

## **So what are Outdoor Pursuits, Outdoor Education or Outdoor Learning?**

Outdoor pursuits, outdoor education and outdoor learning are just some of the terms found when undertaking activities in the outdoors. They are often used synonymously. There appears to be no real consensus within the literature as to their definition or their distinctive character. I have argued elsewhere (see Leather & Porter, 2006) that the change in titles has been a chronological development to account for the broadening contexts and approaches in which outdoor activities are found and used.

There follows three 'models' of the outdoors. I have included these not as absolute arguments, definitive definitions or proven theories, but to illustrate some of the contemporary thinking and as an aid to understanding to what it is that educating or learning outdoors can provide. Higgins (1997 & 2005) uses the 3 ring model of outdoor education, as developed at Moray House, University of Edinburgh. He states (2005: 111)

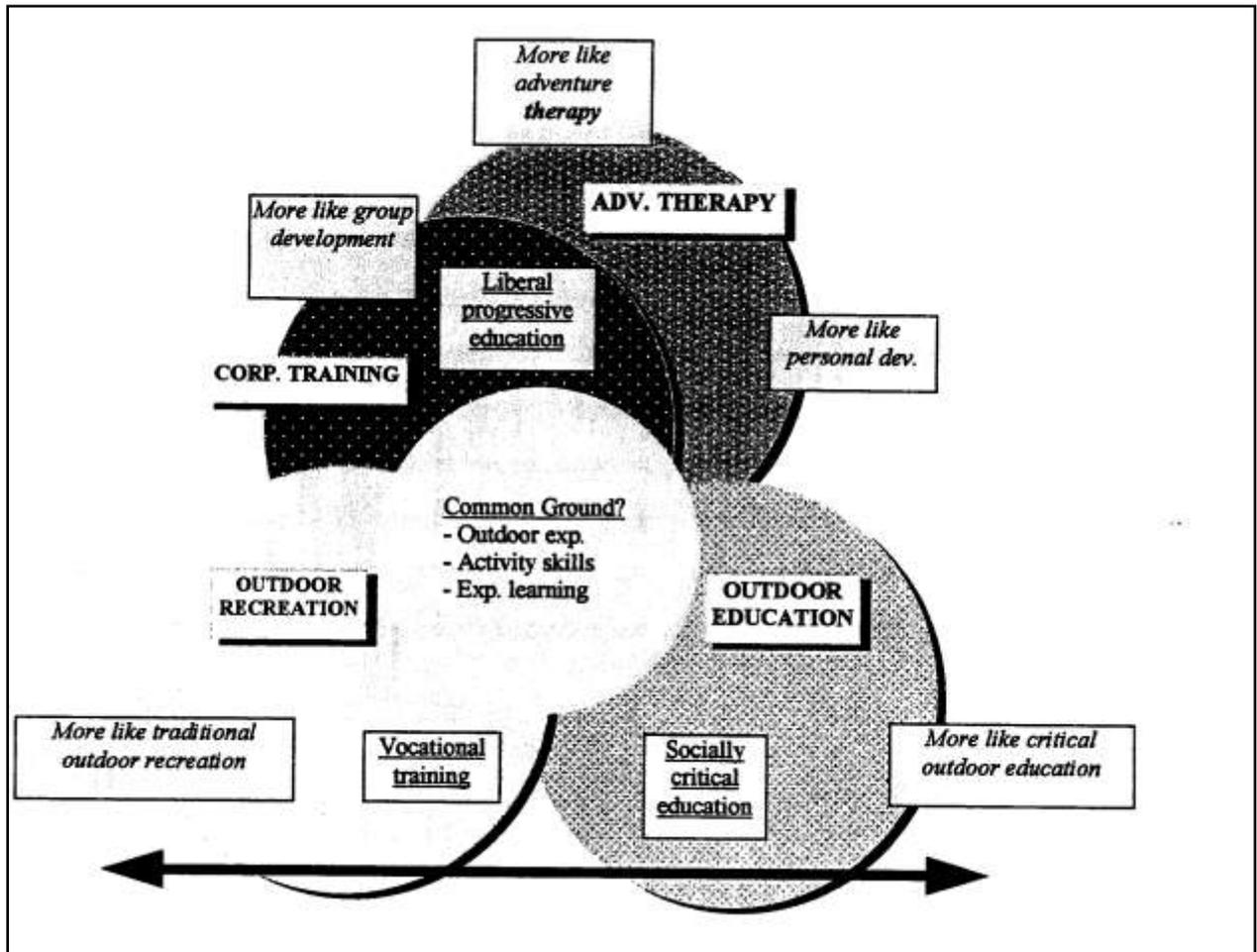
... the role of the outdoor educator is seen as someone who facilitates learning in each, or all three, of the circles according to the needs of the individuals they teach and the requirements of the curriculum. A fully competent outdoor educator will feel confident to work in all three circles whilst always adhering to safe and professional practice.

Figure 1 (Higgins, 1997 & 2005)



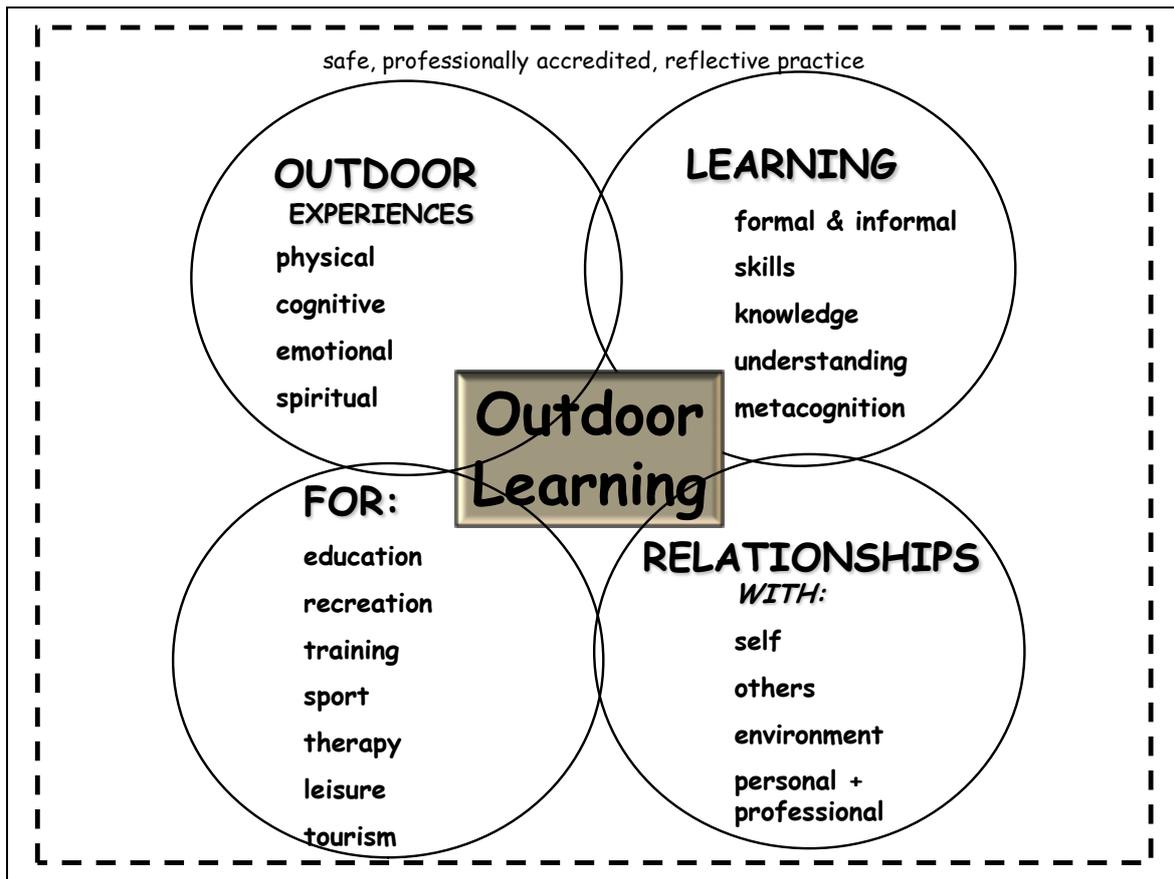
Martin (2001) considers the diversity of outcomes and programme options described in the academic outdoor journals of Australia and the USA that all fall under the broad heading of outdoor education. He maps them in order to show the connections and disconnections within the broader outdoor education field.

Figure 2 Martin (2001)



In 2000 the Institute for Outdoor Learning emerged in the UK after the National Association for Outdoor Education converged with similar organisations. This reflected a broadening understanding of uses of the outdoors for educational purposes. The shift from education to learning, also reflected, I suggest a cultural shift within education and a national change of emphasis towards individualised considerations of learning and teaching, rather than processes of education and a formalised curriculum. As such, I developed my own model to suggest the breadth of what outdoor learning encompasses. As with the others, it serves as a useful tool for discussion, rather than an absolute claim of a definition.

Figure 3 adapted from Leather & Porter, 2006



I suggest it is important to consider this terminology, although some may consider it to be mere semantics. A traditional outdoor pursuit approach, where the mountains speak for themselves, would not recognise some of the activities, locations or contexts seen in outdoor learning. An outdoor educator may be uncomfortable with the lack of a specific curriculum to follow. This model is perhaps of use to help understand the reasons for engaging in some of the less traditional activities.

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References

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