personal growth or social development might regain the ascendancy. But will less criticism be warranted in any 'anthropocentric' revisioning of outdoor education? Jackie Kiewa (2001) and Lou Preston (2001) highlight the problematic constructions of gendered relationships and identities in the rockclimbing experience. Andropocentrism might well be a legitimate concern in such a version of critical outdoor education. Each author exposes gender differences and identity development issues that need to be taken seriously. Unfortunately, neither author really excavates the internal logics of the activity of rockclimbing itself or its artifactual 'design'. Nor do they interrogate the historical and material bases of the social 'conduct' and disciplining of rockclimbing. Preston does mention some differences in the way gendered bodies act in and with the physical and social environment, including consequent constructions of skill and interaction for women and success for men. Notably, neither author says anything about the politics of 'outer' or 'external' nature given their feminist interest in the politics of 'inner' and 'social' natures.

It is probable that different versions of critical outdoor education will emerge. Each will prioritize different interests such as the environment, gender, ethnicity or social status/access issues. There is significant potential for competition, clashes and contradictions in these different 'stakeholder' versions of outdoor education. Perhaps the greatest challenge for a critical outdoor education is to move beyond particular interests while still addressing them. An alternative educational 'end-in-view' (Dewey, 1938) that bypasses some of the 'politics of difference' and 'identity' issues discussed in social, feminist and cultural theory is the reconciliation of the pathological contradictions of postmodern 'inner', 'social' and 'outer' natures (Melucci, 1996).

On these cautionary 'theoretical' notes about the prospects for critical theories of outdoor education and, following Dewey's call for a philosophy of experience and Fay's for a non-idealist, critical practice, it is appropriate to conclude this essay with another story that is reconstructively consistent with the conclusion that (critical) outdoor education must embody a

socio-ecopolitic and ethic in its activities and experiential practices.

Fifteen years ago I taught a now defunct semester-long subject called 'Recreation, Environment and Consumer' (REC) in the third year of the Bachelor of Arts (Outdoor Education) at the now renamed La Trobe University, Bendigo. The subject aimed to bring into critical dialogue, both theoretically and practically, the recreational imperatives and emerging environmental concerns of outdoor education. At that time, outdoor education was cast in the dominant logic of the centrality of adventure activities like rock climbing, kayaking, cross country skiing and bushwalking. I recount only one of the many student accounts I received about a required three day 'trip' for REC. Any trip could be 'invented' by a group of at least three students according to the requirement for 'minimal gear'. The trip was deliberately timetabled for April when the stability of (nature's) weather was pretty well guaranteed in Northern Victoria. A 'rough' proposal was vetted prior to the experience for the purposes of safety and communication, if needed.

Dressed only in the clothes they wore, fuelled with a few small sacks of basic foodstuffs and equipped only with some large heavy duty plastic bags, matches, billy, woollen blankets, a few rolls of duct tape some rope and one home-made paddle, the group hitchhiked from Bendigo to the Barmah Forest on the Murray River. There, on the whim of one participant's memory of a 'boys-own' childhood story book, they constructed three 'coracles' by hand with thin, flexible, green willow branches, the plastic bags, tape and rope. They proceeded to float with whatever the river offered, sometimes in the night. The paddle was quickly discarded because it was "no good" due to the uncontrollable 'nature' of the coracle. The three coracles were subsequently tied together. My memories are clearest about what the different floaters said about their experiences of the river. The craft constantly rotated according to its rudimentary design and construction, and the whims of the river flow and its land/riverscape. Its perpetual spinning motion meant that the river's 'ecology' and its perception were visually and auditorily experienced from the dynamic of forward, lateral and rear orientations. Control was exerted minimally, sometimes by using a leg as a rudder or hand as a paddle. 'Adventure' was consistently high given the unpredictability and uncontrollable nature of the craft. I vividly recall one floater excitedly

recounting her story about the 'danger' of a small branch/snag poking out of the water that threatened to puncture the coracle. Snags and other (grade zero?) 'obstructions' in the river were viewed as significant 'risk' factors to the maintenance of the coracle and the 'security' of the floaters. Progress was 'slow' with only short distances covered each day, necessitating some night travel to 'make' the distance they had underestimated due to a previous 'normal' canoeing experience/journey 'down' the river. The coracle was used as shelter at night with blankets substituting for sleeping bags. At the end of the float, the coracles were disassembled and disposed of thoughtfully. In the face of all of these extraordinary challenges to the group, communication, cooperation, ingenuity and cohesion in regard to working with each other and according to the river opportunities and demands was heightened, considerably.

The ascetic, deconstructed 'nature' of this 'critical' river experience embodied both an ecopolitic and a socio-environmental ethic vastly different to that subscribed to by most other educational constructions of paddling, river environs and adventure, or recreation, environment and consumer. The coracles engaged the floaters with, and in, the river. The experience apparently was lacking in 'leadership', gender neutral, demanding little in the way of physical skill and technical competence, required few resources of a financial/economic type and was adventurous, challenging and risky as well as puzzling, imaginative and productively creative. The (university) teacher/leader was not present, 'invisible'. I recall that the coracle designer/dreamer had previously pointed out during a 'normal' five day wilderness cross country ski trip on the High Plains the contradictions of the leaders' encouraging of a 'one stick' fire and the petrol consumption and associated costs of the two mini-buses required for the trip (which totalled about 2000 kilometres). Other memorable trips in Recreation, Environment and Consumer included the floating around Bendigo's extensive system of aqueducts on (repaired) tyre tubes gathered from a local garage; climbing and 'living' in trees in a nature reserve bordering the university campus; cave dwelling; riding bicycles to nearby Lake Eppalock and walking/swimming the shallows of its perimeter while sleeping in newspapers on its shore. 'Debriefing' or 'counselling' were not called for in REC even if an extensive write up of a 'private' theory about the shared experience

was required of each participant for assessment purposes. Participant enthusiasm for the activities/experiences and collective 'ownership' and 'empowerment' invariably spoke for themselves.

The main point to be made in conclusion about these de/reconstructive 'critical outdoor education' experiences is that the activities devised by the floaters, treers, cavers and lakers actually embodied the ethics and politics of experiencing 'nature' relationally within the material contexts of individual, social and environmental existence -- the 'inner' form of corporeal and 'culturally' embodied human nature, the 'social' form of interactive, associative and communicative nature, and the 'outer' form of external physical nature. Here, experientially and educationally, are the various 'places' or interconnected sites of 'nature' and their 'embodied relations' which, when excavated and interrogated educationally, underpin the beginnings of a more serious discussion about the critical nature of experience in outdoor education and its potential contribution to the sorely needed reparation of, first, human-environment, second, community/society—land/sea/town/cityscape s and, third, culture-nature relations.

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