THE STONELEIGH PROJECT:

A CASE STUDY OF OUTDOOR YOUTH WORK AND ITS IMPACT ON PERSONAL AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Christopher Loynes

School of Sport, Leisure and Travel
Faculty of Enterprise and Innovation
Buckinghamshire New University
Brunel University

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Abstract

This research is a case study of the Stoneleigh Group; a partnership of voluntary youth work organisations that piloted a spiritual development programme for young people aged 18 to 25. The purpose of the research was to examine the claims made by the Stoneleigh Group to have developed a radical approach and outcomes of personal and social transformation within a programme of informal education out of doors. The research was undertaken in the contexts of reviews of research concerning outdoor education, informal education for young people, and youth transition. An ethnographic study of the retreat programme and its impact on the lives of the young people was combined with a critical study of the advocacy work of the Stoneleigh Group within the development of the National Youth Work Curriculum. The analysis was undertaken with the aid of Bernstein's theoretical framework for curriculum and pedagogic critique. The study of the programme claims that the pedagogic approach was radical in its ideology and practice. However, it is argued that the impact on the young people depended on the ideology of the youth organisation for which they volunteered. A range of claims for a radical outcome are identified and discussed. The research argues that, despite the claim that the outcomes of social transformation were only partially achieved, the practices of the Stoneleigh Group were contested because of their perceived radicalism. The study of the advocacy work suggests that, despite these challenges, the Stoneleigh Group's contributions to the national discussions concerning the spiritual development of young people within the youth work curriculum resulted in proposals that supported a more radical pedagogic approach than currently practised. The research indicates that the Stoneleigh Group influenced statements made in the consultation. It is argued that the Group provided support for the concept of young people as agents of social change. In particular, it is suggested that the pilot was used to support a view of young people as capable of, and valued for, their challenges to the established norms of society.

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Sue Bennett was inspirational as a youth worker with Eden Community Outdoors. She epitomised all that motivated me to take an interest in the radical potential of this field. This thesis is dedicated to her.

Author's Declaration

This research builds on an evaluative study, The Stoneleigh Group Pilot Programme: An Evaluation, (Loynes, 2004) undertaken on behalf of the Stoneleigh Group. The research asks different questions for a different purpose and involved the collection of additional evidence and an extended period of field research. Some of the material in Chapter 5 was included as part of a book chapter, Social Reform, Militarism and Other Historical Influences on the Practice of Outdoor Education in Youth Work (Loynes, 2007).

Two conference presentations were made that explored the early findings from this research. The first was entitled 'Power With or Power Over: A Case Study of Emerging Voices Within an Outdoor Experience' and was presented at 'Widening Horizons', the Third International Conference of Outdoor Education at the University of Central Lancashire in July 2006. The second was called 'Agents of Change or Coming in from the Cold: A Case Study of Developing Narratives in an Outdoor Experience' at the10th International Conference for Experiential Learning at Lancaster University in July 2006. Neither of these presentations was published.

The thesis is based on my own research and is all my own work. Quotes from other sources are referenced and quoted evidence is identified with a code that corresponds with the source in the evidence database.

Table of Contents

Abstract		i
Acknowledgements		ii
Author's Declaration		iii
Table of Contents		iv
List of Tables		ix
Chapter 1	Introduction	1
	The Aims of the Research	2
	Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5: Contexts for the Research	4
	Chapters 6 and 7: The Research Approach	6
	Chapter 8: A Theoretical Framework	7
	Chapters 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13: Discussion	8
	Chapter 14: Conclusions	11
	The Multiple Roles of the Researcher	11
	The Use of Pseudonyms for the Participants	12
	Coding the Evidence	12
	Conclusion	12
Chapter 2	Introducing the Stoneleigh Group and the Stoneleigh Project	14
	The Stoneleigh Group	14
	The Young People	24
	The Stoneleigh Project	25
	The Evaluation Study	31
	Conclusion	37

Chapter 3	A Review of Outdoor Education Research	39
	Outdoor Education: Early Claims	40
	Emerging Research Findings Criticised	41
	The Meta-Studies Reviewed	41
	Recent research reviewed	44
	Locating this Study within the Wider Research on Outdoor Education	56
Chapter 4	Youth, Transition and Agency	58
	Youth in Context	59
	The Vulnerability of Youth	63
	Youth Transitions	68
	Youth Transition as Problem	74
	Youth Development	76
	Transition and Risk, Structure and Agency	79
	Conclusion	86
Chapter 5	Youth Development and Informal Education	89
	Colonisation and Tradition	89
	Historical Influences	91
	The New Individualism and Outdoor and Informal Education	110
	Conclusion	119
Chapter 6	Arriving at a Methodology	123
	Finding a Philosophical Position	123
	The Contribution of Narrative	130
	Reflexivity	133
	An Ethnographic Approach	133
	Entering the Field Co-operatively and Critically	135
	Criticality	137
	A Grounded Approach	139

Adopting Critical, Interpretative, Hermeneutic and Ethnographic Approaches to the Case Study 139

Chapter 7 A Review of the Methods of Inquiry 142

A Structure for the Inquiry 142

Focus 1: An Ethnography of the Stoneleigh Project Programme 146

Focus 2: The Impact of the Stoneleigh Project on the Young People 160

Focus 3: A Critical Analysis of the Struggle for the Meaning and Dissemination of the Findings of the Stoneleigh Project 162

Ethical Considerations 163

Reflexivity 165

Benefits and Dilemmas 166

Conclusion 170

Chapter 8 Knowledge, Power and Control in Education: Theoretical Perspectives 172

The Underlying Principles of Bernstein's Theories 176

The Current Relevance of Bernstein's Ideas 180

Bernstein's Theories and the Stoneleigh Project 184

The Genesis of Values 195

Conclusion 199

Chapter 9 The Ideologies of the Stoneleigh Group and its Partners 201

Youth and Transition 204

Marginalisation 209

The Stoneleigh Group and the Meaning of Work 222

Conclusion 228

Chapter 10 The Participants' Experience of the Stoneleigh Project Retreats 231
The Retreat Programme 232
The Young Participants 238
The Retreat Experience 244
Conclusion 267
Chapter 11 The Role of Narrative in the Stoneleigh Project 270
Recruitment 271
Creating Discourse 273
Constructing and Reconstructing Identity 274
Experiencing Agency 279
Learning Narrative Skills 280
Transformation 281
Conclusion 283
Chapter 12 The Stoneleigh Project and its Influence on the Lives of the Young Participants after the Retreats 285
The Stoneleigh Project Programme after the Retreats 285
Agents of Personal Change 301
Personal or Social Change Agents 308
The Young People of the Stoneleigh Project as Agents of Social Change. 316
Conclusion 320
Chapter 13 Ideological Struggles: The Spirituality Concept and Informal Education 322
Spirituality and the Stoneleigh Group Partners 323
An Integrated Code and the Threat to Power. 326
The Struggle between the Programme Staff and the Stoneleigh Group Partners. 330
Leadership as a Colonising Influence: the struggle amongst the Stoneleigh Group partners. 335
The Struggle for Ideas after the Stoneleigh Project. 340

	Unravelling the Conflation of Values, Spirituality and Religion.	342
Chapter 14	Conclusions	346
	Questions One and Two: The Integrated Curriculum and Pedagogy of the Retreats.	346
	Question Three: Agency and the Reproduction and Transformation of Social Order.	353
	Question Four: The Struggle to Break Out of a Liberal 'Papering Over of the Cracks'.	359
	Questions for Further Study.	362
References		364
Appendix 1	The Backgrounds to Participants in the Text.	374
Appendix 2	Sources of Evidence Used in this Thesis.	378
Appendix 3	A Personal Narrative in the Context of the Study of The Stoneleigh Project.	383
Appendix 4	A Summary of the Work of the Stoneleigh Group Partners.	393
Appendix 5	The Four Umbrellas of the Stoneleigh Group and its Network.	398

List of Diagrams and Tables

Chapter 2

Table 1	The Stoneleigh Project: Calendar of Events	22
Table 2	The Formal Roles of the Participants within the Stoneleigh Group	24

Chapter 7

Table 3	Research Calendar	143

Chapter 10

Table 4	Summary of 12 'Case Study' Young Participants' Perceived Situations Before the Stoneleigh Project	239

Chapter 12

Table 5	Summary of the Effect of the Stoneleigh Project on the Identity and Trajectory of the 12 Case Study Young People	287
Diagram 1	Trajectories of the Young Participants in the Stoneleigh Project Showing the Representative Pathways of the 12 Participants Analysed as Case Studies.	291