

“Adventurous Learning is a real gem for educators of all stripes. Purposefully designing elements of uncertainty and ambiguity into educational experience may seem counter-intuitive, but as Simon Beames and Mike Brown argue, these elements are essential to the engaged and transformative 21st-century school and classroom. This thought-provoking, useful book captures a critical and overlooked element of educational design.”

—Jay Roberts, *Earlham College, USA*

“A powerful book that speaks across outdoor and adventure education and mainstream schooling. Simon Beames and Mike Brown cogently argue for pedagogies for diverse purposes and contexts in order to meet the challenge of rapidly changing societal needs. Their four dimensions of adventurous learning—agency, authenticity, uncertainty and mastery—are drawn from respected educational, psychological and sociological theories and cohere into a readily understandable framework. This will help teachers in any context to be clearer about some important elements of teaching and learning in exciting and engaging ways.”

—Sue Waite, *Plymouth Institute of Education, UK*

“This elegantly written and deeply insightful book poses a revitalizing adventure agenda for inside the classroom and out. In times when education for neoliberal replication is the norm, *Adventurous Learning* embraces education for change, challenges entrenched ways of learning and refocuses on the passions and agency of the learner.”

—Mike Boyes, *MNZM, Associate Professor of Outdoor Education, University of Otago, New Zealand*

“With the bankruptcy of conventional thinking about adventure education becoming increasingly apparent, its advocates need to reconstruct new foundations in an ever-more complex social, intellectual and educational environment. Beames and Brown tackle this challenge head on. By situating *adventure* in the context of globalization and complexity, they decouple the concept from its conventional association with the discourses of personal growth and describe it instead as a potent arrow in the quiver to be used against the forces that maintain factory-model schooling. The authors urge teachers everywhere to make *all* learning adventurous—not by

encouraging physical risk-taking in faraway places or planning yet another trip to the teambuilding center, but by authentically partnering with youth to face the uncertainty that comes from addressing real challenges in their local communities—including the use of ‘traditional’ outdoor activities. If ever there was a book on adventure education deserving of a claim to John Dewey’s legacy, this is it.”

—Jayson Seaman, *University of New Hampshire, USA*

Adventurous Learning

Adventurous Learning interrogates the word 'adventure' and explores how elements of authenticity, agency, uncertainty and mastery can be incorporated into educational practices. It outlines key elements for a pedagogy of adventurous learning and provides guidelines grounded in accessible theory. Educators can adapt and tailor these guidelines for indoor and outdoor teaching in their own contexts. By reclaiming adventure and its role in learning, educators will be able to design and implement programmes based on sound principles that have deep and enduring meaning for their students in an increasingly complex, unpredictable and rapidly changing world.

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Adventurous Learning

**A Pedagogy for a
Changing World**

**Simon Beames and
Mike Brown**



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Foreword

Not more than a fortnight after news that *Adventurous Learning* was on its way to press, I received an email from a 14-year-old boy that, in the fullness of time, confirmed both the need for, and the wisdom contained within, this slim semi-revolutionary volume. And therein lies a story.

In his note, the boy explained that his Grade 8 teacher had asked all of the students in her two language arts classes in an elementary school in southwestern Ontario, Canada to read a book, any book, and to respond to it by writing a letter to its author. The book he had chosen was one called *Deep Waters: Courage, Character and the Lake Temiskaming Canoeing Disaster*—a book that I had written and published in 1996—that had been sitting around the house since he was born.

The reason it was in their house, he went on, was that his dad was in the book. His dad was one of the survivors of the St. John's School canoeing tragedy on Lake Temiskaming. His dad's older brother, an uncle he had never met, was on the trip too, but he had died. And that in spite of the fact that the fateful journey took place in 1978, the boy told me that the story was still "too new" for his dad to consider reading it. Encouraged by this assignment from his language arts teacher, the lad decided to read it for himself.

By that point in the note, it dawned that something quite remarkable was unfolding here: a 14-year-old boy reading a difficult story about his dad, when *he* was 14 and involved in a tragedy in which 12 teenage boys and one master died on a school canoe trip. The boy had questions about the details of the book, and about decisions I had made as a writer. But,

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as I began to ponder what I might say in response to his queries, these specifics were eclipsed by growing intrigue with the assignment itself.

In responding to their teacher's instruction, students made a rainbow of choices, from fiction to nonfiction, graphic novels, how-to books and everything in between. They all read their books during private reading time in their language arts classes and then, as part of the exercise, they all wrote letters to their authors, working through several drafts that were critiqued by peers and the teacher. Subsequently, students were put into groups and instructed to tell the others a little bit about their book and to read aloud their letter. For some students, this was as far as it went.

In an inspired next step for students who were particularly engaged, the teacher then gave anyone who was interested the time and opportunity to search out their author on the internet to see what else they had written, to see what else they might learn about them as writers and creators and, finally, to see if there might be a way to contact their author to send them the letter they had written.

Some of the authors were deceased, as it turned out, even though there was an abundance of material about them on the web. Other authors were local and writing for the first time and there wasn't much at all about them on the web. But for many of the students, they not only found evidence of their author online but they also found information—sometimes provided directly, other times through an agent or publisher—that looked like it might allow a letter to be sent. And that's how the connection was made between the son of the Lake Temiskaming disaster survivor and the author of *Deep Waters*.

I responded to the boy's questions, doing my best to answer with specifics, but I also told him how lucky he was to have a teacher who had created such an engaging assignment. Through his father's email address, we went back and forth a couple of times and this led to an invitation to attend the boy's class—basically for show-and-tell, to talk about what was turning into an epic learning experience for everyone involved. "You can talk about whatever you like," he said, "as long as my teacher says it's okay." And that's when things got even more interesting.

The more I contrasted this read-a-book-and-write-the-author assignment with what had happened with the goals of the school that had killed 12 boys and a teacher in the name of trying to "educate" them, the more I realized that there was an opportunity here to celebrate a sovereignly fine example of inspired classroom teaching. So I accepted the boy's invitation and turned up on the prescribed day at the agreed upon time.

By way of introduction, the boy told the class a bit about his book—my book—detailing his dad's experience at a school that was determined to “turn boys into men” by force feeding them Latin and Greek, by compelling them to clean the toilets, cook the food and commit great tracts of poetry to memory; by berating them or beating them with sticks when they misbehaved and, famously, by forcing them into insane snowshoe marches in the dead of winter and equally pointless canoe odysseys invoking the routes and virtues of the voyageurs—en route, or so they hoped, to building “character”.

My job was to tell the class how far the teachers in *Deep Waters* had missed the educational mark by cajoling and dragging their students to the moral North Pole. I explained—and this was hard because the boy's father, who had lost his brother on the Temiskaming trip, as well as his mother and grandfather, were in the back of the room when our presentation was happening—how, through the misappropriation of pedagogical power, the Temiskaming school had permanently stained the educational invocation of risk. And, turning to the boy's teacher, I observed how much closer she had come to creating meaningful educational adventure by inviting students to participate in a language arts assignment that was, in my judgment, one of the most remarkable and enduring educational events I'd ever witnessed.

I talked about risk, about “learning edges” and how, in my estimation, you never learn anything when you're sitting in the fat, comfortable middle of what you know. Contrasting what the Temiskaming teachers were trying with their book assignment, I talked about the choices the language arts teacher had given them, including the various options and the risks—“I could have been a pedophile lurking on the internet,” I told them—they took to seek out and connect with their authors. I talked about engagement and how this assignment, in this one instance, had allowed the boy to enter his father's world and, with the book and the assignment as a vehicle, to enter my world as well, and to meld the three in the most generative way by inviting me to his class.

The boy, as it turned out, was painfully shy but he had been captivated by the search for truth in the book he had chosen *and* in the detective-like and semi-clandestine hunt for the author. The assignment was situated within the rubric of the Grade 8 language arts curriculum but, because of the elements of choice with the book and in the shaping of the letter to the author and then in deciding whether or not to actually send the letter, the whole learning episode had relevance and intrinsic value for the students.

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It was clear from the discussion with the class that followed our presentation that almost all the students in the class were thoroughly engaged, intrigued and energized by what they had done and, in this instance, by the serendipitous outcome of their assignment that had brought one author to the front of their class, and left a normally retiring and often invisible kid seriously chuffed at what he had done, beaming in the spotlight for a few moments on a sunny winter morning.

Adventurous Learning: A Pedagogy for a Changing World provides not only a worthy consideration of the social and theoretical context of this language arts assignment—bowing to Dewey and the likes of Festinger and Csikszentmihalyi, while bringing the conversation forward into Bauman’s “liquid-modern” world as well—but also provides a lexicon of terms and a useful model for educators to employ as they seek to foster similarly powerful learning events in their own contexts. I have no doubt that teachers who are already disposed to this type of lesson construction will find resonance in these pages. As a reader and a member of the experiential education choir, I have found new meaning and relevance in visiting and revisiting the example of the language arts assignment through this book’s generative quatrain lattice of authenticity, agency, uncertainty and mastery.

More significantly, however, I’m guessing that set in the disturbing context of ‘McDonaldization’ and ‘Disneyization’ of education, the arguments and guideposts herein—written in accessible, conversational and occasionally in charming self-effacing prose—will inspire teachers rooted in more conventional educational traditions to consider change, perhaps even to consider teaching as a political act. Practitioners working in more traditional outdoor adventure arenas, particularly those whose research broaches similar terrain, will also find the book stimulating, particularly the deliciously impertinent roasting-of-chestnuts-like metaphoric transfer of educational experience and challenge by choice. “If you teach anything,” the authors boast early, “this book has something to say to you.” Amen, Brothers Beames and Brown!

In a late 19th-century speech at Stanford University, railing against the post-industrial-revolution trends in education and calling for what he called “the moral equivalent of war”, educational philosopher William James wrote: “Soft pedagogies have taken the place of the old steep rocky path to learning. But from this lukewarm air the bracing oxygen of effort is left out. It is nonsense to suppose that every step in education can be interesting. The fighting impulse must be appealed to. A victory scored under such circumstances becomes a turning point and crisis of character.”¹

This quotation has been something of a rallying cry for experiential educators intent on providing an alternative to conventional schooling. A hundred years later, Simon Beames and Mike Brown are pointing to an equally serious societal situation and calling for an equally impactful rethinking of education. But setting aside the fresh-air-fuelled notions of “steep rocky paths” to personal pedagogical enlightenment, and somewhat counter-intuitively, they have brought the revolution back into the classroom (without in any way discounting the potential power of the out of doors as a fertile learning ground) and, ironically, back into the lives and lifelong learning of students, back into the practice of educators with real potential to change the world.

James Raffan

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NOTE

- 1 *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: And to students on some of life's ideals* by William James. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1899, pp. 54–55.



Preface

In the late winter of 2010, Simon led a group of ten university Outdoor Education students on a hut-to-hut ski tour in Norway. After six fantastic days of Nordic skiing in a gorgeous snowy landscape, with cosy evenings in fully provisioned huts complete with wood-burning stoves, we returned to our mountain lodge satisfied that our adventure had been a huge success.

The next morning, when we were due to take a bus and train to Oslo, and then a plane back to Edinburgh, we got the news that a volcano had erupted in Iceland and that all European air travel was cancelled. Our true adventure was just about to begin, and with it the seeds of this book.

Once in Oslo, we checked into the hostel that we had stayed in the previous week. In terms of group management, 'Maslow's' first level of needs had been met; our next task was to figure out a way to get home.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in dealing with the situation was that the circumstances were very fluid and unstable. The airports, for example, did not know when flying would start again. It might be later today or it could be next week. I took a chance that afternoon and bought £1500 worth of air tickets for the next day. The group, split into two dorm rooms, was in good spirits. They Skyped family members and shopped for souvenirs.

We awoke the next day to disappointment and even greater uncertainty. Our 'new' flights would not materialize, as the airport was still closed, and the authorities had no idea when flights would begin again. This was getting serious.

We held a team meeting in the men's dorm room and got the issues on the table. The circumstances in which we found ourselves were

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constantly changing and could not be predicted, and the leaders (myself and Bob Henderson) had no prior experience of managing the obstacles ahead. We were all in this together and solving this puzzle would demand each individual's cooperation, ingenuity, selflessness and initiative.

Unlike the initial plans for our ski tour, I no longer held the upper hand in knowing the best mode of transport. In this situation, my knowledge acquired from previous trips was rendered useless. The solution to our dilemma would need to come from people in the group. Many ideas were floated: *we'll take the bus to Amsterdam and then a ferry to England; we'll rent a van and drive it back; we'll buy a second-hand van; we'll hire taxis to take us; we'll take a ferry to Copenhagen and then another to Newcastle; and (my favourite), we'll pay a fishing boat to take us across the North Sea.* By this time, it was late in the afternoon and we were weary after talking for hours. The next morning, however, a refreshed and determined group split into pairs and proceeded to gather information regarding the viability of each of the listed options.

When we gathered that afternoon, each pair reported back on the timing, cost and overall viability of the mode of travel they researched. Then we voted. The option deemed most viable was taking a two-day bus ride through Sweden, Denmark, and Germany, and finishing in The Netherlands. After staying the night at one of the student's parents' friend's apartments, we would take an overnight ferry to Harwich, on the east coast of England. Once there, we would be picked up by a student who would have driven a 15-seater minibus down from Edinburgh.

The next morning we embarked on a three-day odyssey. We arrived back in Edinburgh six days later than originally scheduled, and all of us felt that we had had an adventure.

In the weeks that followed, I tried to make sense of the events from that extended journey and was struck by a number of things. First, and perhaps most obviously, it seemed that getting back from Norway was much more adventurous than ski touring in Norway. If one was selling adventure in a glossy magazine, however, the ski touring would probably win every time. Second, I remember feeling that our ski tour had gone exactly how I had envisioned, but this feeling of the planned and predictable adventure did not sit well with me. What was it about the second part of our time away—figuring out how to get back from Oslo and then the travelling itself—that elicited such feelings of adventure? Did this adventure have fundamental ingredients?

Underlying our time in Oslo was an ever-present feeling of being in a 'fluid' situation. The possible courses of action were constantly shifting

and no one possessed “definitive knowledge”, such as when the planes would start to fly again. There was a high degree of *uncertainty*. What was certain was that we would eventually get back to Edinburgh—we just didn’t know when or by what means.

Another feature that characterized our predicament was that it was real. The ski trip was ultimately a contrived set of experiences that I had packaged together because I thought they would be enjoyable and full of new learning experiences for my students. In contrast, part two of our Norwegian trip stood out because it was not contrived, nor planned in any way. It was a situation in which we found ourselves and from which no one could extract us. We couldn’t turn this experience ‘off’ and then start again or do something different. We were fully immersed in a highly *authentic* set of circumstances. It was as real as it gets.

A third aspect of our trip was that the students had a large amount of power to decide how they were going to get themselves out of this situation. As a leader without any more information than the students, my task was reduced to that of facilitating healthy and productive discussions. Although the students obviously had nothing to do with choosing the challenge they faced, they had an enormous amount of *agency and autonomy*, in terms of proposing and evaluating different courses of action, choosing one, and then seeing it through.

Finally, this adventure demanded a high degree of psychological, socio-emotional and physical commitment from all of us. It did not involve negotiating hazards that might harm us, but it did present us with a variety of *challenges* that revealed themselves as time went on. These challenges demanded mastering skills in gathering and analysis, as well as deep reasoning regarding the outcomes associated with various courses of possible action. The challenges certainly required a certain mental and physical tenacity from all of us. Meeting these challenges demanded our best. I have never been so proud of a group that I’ve been away with.

Let’s now fast-forward a couple of years to a time when Mike and I were at a conference, chatting about the problems of adventure education—how too many programmes have become overly predictable, commercialized and devoid of adventure. To us, it seemed that adventure education was going the same way as mainstream education.

Even though we both have backgrounds in outdoor adventure education, we work in Schools of Education at our respective universities. This affords us opportunities to spend time in schools and on outdoor programmes with school students. We were struck by how all kinds of education—indoor and outdoor, curricular and extra-curricular—was very

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prescriptive (i.e., with little uncertainty). Neither teachers nor students had strong voices regarding what was learned or how it was learned (i.e., little agency and autonomy). Further, much of the content was not taking place in the real world, where there are real problems to tackle: many of the forms of education that we witnessed had been relegated to classrooms and ropes courses (i.e., minimal authenticity). Finally, the vast array of learning activities on offer rarely demanded any depth of knowledge, skill, or judgment gained through experience and practice (i.e., minimal mastery).

We believe that learning through appropriate adventure is something that all teachers and instructors can facilitate—whether they are teaching nursery school, working at a summer camp or delivering a university geology lecture. This book aims to provide educators of all kinds with principles that will enable them to make their classes and courses more adventurous, in order for students to be more deeply engaged in learning that has a high degree of meaning and relevance to their lives.

SKB & MB



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FROM MIKE . . .

I would like to thank Simon for his vision and for the enthusiasm that he brought to the project. Once again it has been a pleasure to work with you. My thanks to Juliet Small and Jane Townsend who provided valuable feedback on the manuscript at short notice. A special note of thanks to Nancy who put up with a 'lodger' during the final push to the finish on the book—your warm hospitality and friendship is greatly appreciated.

FROM SIMON . . .

I would like to thank John Telford, Beth Christie, Pete Higgins and Robbie Nicol for giving me time to read, think and write; Emily Salvesen and Fiona Reid, Pete and Mary Higgins and Hamish Ross, for giving me places in which to write; Naomi Silverman, at Routledge, for shepherding us so skilfully and genially through the publication process; Jennifer Broughton, Patrick Byrne, Scot Hoffman and Mitchell McLarnon, for providing incredibly helpful suggestions for improving the manuscript; James Raffan, for writing the Foreword; Mike, for his insightful thinking, humility and easy-going nature—all I need in a writing partnership; and Nancy, my ever supportive, tolerant and loving rock.

Chapter 1

Introduction

We are passionate about the role that well-conceived and facilitated educational experiences can play in enriching students' learning. Together we have over forty-five years of involvement in education, in a variety of roles, such as high school teacher, youth worker, outdoor instructor, university professor and researcher.

The rationale for this book is rooted in our concerns about the state of education in today's world and the path it is taking. We believe that the potential benefits of mainstream education and outdoor adventure education have been increasingly restricted and marginalized to a point where neither offers a strong platform for meaningful student learning. In this book we have articulated some of our concerns and made some suggestions for an alternative form of practice that we hope will both enrich students' learning experiences and stimulate educators who are seeking to broaden their repertoire of practice.

The state of any educational policy and practice is located within the greater social, cultural, political and economic times in which it exists. This may seem like an obvious statement, but it is an important one to begin with, as the content of this book would not have had so much relevance twenty or fifty or a hundred years ago. This book addresses a system of education that has been substantially shaped by a rapidly changing world that is a feature of the 21st century.

Consider how different life is now when compared to how it was for your parents or grandparents. Back then, there was no internet and there were no cell phones. Breathable fabrics and the use of plastic in the

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construction of kayaks were in their infancy. These new and improved material objects brought about by technological advances are easy to spot. The non-material aspects of 21st-century life are much harder to define, however. Many of these non-material aspects have affected social structures (e.g., notions of the family unit), career opportunities and lifestyle choices. Much of this has to do with (un)predictability and uncertainty regarding the future. These days, people are less likely to know what lies ahead of them, in terms of the jobs they will have, where they will live and how secure they might feel. Our lives are increasingly filled with uncertainty and speed. Giddens (1999) referred to this as the *Runaway World*.

Now consider two of the big criticisms that we hear about education in so-called 'developed' nations. You'll have heard that there is too much standardized testing and that classroom sizes are too big. These criticisms, which will be discussed in Chapter 3, are usually a consequence of educational budgets being under-supported by central or local/state governments, so that decisions about learning and teaching are often made on an economic basis, rather than on educational ones. In order to teach more people with fewer resources, an industrialized model of education, based on the rationalization of goods and services, is implemented.

Perhaps the most classic example of economic rationalization is what Ritzer (1993) labelled *McDonaldization*. With McDonaldization, organizations control, calculate and constrain their operations to such a degree that they become highly efficient. The positive side of this is that an organization's production can be highly predictable. This kind of prescribed operational process might be fantastic for an American traveller in Shanghai who wants to have a Big Mac; however, it is this standardization and prescription that is a major problem for contemporary education. One reason why this is a problem has to do with recognizing that people are not "all the same". When we treat everyone the same, we are making a judgment on what is best for people that is usually based on our understandings of what is good and right. What is valued in some societies as knowledge is ignored in others, and universalized 'knowledge' that is divorced from learners' historical and social contexts may be of little relevance or interest to them. The 'one size fits all' approach to education has failed a range of groups (e.g., indigenous peoples, immigrants and students from low socio-economic backgrounds).

We discussed earlier how education is a reflection of its time, and hopefully this idea is clearer now. The major challenges of our era, such as climate change, wars based on religious beliefs and public health (e.g.,

obesity, global pandemics), demand creative solutions that will not come from students who have learned to become excellent test-takers. Society needs young people who have been educated to address real-world issues on a planet that is moving swiftly.

It is through education itself that we have the means to change educational processes. Ken Robinson (2011) argues that we need to run our education systems in “radically different ways” (p. 5) if people are to survive and flourish. We are optimistic enough to believe that together we can provide some resistance to what might be termed ‘the ills of education’, but we are not so naive to think that this kind of change will happen overnight; it may take several years, if not a generation. Education is a highly politicized and complex enterprise with formalized learning outcomes, and educators have an ethical obligation to consider how the knowledge, skills and attitudes they teach are put to use.

This book has been written for a wide range of educators: early years teachers, primary school teachers, secondary school teachers, college and university professors, youth workers, wilderness expedition leaders, adventure activity instructors, corporate trainers and coaches. If you teach anything, this book has something to say to you. This may seem like a bold and even arrogant statement. Some may think that one book cannot possibly cater to such a wide audience. We believe that education of all kinds—indoor and outdoor, nearby and far away, with little people and big people—has gone down the same path to a point where there is less and less uncertainty (in terms of its outcomes and processes through which they are achieved), minimal participant power (what we call agency), fewer opportunities to learn in real-world, authentic settings, and too little emphasis is placed on mastering skills and knowledge that can be put to good use.

The book contains nine chapters that build on the foundations provided in this introductory chapter. In Chapters 2, 3 and 4 we outline some of the challenges and issues facing contemporary education, while in Chapters 5 to 8 we explain the four key dimensions of adventurous learning. We close the book with a chapter that discusses how the four dimensions can be considered together when designing and delivering engaging and meaningful learning for your students.

The forthcoming chapter delves into the meanings of adventure. As we will see, the definition of adventure is incredibly broad and one that many people will be able to make connections to in their home life, work, school and play. What do you think is an adventure? Consider the adventures that you have experienced in the last three months. Did these adventures

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happen by accident? Did you pay for these adventures? Did they involve 'typical' adventurous activities (e.g., paragliding, rock climbing) or did they involve something unexpected happening (e.g., getting a flat tyre while driving)?

In today's world, the word adventure means many things to many people; it is subjective and culturally relative. What constitutes an adventure for one of us may be utter boredom for someone else, and while our white, privileged male selves may seek adventure to construct and maintain a certain identity in society, people living in different circumstances (e.g., unemployment or social deprivation) may have no desire to augment the considerable levels of uncertainty and risk they involuntarily face on a daily basis.

Themes of adventure pervade western society and are evident in the choices people make about everything from clothes, to holidays, to leisure activities, from the dominant modes of charity fundraising, to children's birthday party activities, and even the post-apocalyptic video games that are so popular. What do these kinds of adventure have to do with education? Not very much, we would answer! We do argue, however, that meaningful education in the 21st century demands characteristics of adventure. There is an urgent need to reclaim the essence of 'adventure' and more deliberately incorporate key elements of it into our educational practices.

Chapter 3 is entitled the *Socio-cultural Backdrop*, and explores how our taken-for-granted, day-to-day actions are in fact highly influenced by the fast-paced, sophisticated and powerful economic forces that pervade society. One of the tensions present in contemporary society, which is in an increasing state of flux and uncertainty, is that many people crave predictability (perhaps as a consequence of this fluidity). Consequences of late modernity's rationalized features of social life manifest themselves through increasing regulation, standardization and prescription in both mainstream education and non-school-based outdoor education.

We will see how the collective theses within Beck's (1992) *Risk Society*, Giddens' (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity*, and Bauman's (2007) *Liquid Times* give us a theoretical platform upon which we can examine what we mean by adventure. Notions of adventure, risk, challenge and uncertainty can only be considered within a micro (educational) context once they have been understood on a global, socio-cultural level. This discussion becomes more complex when we take the changing young person into account as well. The educational adventures that a 'digital native' child, who is largely disconnected from the natural world, might want to

undertake, will contrast greatly with those of someone born even thirty years ago. Universalized and context-free adventure activities delivered to school students in many western countries fail to connect with the lived-experiences of youth in a globalized age.

For some people, the antidote to the pitfalls of conventional schooling could be found in organizations like Outward Bound, the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) and Project Adventure. Over the last fifty years, however, outdoor adventure education, with its promise of personal and social development, has fallen into the same trap of rationalization, prescription and regulation as has mainstream schooling—the very style of education to which it was claiming to be an alternative. The ‘naturalness’ of highly orchestrated and contrived adventure pursuits being delivered by experts in ‘place-ambivalent’ settings, has been questioned by a number of writers. Formerly uncontested notions of the importance of perceived risk and the transfer of learning from one social situation to another are no longer philosophically supportable and are poorly evidenced. Adrenaline-filled fun activities invariably require so much knowledge and judgment for safe participation, that inexperienced young people are only able to exercise minimal agency and authentic decision-making.

The focus on delivering a bewildering array of activities alongside inescapable forces of commercialization (with their need for efficiency and predictability) has, paradoxically, eviscerated the potential for adventurous learning within contemporary adventure programmes. Chapter 4 provides a multi-faceted, coherent argument that outlines how outdoor adventure education, in its dominant guise around the world, fails to meet its full potential. Such a critique is a necessary platform upon which we can begin to redefine this critical relationship between adventure and learning.

At this point in the book, the scene has been set and we move to explaining how the four dimensions of adventure (*authenticity, agency, uncertainty and mastery*) can inform the development of an adventurous learning environment.

Chapter 5 on Authenticity explains how it is vitally important for students to see the value in the tasks in which they are engaged. This is not always the case, as educational activities are frequently viewed by students as a sequence of tasks to complete in order to succeed in some kind of assessment, which then permits progression to some kind of next stage, but which has few (if any) concrete, useful links to their daily lives. Our view of authenticity in education is rooted in what might be called ‘real-world’ learning contexts. Of course, classrooms are in the real world,

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but (at best) they are often one step removed from the democratic issues, cultural practices and curriculum-imbued surroundings that exist outside school buildings.

Our notion of authenticity is linked to Dewey's call for education not to be viewed as preparation for the future, but rather, be full of meaning in the present. Authentic experiences are those that have deep relevance with the current lives of our students, rather than the acquisition of abstract knowledge (or Freire's notion of 'banking') that may be useful in the future. Unlike decontextualized ropes courses and algebra exercises, authentic learning opportunities *here and now* help students to understand and learn from the world as experienced in the present. Many authentic learning contexts exist in the school grounds and local neighbourhood, while others involve working with community organizations in service, conservation, citizenship or enterprise projects.

For students to engage deeply in learning they need to be provided with opportunities for ownership and responsibility. Another word for having this kind of power—one adored by sociologists—is *agency*. Agency is the focus of Chapter 6. Young people have a hunger and curiosity to learn about the world they inhabit, and we advocate for students to be equipped with the skills, knowledge and power to be able to make informed decisions regarding the circumstances they encounter throughout their educational career.

This is not to vanquish the role of educators, as they are central to the quality of their students' education. Indeed, although we are perhaps stating the obvious, unlike learning—which people have been doing since the beginning of time in the absence of formal schooling—education involves an educator (Itin, 1999; Roberts, 2012). Educators' reason for being is to facilitate learning that will help students and society benefit in equal measure. In adventurous learning environments, their role (in our view) is to consider the value of sequenced learning experiences that afford students opportunities to evaluate various courses of action, construct and execute plans, and be prepared to deal with consequences. Agency is a crucial dimension in our conceptualization of adventure and is interwoven with our development of the concept of mastery through challenge.

The third dimension in adventurous learning is Uncertainty. This chapter outlines the vital necessity of pedagogical approaches that feature uncertainty of outcomes and of process. Our approach to adventurous learning contrasts with commercialized, packaged and highly regulated 'adventures' that feature replicable and predictable outcomes, and which are so typical of many tightly scripted contemporary adventure education

programmes. School-based educators inhabit a world of set lesson plans with pre-determined outcomes and pressure to cram-in packaged content within a fixed time frame. A distinguishing feature of our conception of uncertainty is the emphasis placed on process and the need to create space for learners to exercise curiosity and creativity, rather than restricting these attributes through rigid adherence to defined lesson plans or achieving predetermined outcomes.

We are calling for a reappraisal of educational activities of all kinds, so that students can experiment, learn from trial and error, and make mistakes without the threat of physical or psychological harm. This is not wrapping our students in cotton wool; it is about providing space for experimentation within carefully considered boundaries. Indeed, powerful learning experiences can come about when neither the teacher nor the students know the solution to a given problem and must work together to find it. The rationalization of mainstream educational outcomes, coupled with the standardization and commercialization of adventure activities (that require replicability and certainty), undermine student agency and severely limit what can be learned and how it can be learned. Following Dewey's notion of the *indeterminate situation*, uncertainty is a cornerstone of adventurous learning.

Chapter 8 discusses the crucial ingredients of Mastery through challenge. We know that not enough challenge leads to boredom and too much often results in feelings of helplessness or inadequacy. We are concerned that adventure-based educators have been culpable of confusing discussions of educational challenge by using the terms 'risk' and 'challenge' almost interchangeably. This has led to the development of 'novel' activities that, while fun, take the form of entertainment rather than education, thus diminishing opportunities for learning.

Appropriate challenges requiring the acquisition and application of skills are vital to enduring learning and can contribute significantly to building one's positive sense of self, thus underscoring the role of agency in attaining goals. In our view, the mastery of skills has an important role to play in developing learners' capacity to act and to be responsible for their choices. Appropriate learner-driven challenges, with their ensuing struggles, frustrations and successes, can lead to high levels of satisfaction.

We are conscious of young people's needs for authentic challenges that have meaning in their everyday lives; 'real-world' challenges lie in opposition to contrived tasks, such as rappelling off a tower or crossing a 'toxic swamp' using three planks of wood, which some people may find challenging, but from which limited useful and applicable learning may result.

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We do our students few favours when we mistake high thrills entertainment for learning; entertainment may lead to short-term pleasure, but meaningful, enduring learning requires sustained effort. Too often, short-term novel activities do not demand that participants take control of the direction of their learning through developing and applying skills that build on prior knowledge. While suitable challenges may involve elements of risk, we strongly argue that artificially constructed physical risk-taking has no place in our conception of adventurous learning. The discussion needs to be centred on suitable, authentic learner-based challenges that lead to learning, rather than on fabricated and highly regulated activities that bear little resemblance to the challenges faced in real life.

The final chapter is where we explain how the features of adventurous learning—authenticity, agency, uncertainty and mastery—come together to guide practice and programme development. We present a schematic representation of adventurous learning that can be used to evaluate current educational practice and to inform future programme design, lesson planning and approaches to teaching. We are understandably cautious about the provision of ‘the model’ of adventurous learning, but we are also aware that as practising educators it is helpful to be able to have a conceptual model upon which to frame one’s day-to-day thinking about how best to prepare today’s learners for a changing world.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this book is to examine ways in which aspects of adventure can enhance indoor and outdoor teaching practices and positively influence learners. For us, this examination is not possible without having a deep understanding of both the various meanings of the word ‘adventure’ and the context of education in the early 21st century. Our belief is that too many educational enterprises dressed as adventure education are not very adventurous at all and, because of this, the amount of learning that they are capable of eliciting is greatly limited. The book’s discussion moves us towards an enriched pedagogical approach that will provide early years teachers, primary school teachers, secondary school teachers, pre-service teachers, college and university professors, youth workers, wilderness expedition leaders, adventure activity instructors, corporate trainers and coaches with the tools to critically reflect, evaluate and develop their practice.

We encourage you to engage with the material presented with a questioning frame of mind, to engage in dialogue with your peers, and to

experiment with the ideas put forward. Like you, we grapple with the day-to-day practicalities of teaching and the associated administrivia that seems to be the 'lot' of educators in modern educational institutions. The ideas that follow are drawn from our own trial and error, frustrations and successes, and desire to better equip those with whom we interact to be better prepared for a world that will not decrease in complexity and uncertainty.

You'll notice that we use the term 'adventurous learning' throughout the book, as opposed to adventure education. The word 'adventurous' is particularly appealing to us, as it comes with less 'baggage' than the ubiquitous term 'adventure', which is discussed in Chapter 2. The *Oxford Concise Dictionary* (2008) defines adventurous as "Open to or involving new or daring methods or experiences" (p. 19). It follows, then, that the kind of learning that we espouse be hallmarked in this same way.

We shared an earlier draft of the book with colleagues who acted as critical friends and kindly suggested improvements and modifications. Some reviewers found it helpful to skip ahead to the final chapter and see how the four dimensions of adventurous learning could be illustrated with diagrams. Others wanted to get to the 'solutions' part of the book first (from Chapter 5 onwards) and come back later to the 'issues' section (Chapters 2–4). Both of these ways of approaching the book are perfectly acceptable; indeed, in a book on adventurous learning, we wouldn't want to be too prescriptive to our readers. You have our permission to move between chapters in whatever order you like.

With this introduction, we warmly welcome you to the uncertainty and challenge of adventurous learning. We hope you will gain the knowledge and desire to develop authentic learning experiences for your students and implement this approach in your own contexts.