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Origins and Foundations of Outdoor Learning in Canada

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EDITORS’ NOTE: Some historic quotes use the singular male gender to describe participants in outdoor learning programs as recently as the twentieth century. A sign of the times, this does not necessarily imply that females were not similarly engaged.

Over the last 2,500 years, many thinkers, pioneers and movements have contributed to defining, developing and popularizing a number of approaches and initiatives pairing education with the outdoors. This chapter outlines some of those educational approaches and learning processes by defining them, providing examples and exploring their origins and foundations. Specifically, ten such approaches or movements are presented, all seen as core to the association between education and the outdoors. The selected approaches and movements are representative of current Canadian practices or useful in coming to a fuller understanding of the emergence, development, and basis of those practices.

Experiential Learning and Progressive Education

Several authors and researchers (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014; Gass et al., 2020; Priest & Gass, 2018) assert that the outdoors is especially conducive to learning and personal development. It

is frequently suggested that the outdoors, or its different related dimensions (i.e., the natural environment, adventure and physical activity), provide a direct experience of what is to be learned. Learning through such direct experiences, or learning by doing, is commonly referred to as experiential learning or experiential education.

Over the last three millennia, different thinkers have emphasized the “necessity of testing thought by action if thought was to pass over into knowledge” (Mayhew & Edwards 1966, as cited in Westbrook, 1993, p. 2). Mindful of these historical antecedents to experiential learning, several authors (including Allison & Seaman, 2017; Bisson, 2009; Hunt, 1999; Wurdinger, 1997) return, by way of introduction, to the ideas and concepts of classical Greek philosophy. For philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, experience fosters the acquisition of certain types of knowledge and is also necessary to the development of morality and virtue. For example, Aristotle asserts in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (n.d.):

The virtues we get by first exercising them... For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g., men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.

Aristotle (n.d.) also suggested that taking risks—often associated with the practice of outdoor activities—may be desirable for the acquisition of such cardinal virtues:

This, then, is the case with the virtues also; by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly.

Since the days of the classical Greek philosophers, many other thinkers and educators (Dewey, Montessori, Ferrière, Freinet and Freire) have promoted learning processes or educational approaches based on practice and experience, on the idea of meeting challenges, overcoming obstacles and solving problems, and on engaging learners by stimulating their sense of discovery and exploration.

Other thinkers, such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Decroly, advocate the same type of experiential and sensorial learning but specifically esteem the natural environment as an educational setting:

Lead your child by the hand to the great scenes of nature; teach him on the mountain and in the valley. There he will listen better to your teaching; the liberty will give him greater force to surmount difficulties.

But in these hours of liberty it should be nature that teaches rather than you. Do not allow yourself to prevail for the pleasure of success in your teaching; or to desire in the least to proceed when nature diverts him; do not take away in the least the pleasure

which she offers him. Let him completely realize that it is nature that teaches, and that you, with your art, do nothing more than walk quietly at her side (Pestalozzi (n.d.), as cited in Guimps, 1888, p. 54).

All of these thinkers, now associated with the Progressive Education movement or the New Education movement, have contributed to the emergence, development and adoption of educational approaches and learning processes based on experience and active participation: experiential learning (EL). For Ménard (2022, p. 175), experiential learning:

1. is centred on the person doing the activity;
2. results from an inductive approach for which experience is the starting point;
3. involves deep reflection during the activity; and
4. refers to both the process and the product of the learning, as well as to the context in which it happens.

Kolb's experiential learning theory is presented as "a dynamic view of learning based on a learning cycle driven by the resolution of the dual dialectics of action/reflection and experience/abstraction. It is a holistic theory that defines learning as the major process of human adaptation involving the whole person" (Kolb & Kolb, 2012, p. 1215). EL is a process "in which the individual transforms their personal experience into knowledge" (Legendre, 2005, p. 127) and a "learning model advocating participation in activities taking place in contexts as close as possible to the knowledge to be acquired, skills to be developed and attitudes to be shaped or changed" (Legendre, 2005, p. 127).

EL allows learners to actively engage in authentic and beneficial experiences where they "make discoveries and experiment with knowledge themselves instead of hearing or reading about the experiences of others" (Kraft & Saskofs, 1988, as cited in Prouty, 2007, p. 12). This is reminiscent of ideas expressed by Rousseau (1762, p. 464) more than two centuries earlier:

Our first teachers in natural philosophy are our feet, hands and eyes. To substitute books for them does not teach us to reason, it teaches us to use the reasoning of others rather than our own, it teaches us to believe much and know little.

For John Dewey, author of *Experience and Education* (1938) and considered by many to be the father of experiential education, pragmatism and progressive education, education is not simply the transfer of knowledge to learners but, rather, involves creating learning situations wherein they can discover and personally test knowledge for themselves. Individuals therefore learn by confronting the problematic situations they face in the course of activities that stimulate their interest (Westbrook, 1993, p. 2). Facing obstacles that rupture continuity is what activates reflection and a search for solutions (Baillargeon, 2014; Deledalle, 1965; Dewey, 1938). Problematic situations create a desire to solve a dilemma and provide opportunities for development:

problems are the stimulus to thinking.... growth depends upon the presence of difficulty to be overcome by the exercise of intelligence (Dewey, 1938, p. 79).

The principles of meaning, continuity, obstacle and experience are therefore central to Dewey's philosophy of education (Baillargeon, 2014; Deledalle, 1965) and to outdoor education.

Organized Camping and Summer Camps

In North America, the earliest structured outdoor education initiatives are generally associated with the "organized camping" movement that emerged with the establishment of the first summer camps in the United States around 1860 (Ewert & Garvey, 2007; Raiola & O'Keefe, 1999; White, 2012, 2015). At the time, there was, according to McNeil (1957, as cited in White, 2015), an interest in finding an "antidote" to the physical and moral decline of young people confronted with industrialization, gentrification and urbanization. It was in that specific context and in response to those concerns that the first sum-

mer camps were founded to occupy upper-class young Americans during the summer months when school was out (Rillo, 1964; White, 2015). This is clearly exemplified in comments made by Balch, the founder of Camp Chocorua, explaining that he developed his summer camp in 1881 in order to fight "the miserable existence of wealthy adolescent boys in the summer when they must accompany their parents to fashionable resorts and fall prey to the evils of life in high society" (Eells, 1986, as cited in White, 2015, p. 5). So it was that the earliest summer camps in the United States aimed specifically to develop character, autonomy, effort, discipline and responsibility (White, 2015).

The first Canadian residential camp, Camp Big Cove, established in Nova Scotia in 1889, was an initiative of the local YMCA (Nadel & Scher, 2019). "It was followed by camps sponsored by YMCAs from Ontario, British Columbia, Québec [...] most with an evangelical orientation" (Nadel & Scher, 2019, p. 45).

Although organized summer camps were present in the 1900s, they really came into their own in the 1920s and 30s. Initially they had a character-building orientation that was in tune with that of the private boarding school. Character development was achieved through communal living and outdoor activities.... By the early 1920s, canoeing and backpacking expeditions were common out trips at many residential camps. Summer camps became a "defining Canadian growing-up experience" and thus were a rite of passage for the Canadian middle class. (Priest & Asfeldt, 2022, p. 495)

Every year to this day, millions of young people are exposed to meaningful outdoor educational experiences at countless summer camps. A literature review conducted as part of a study by Sibthorp et al. (2020) serves to identify various benefits of spending time at a summer camp, including positive effects on self-esteem, confidence, physical skills, independence, resilience, leadership and interpersonal skills. These benefits clearly demonstrate the developmental

scope of summer camps. Sibthorp et al. (2020) conclude, in part, that summer camps provide a rich framework for social and emotional learning and foster durable learning that has been identified by many campers as being useful later in life.

Scouting

A parallel independent movement to organized camping in the United States, the Scout Movement, established in 1907 in England and eventually incorporated in Canada by 1914 (White, 2012, 2015), is undoubtedly part of the same movement that advocated the education of youth through adventure activities in nature (Smith & Knapp, 2011; White, 2015). Baden-Powell, founder of the Scout Movement, had a deep belief in the idea of developing character and personality in young people, with the ultimate goal of developing their full potential as responsible citizens (Baden-Powell, 1923; Deschênes, 2009; Smith & Knapp, 2011). He also aspired to instil in young people an intrinsic desire to learn:

Education as I read it means not so much putting knowledge into the boy as giving him the desire and the method for acquiring knowledge (Baden-Powell, 1923, p. 8).

For Baden-Powell, nature and adventure were the ideal context for developing this motivation to learn:

Moreover, much of the open-air life with its nature study, camping, exploration, mapping, sketching, etc., appeals with equal force and with equal advantage to girls. Thus, the whole youth of the world appears to be ready and only waiting for the application of some such training if only it were made possible for them. ...such training would be [a] voluntary form of self-education on their part, carried out with all the energy and enthusiasm of youth. (Baden-Powell, 1923, p. 8)

As the largest youth movement in the world, the Scout Movement still aims “to contribute to the development of young people in achieving their

full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potentials as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of their local, national and international communities” (World Organization of the Scout Movement, 1992, p. 5). To achieve this, the concepts and principles of learning through action, adventure, small group experiences, contact with nature, educational games, progressive approaches based on participants’ interests, self-education, community service and spirituality—central tenets in the educational approach developed by Baden-Powell in the early twentieth century—are still applied today (Baden-Powell, 1923; World Organization of the Scout Movement, 1992; Deschênes, 2009; Smith & Knapp, 2011).

Nature-study

Nature-study refers to an education and social movement that gained popularity starting in the late nineteenth century (Jeffer, 2017). According to Comstock (1915, as cited in Quay & Seaman, 2013), the term appeared in 1880, by which time the movement had already existed for several years. A forerunner of the natural sciences, the aim of nature-study went far beyond simply developing nature literacy. The primary purpose was to enable people to discover and develop a profound affiliation with the natural environment and a personal approach to entering into a relationship with the land (Baker, 2005). It was thus hoped that by instilling new generations with an appreciation of nature, they would grow into adults motivated to protect it (Jeffer, 2017). It is in this sense that Bailey (1904, p. 11) stated that nature-study aims to:

educate the child in terms of his environment, to the end that his life may be fuller and richer. Nature-study is not the study of a science, as of botany, entomology, geology, and the like. That is, it takes the things at hand and endeavors to understand them.... It is informal, as are the objects which one sees. It is entirely divorced from mere definitions, or from formal explanations in books. It is therefore supremely natural. It trains the eye and the mind to see and to

comprehend the common things of life; and the result is not directly the acquiring of science but the establishing of a living sympathy with everything that is.

Nature-study, based on direct interaction with the natural world, influenced the way in which the natural sciences were taught in schools, in part by taking students out of the classroom and away from school books. The expression “study nature, not books,” coined by Aggasis, is often used to explain the underlying principle of nature-study. The movement would also contribute to the emergence of organizations for young people, including 4-H clubs (Jefferies, 2017), as well as influence major conservation and environmental movements.

Open-air Schools

The first open-air schools (OAS) appeared in Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century in a specific socio-health context. Originally established “to provide education to stunted children from disadvantaged social backgrounds in urban settings, who were susceptible to contracting tuberculosis” (Theodorou & Karakatsani, 2007, p. 187), OAS would eventually be opened to other segments of the population. Somewhere between a sanatorium and a traditional learning institution, OAS were primarily distinguished by their architecture, but also by the food served and physical activities practised:

Food... consisted primarily of vegetables, cereals, fresh fruit and dairy products. Meat was often banned. Gymnastics classes were often conducted according to the naturalist physical education methods of Hébert (Villaret & Saint-Martin, 2004, p. 23).

OAS buildings were carefully designed and built to be integrated into the natural environment so as to maximize their beneficial effects. This included large openings to allow fresh air and light to enter (Villaret & Saint-Martin, 2004). School furniture was light and mobile so that teaching could be easily taken outdoors (Theodorou & Karakatsani, 2007; Villaret & Saint-Martin, 2004).

Set close to large trees, the location also needed to be sunny, ventilated, dry and protected as much as possible from winds out of the North and the West. Built far from the smoke of industrial plants, an OAS required a courtyard open on one side to serve as an outdoor classroom, as well as a playing field at least 100 metres by 50 metres. The showers, dining hall, washrooms and classrooms had to be sunny. School furniture was light and foldable so that classes could be held in nature. The windows remained open day and night (Villaret & Saint-Martin, 2004, p. 23).

Looking at the growing interest amid educational circles nowadays in offering teaching activities outdoors (for example, holding physical education classes outside, setting up and using outdoor classrooms or school gardens), the contribution of the OAS educational and architectural movement is easy to see.

Camping Education

If the intention behind the first summer camps was, as mentioned, to extend the educational mission of schools into the summer months, the idea of the camping education movement was the other side of the coin: to integrate outdoor activities into the regular school curriculum. To achieve this, starting in the late 1920s (Raiola & O’Keefe, 1999), a number of school leaders began to acquire or oversee the construction of their own camps, an infrastructure that was to complement traditional school facilities such as the library, gymnasium, laboratories and auditorium (Sharp, 1947). Activities intended to introduce students to the natural environment and camping were then directly integrated into the academic program (Raiola & O’Keefe, 1999).

For Lloyd Burgess Sharp, who coined the term “camping education” (Bisson, 1996) and pioneered the development of this new educational approach, camping education was never intended to systematically supplant traditional education but rather to complement it (Quay & Seaman, 2013). Sharp therefore believed that it

was necessary to identify and use learning environments according to the subject matter:

That which can best be learned inside the classroom should be learned there; and that which can best be learned through direct experience outside the classroom, in contact with native materials and life situations, should there be learned" (Sharp, 1947, p. 35).

For Kilpatrick (1942, as cited in Quay & Seaman, p. 30) the camp "provides real living, and so brings learning far and away better than does the older type school. Hour for hour, a camp is often more educative than school because in it the children can better live what they learn".

The term "camping education" would eventually give way to "outdoor education." Sharp himself preferred and popularized the latter term starting in the mid 1940s (Carlson, 2011; Raiola & O'Keefe, 1999). Thus, the camping education movement combined with the intensification of the progressive education movement, led at the time by thinkers such as Dewey and Kilpatrick, who both notably supervised Sharp's doctoral studies (Carlson, 2016), laid the groundwork for what would become outdoor education (Quay & Seaman, 2013).

Although Canadian educational institutions with their own nature camp are quite rare nowadays, that does not prevent multiple outdoor activities in the tradition of the camping education movement from being organized every year. This includes outdoor education camps for schools and a wide range of nature and discovery classes.

Outdoor Education

According to Priest (1999), outdoor education (OE) has, over time, been described or labelled as being a place, a subject, a reason for learning, a method, a process and a topic of learning. Essentially, outdoor education is education "in, about and for the outdoors" (Donaldson & Donaldson, 1958, p. 17).

For Quay and Seaman (2013), this three-pronged conception of OE highlights that it is both a method of learning and an object of learning (a subject matter). "In" refers to a learning method or process, in fact to an environment (the outdoor setting) that will affect the way learning takes place or how learning situations are set up, that will influence and become the process (Quay & Seaman, 2013). "About" refers to the content or subject matter. Consequently, the content concerns what one finds in nature and the components of outdoor settings, as well as the outdoor activities organized there (Donaldson & Donaldson, 1958; Ford, 1986; Quay & Seaman, 2013). Finally, "for" is associated with both the learning method and the subject matter. Firstly, OE is associated with a method that consists in exposing participants to learning activities and situations in order to ready them "for" the outdoor environment and prepare them to make sensible use of outdoor environments by developing the right skills and attitudes (Donaldson & Donaldson, 1958; Quay, 2016; Quay & Seaman, 2013). Secondly, OE focuses on benefits "for" natural outdoor environments by developing the type of knowledge (subject matter) needed to protect and conserve these environments (Ford, 1986; Quay & Seaman, 2013). According to this dual perspective, the "for" dimension implies both a state of mind and convictions about outdoor environments that must be based on knowledge, but also the development of skills to act in accordance with that state of mind and those beliefs (Donaldson & Donaldson, 1958; Quay & Seaman, 2013). It is hoped, ultimately, that the experience will be beneficial to both the learner and the environment (Donaldson & Donaldson, 1958).

Nowadays, outdoor education programs are offered by early childhood centres; schools (pre-school, primary, high school, college and university); summer camps; community groups, associations and municipalities; nonprofit organizations; and private businesses. They are found in every geographical area and are initiated, facilitated and administered by individuals with a wide range of profiles and education (Ford, 1986; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019).

Priest (1986, 1999) proposed an early redefinition of OE that divided it into adventurous and environmental branches.

Outdoor education is an experiential method of learning with the use of all senses. It takes place primarily, but not exclusively, through exposure to the natural environment. In outdoor education the emphasis for the subject of learning is placed on relationships concerning people and natural resources (Priest, 1999, p. 111).

In accordance with that definition, Priest (1999) recommended categorizing the different types of relationship associated with OE into four kinds:

1. ecosystemic (within nature),
2. ekistic (between humans and nature),
3. interpersonal (among people), and
4. intrapersonal (to oneself).

In this regard, two branches of OE are generally recognized: environmental education and adventure education. Environmental education deals with ecosystemic and ekistic relationships, whereas adventure education focuses on the development of interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships (Priest, 1986, 1999).

Environmental Education

Environmental education (EE) is a form of education that aims to develop the essential elements “of a movement toward a better quality of natural environments [...], toward a better quality of life for current and future generations living in natural environments” (Legendre, 2005, p. 525).

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization & United Nations Environment Programme (1988, p. 6), EE is defined as “a permanent process in which individuals and the community gain awareness of their environment and acquire the knowledge, values, skills, experiences, and also the determination which will enable them to act—individually and collectively—to solve present and future environmental problems”.

In the same perspective as that of the nature-study movement, EE is not limited to simply transmitting knowledge about the environment as the learning focus, but rather aims to foster “kinship with the environment and nature in order to contribute to personal and collective identity and wellbeing, and to preserve nature and the relationships with it. Moreover, this process contributes to the further objective of understanding, preserving, restoring or improving the qualities of the living environment” (Berryman, 2002, p. 55).

To achieve this goal, EE relies on “building collective knowledge in a critical perspective. It aims to develop useful expertise associated with concrete achievable ends. It calls for the development of environmental ethics and the adoption of attitudes, values and behaviours permeated with those ethics. EE prioritizes cooperative learning in, by and for environmental action” (Sauvé, 1997, p. 53). Finally, environmental education develops eco-citizenship by “harmonizing the network of human, societal and environmental interrelationships” (Sauvé, 1997, p. 52).

EE initiatives in Canada are numerous and diverse. They take place in formal and informal educational contexts and may, for example, take the form of discovery activities, lectures, community projects, workshops, guided outings or problem-solving activities. They include, but are not limited to:

- gardening activities,
- organic matter recovery (composting or vermicomposting),
- active transportation awareness activities,
- exploration, inventory or mapping of nature,
- park or shoreline cleanup,
- outdoor science,
- tree planting,
- green energy production, and
- observation of the plants, animals, stars.

Adventure Education

Two main terms are used in the scientific literature when it comes to outdoor education and

adventure: adventure education (AE) and outdoor adventure education (OAE). Although the latter evokes aspects of the outdoors and the natural environment more explicitly, Sibthorp and Richmond (2015) assert that the two terms are generally used interchangeably.

According to Priest (1999, p. 111), AE is primarily based on the premise that “change may take place in groups and individuals from direct and purposeful exposure to: challenge, high adventure, and new growth experiences.” While many AE programs include in their curriculum the teaching of specific techniques pertaining to outdoor recreational activities (e.g., canoeing, kayaking or rock climbing), the ultimate goal nevertheless remains enabling participants to learn about themselves, grow and progress toward achieving their full potential (Miles & Priest, 1990). In that light, AE is more of an educational approach than a form of technical training. AE initiatives therefore generally aim to develop interpersonal relationships by working, for example, on aspects of communication, cooperation, trust, conflict resolution, problem solving and leadership, as well as on developing intrapersonal relationships, such as those associated with notions of self-concept, spirituality, self-confidence, and self-efficacy (Priest, 1999).

While many different outdoor learning programs or initiatives saw the light of day starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, several authors are of the opinion that the archetype of what is now called adventure education came in the form of programs run by the Outward Bound school founded by Kurt Hahn in Wales in 1941 (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014; Gass et al., 2020; Miles & Priest, 1999; White, 2012). The first program offered by Outward Bound was a one-month course intended to develop character, autonomy, discipline, persistence and resilience (Hirsch, 1999; White, 2012). The program curriculum at that time comprised a range of training and activities, including small boat navigation, athletic experiences, map and compass skills, rescue training, sea and mountain expeditions, as well as service to local people, also called community involvement (White, 2015).

Prouty et al. (2007, p. 4) define AE as “direct, active, and engaging learning experiences that involve the whole person and have real consequences.” Ewert and Sibthorp (2014, p. 5) describe it as:

A variety of teaching and learning activities and experiences usually involving a close interaction with an outdoor natural setting and containing elements of real or perceived danger or risk in which the outcome, although uncertain, can be influenced by the actions of the participants and circumstances.

Although no one definition seems to enjoy a consensus or even be preferred among the authors consulted, several common aspects can be identified. As an approach, AE is:

- generally practised outdoors (Bailey, 1999; Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014; Prouty et al., 2007),
- experienced in a small group (Prouty et al., 2007),
- experiential, i.e., direct, active, concrete and engaging (Berry, 2011; Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014; Priest, 1999; Prouty et al., 2007),
- kinesthetic (Bailey, 1999),
- participant-oriented (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014),
- holistic (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014),
- based on challenges that draw participants out of their comfort zone (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014; Priest, 1999),
- based on uncertainty (Ewert & Garvey, 2007; Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014; Priest, 1999; Prouty et al., 2007),
- based on risk taking (Ewert & Garvey, 2007; Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014; Prouty et al., 2007),
- based on real consequences (Prouty et al., 2007),
- inclusive of moments of reflection about actions taken (Bailey, 1999), and
- used to create learning that is intended to be transferable to daily life (Bailey, 1999).

Commonly used as umbrella terms in the scientific literature, *adventure education* and *outdoor adventure education* generally refer nowadays, broadly speaking, to all outdoor education initiatives based on notions such as the unknown, uncertainty, discovery, exploration, challenges, obstacles, risk taking and so forth. In this sense, many Canadian educational expedition-based projects and programs currently organized by associations, community groups, schools, summer camps, the Scout movement and organizations like Outward Bound are now labeled as adventure education initiatives.

Udeskole and Forest School

Various recent Canadian outdoor learning initiatives taking place in schools and early childhood centres are inspired by approaches developed in the northern half of Europe (Harwood et al., 2020; Priest & Asfeldt, 2022). Examples of these European outdoor education movements include *Waldkindergarten* (forest kindergarten) and *Waldschulen* (forest school) in Germany, *I Ur och Skur* (school in all weathers) in Sweden, *Uteskole* (outdoor schooling) in Norway, *Udeskole* (outdoor schooling) in Denmark, and Forest School in the United Kingdom.

These educational approaches, generally intended for children, share common origins and are based in similar tenets, philosophies and methods. They are experiential; holistic; democratic; inclusive; learner-centred; initiated and directed by the child; and based on play, discovery and healthy risk taking in which the educator assumes the role of facilitator, guide and co-learner. Despite the similarities, the various educational approaches mentioned above are designed and implemented in different ways reflecting distinct cultures and political and educational systems (Waite et al., 2016). The two approaches described below were selected because they are increasingly mentioned when it comes to outdoor learning in Canadian preschool and primary educational settings.

The term *Udeskole* can be translated as “outdoor schooling” or “out-of-school-teaching.” Although

educational initiatives in a natural setting have been common in Denmark since the mid-twentieth century, outdoor schooling (*Udeskole*) is relatively new in Scandinavia as a form of teaching and learning activity that is an integral part of the education system (Bentsen et al., 2010). For Bentsen et al. (2009, p. 32), *Udeskole* is a term “that not only refers to a method of teaching but also a movement to redefine school, and a theory about how education should be viewed: an understanding that education exists in a social, economical, political and geographical context.”

Intended for children aged 7 to 16, (Bentsen et al., 2010; Bentsen & Jensen, 2012; Mygind et al., 2010), the *Udeskole* approach is “characterised by the fact that *compulsory* educational activities take place outside the walls/buildings of the school and are done on a *regular* basis (i.e. a day every or every other week) and can take place in nature, local communities, factories, farms etc.” (Jordet, 1998, 2007, as cited in Bentsen et al., 2009, p. 32). The *Udeskole* approach:

- is a progressive and experiential form of outdoor learning (Bentsen & Jensen, 2012),
- calls on the learner’s kinesthetic and sensorial capacities (Jordet, 2007, as cited in Bentsen & Jensen, 2012),
- is complementary to traditional approaches, not a replacement for them (Bentsen et al., 2009),
- takes the form of a full or half day spent outdoors weekly or biweekly (Bentsen et al., 2010; Waite et al., 2016); Jordet suggests that this activity should represent 10% to 20% of teaching time (2007, as cited in Bentsen & Jensen, 2012),
- emphasizes the use of the local environment for teaching academic subjects and specific content (Bentsen et al., 2010; Jordet, 1998, as cited in Bentsen & Jensen, 2012), and
- focuses on authentic learning contexts—students “learn about nature in nature, about society in the society and about the local environment in the local environment” (Jordet, 1998, as cited in Bentsen & Jensen, 2012, p. 205).

The first Forest Schools (FS) appeared in England in the 1990s. Directly inspired by Scandinavian educational practices (Bentsen et al., 2009; Knight, 2015; Leather, 2018; Tiplady & Menter, 2021), they essentially, at that time, offered an educational experience that specifically took place in a forest or woodland (Leather, 2018; Tiplady & Menter, 2021). Initially intended for British children of preschool or primary age (Knight, 2011; Leather, 2018), the FS approach is now employed internationally for learners of various ages, skills and needs (Knight, 2011; Tiplady & Menter, 2021).

The Forest School Association (FSA) sets out guidelines that serve to define the FS educational experience. According to the FSA (FSA, 2019, as cited in Tiplady & Menter, 2021, p. 100), Forest School:

- is a long-term process of regular session (rather than a one-off or infrequent visits, the cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review links each session).
- takes place in a woodland or natural environment (to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world),
- uses a range of learner-centred processes (to create a community for being, development and learning),
- aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved (thus fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners),
- offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks (appropriate to the environment and to themselves), and
- is run by qualified Forest School practitioners (who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice).

In short, according to Knight (2009, as cited in Leather 2018, p. 2) “the experience is regular, repeated and in an unfamiliar setting, it is made as safe as reasonably possible, it happens over time, there is no such thing as bad weather—only bad clothing, trust is central and [very importantly] the learning is play based and, as far as possible, child-initiated and child-led.”

While *Udeskole* and Forest Schools use closely related approaches, significant differences exist according to Waite et al. (2016), more specifically in terms of the degree of integration into their respective national education systems. Since Forest School services are largely delivered by outside experts, they are less in line with the national curriculum than are *Udeskole* initiatives, which are implemented and facilitated by members of the education system, with greater professional independence.

Conclusion

During the last 150 years approaches combining learning and the outdoors have seen significant growth. Internationally, countless initiatives are currently offered in a multitude of forms, deployed in a wide range of environments and intended for different clientele.

In Canada, outdoor learning is also “happening on many fronts and in many ways” (Henderson & Potter, 2001, p. 234). More specifically, such initiatives are generally offered in early childhood and school programs (K–12 schools and the post-secondary sector), in summer camps and by private and not-for-profit organizations (Asfeldt et al., 2021; Henderson & Potter, 2001; Priest & Asfeldt, 2022; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019).

Despite the overall heterogeneity of Canadian practices and programs, they share common origins and foundations and, above all, a common purpose: to contribute to learning and to the development of individuals’ full potential, and to help them, in the words of Ladsous (2010, p. 5), “stretch their limits, grow and fulfill the life project within them.”

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