Exploring student's perceptions of a place-responsive, sustainability-focused expedition to Zanzibar and its implications for outdoor education practice.

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MA Outdoor Education

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Institute of Management and Health

Contents

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DECLARATION FORM

Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation Declaration Form

1. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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3. This dissertation is the result of my own independent work / investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. A reference list is appended.

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Abstract

This study explores how a place-responsive, sustainability-focused expedition influenced participants' sense of place, environmental knowledge, and concern. Amidst growing critiques of traditional adventure-based outdoor education, which often prioritises physical challenge over ecological engagement, this research explores an alternative approach that fosters cultural, historical, and environmental connections. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative phenomenological methodology, data were collected from sixteen participants aged sixteen to nineteen through ethnographic reflective journals, group and semi-structured interviews, and autoethnographically through participant observation. A thematic analysis identified five key themes. An enhanced sense of place through cultural exchange, historical learning, and Indigenous perspectives; increased environmental knowledge and concern fostered through direct engagement; and improved physical, mental, and social wellbeing.

Findings suggest that immersion through cultural and ecological narratives cultivated environmental awareness and personal growth. Language learning emerged as a key factor in building relationships and deepening participants' sense of place. Historical engagement, particularly with colonial legacies and local conservation efforts, prompted critical reflections on global inequalities and sustainability. Direct exposure to environmental degradation heightened participants' concern, with post-trip reflections indicating ongoing advocacy in the participants' home communities. The study underscores the pedagogical value of place-responsive outdoor education, advocating for longer duration, culturally immersive experiences that integrate Indigenous knowledge and structured reflection. Recommendations include integrating language acquisition, creating time for dwelling, and fostering reciprocal relationship with host communities. The research contributes to debates in outdoor education regarding the viability of transformative learning experiences beyond local contexts and emphasises the need for ethical, decolonised approaches in international expeditions. Future research should explore the long-term impacts of place-responsive outdoor learning and its role in fostering sustained environmental stewardship.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Mache Treviño, and tutor, Dr Andy Williams for their unwavering support, insightful feedback, and encouragement throughout this research. Their guidance was invaluable in shaping both the direction and depth of this study.

Many thanks also go to the participants who generously shared their reflections, experiences, and time. This research would not have been possible without their dedication and commitment. I am also grateful to South Devon College and African Impact for the help in funding and facilitating this expedition. Especially to South Devon College for having the vision and foresight to develop both their staff through access to continued professional development, and for the learners through providing many opportunities for personal development and growth.

Finally, a special thanks to my family for their patience, motivation, and endless support. I am very much looking forward to getting back out into nature with you all, where we belong.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Research background and context

Outdoor education is an evolving field that has traditionally utilised experiential learning delivered in a wide range of contexts, to nurture skill and personal development, and environmental awareness. However, the purpose and delivery of outdoor education have undergone significant shifts due to changing socio-political and environmental concerns (Mannion and Lynch, 2016). Recent literature highlights a transition towards sustainability-focused place-responsive education as a means of fostering a deeper sense of environmental connection and responsibility (Beames *et al.,* 2023; Wattchow and Brown, 2011). This dissertation investigates how an environmentally sustainability-focused, place-responsive expedition influences participants' sense of place and their development of environmental knowledge and concern.

Historically, outdoor education has been shaped by philosophical traditions such as romanticism and recently, neoliberalism, both of which have contributed to the 'landlessness' and 'commodification' of many outdoor experiences (Baker, 2005; Beames and Brown, 2014). This had led to critiques of adventure-based models that prioritise challenge and risk over deeper place-based connections (Lugg, 2007). In response, place-responsive education has emerged as a potential framework that emphasises meaningful engagement with environments, cultural narratives, and ecological systems (Mannion and Lynch, 2016).

This research is situated within broader discourses on outdoor education and sustainability, drawing on experiential, embodied, and aesthetic learning approaches. By examining the potential of place-responsive expeditions to develop environmental knowledge and concern, it challenges a widely held assumption that impactful learning primarily arises through exposure to nature, risk, or conquering nature-based or artificial challenges. This study seeks to illuminate how deep, situated engagement with place can cultivate more meaningful and lasting environmental awareness. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing discussions on how outdoor education can move beyond traditional adventure-based models towards more ecologically and culturally responsive practices.

Research rationale

The global climate crisis has positioned environmental education as a critical component of outdoor learning (Mann, Gray and Truong, 2021). The significance of climate change, environmental degradation, and biodiversity loss has been extensively documented, with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022) warning of the increasing threats to ecological stability. Outdoor education has a vital role to play in addressing these challenges by developing eco-literacy, environmental awareness, and sustainable behaviours (Orr, 1992; Thomas, Dyment and Prince, 2021). However, despite this urgency, the commodification of outdoor education has, in many cases, shifted its focus away from environmental stewardship towards adventure tourism and skill acquisition (Humberstone, 2000; Wattchow and Brown, 2011; Beames and Brown, 2016).

The growing concern over the 'placelessness' of many current outdoor education practices, where the natural world is reduced to a backdrop for adventure activities (Wattchow and Brown, 2011), underscores the necessity of reevaluating and the repositioning of traditional approaches to outdoor education. Place-responsive education presents an alternative approach, encouraging educators and learners to cultivate deep, personal connections with the environment through direct experience (Gruenewald, 2003). It challenges dominant paradigms that prioritise high-adrenaline, quick-hit adventure experiences in flavour of slow, immersive, and relational approaches to place (Beames and Brown, 2016). Given the increasing policy focus on sustainability education, as reflected in initiatives such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) (United Nations, 2015), there is an urgent need to evaluate how outdoor education can play a more substantive role in fostering eco-literacy and pro-environmental behaviours.

This dissertation responds to Wattchow and Brown's (2011) call for practitioner-authored research that explores place-responsiveness in outdoor education, particularly within expedition contexts. It also aligns with broader calls for outdoor educators to receive enhanced training in environmental education to ensure meaningful engagement with ecological issues through their practice (Thomas, Dyment and Prince, 2021). This study examines the potential of

place-responsive education to bridge the gap between adventure and environmental learning offering insights that could inform future curriculum design and policy initiatives.

Locating and contextualising the study in outdoor education

Outdoor education is a multifaceted field with diverse interpretations and applications across different contexts, both in the United Kingdom (UK) and globally (Humberstone, 2000; Higgins and Nicol, 2002). The way it is framed and delivered varies significantly, shaped by educational philosophies, institutional priorities, and socio-political agendas (Beames, Mackie, and Atencio, 2019). Within the UK, outdoor education encompasses a variety of approaches from residential field studies and adventure-based learning to environmental education and sustainability-focused expeditions. This research is positioned within this broader landscape, exploring the intersection of place-responsiveness, environmental education, and expeditionary- based learning. Place-responsive pedagogy requires outdoor educators to respond to the places they inhabit, engaging with local narratives, histories, and ecosystems to foster deeper environmental connections (Hill and Brown, 2014). A central focus of this research is the role of place attachment and cultural engagement in shaping environmental knowledge and concern. By immersing learners in ecologically and culturally rich settings, this study investigates whether sustained exposure to place-based experiences influences participants perceptions of, and relationships with, the environment.

A key debate in the field of outdoor education concerns the extent to which meaningful place-responsive learning can occur in non-local environments. Some scholars argue that place-based education should prioritise local settings to enhance familiarity and long-term stewardship (Smith, 2007; Mannion, Fenwick and Lynch, 2013; Leather and Thorsteinsson, 2021). Others contend that expeditions to unfamiliar environments can provide powerful transformative experiences, fostering cross-cultural understanding and broadening learners' ecological awareness (Loynes, 2010; Allison and Stott, 2021). This research contributes to this discourse by examining how a non-local sustainability-focused expedition affects participants' engagement with place and environmental issues.

Research aims and objectives

The primary aim of this research is to examine how a place-responsive, sustainability-focused expedition experience influences participants sense of place and their environmental knowledge and concern. The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. Plan, develop and implement a research approach with a focus on place, environmental knowledge, and environmental concern.
2. Evaluate the effect of the key experiences of this expedition on the student experience.
3. Reflect upon these findings and evaluate implications of these for the researchers own, and other outdoor educators' practice.

Research question

How does an environmental sustainability-focused, place-responsive approach to an outdoor education expedition experience affect the sense of place in participants and the development of environmental knowledge and concern?

Methodological overview

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach within an interpretivist paradigm, recognising that knowledge is co-constructed through lived experience and social interaction (Telford, 2019). The methodology incorporates autoethnography, participant observation, and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to capture the depth and complexity of participants' experiences (Humberstone and Nicol, 2019). Data was collected through:

- Reflective journals, maintained by participants throughout the expedition.
- Group interviews, conducted at the end of the trip to facilitate collaborative reflection.
- Semi-structured individual interviews conducted one-month post-expedition to explore lasting impacts.
- Researcher's autoethnographic journal, documenting observations, and reflexive insights.

The intervention consisted of a seventeen-day place-responsive expedition to Jambiani, Zanzibar, designed intentionally to immerse participants in local environments and cultural narratives. The itinerary was structured to develop a deep engagement with place, allowing

learners to develop ecological literacy through experiential and sensory learning from Indigenous perspectives (Beames, 2015; Lil and Shein, 2022). Ethical considerations, including cultural sensitivity and environmental impact, were addressed to ensure responsible research practice (Allison and Higgins, 2002; Allison and Beames, 2010).

Geographical and institutional context

South Devon College is a Further Education (FE) college with a University Centre attached, located centrally in Torbay. The Adventure Sports Department facilitates a range of provisions from level two to level six designed to develop the skills, knowledge, and behaviours required to pursue a career in outdoor adventure education (South Devon College, 2023). The researcher is the Programme Coordinator for the Adventure Sports Department with responsibility for the intent, implementation, and impact of the curriculum.

Prior to the commencement of the researcher's Masters course, an application was made for Turing Project (UK Government, 2023) funding to take a group of learners on an 'ecologically focused' expedition. The funding bid was written based around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG's); specifically goals 10 (Reduced inequalities); 13 (Climate action); 14 (Life below water) and 15 (Life on land) (United Nations, 2015). The original concept being a 'Geopark Exchange' based on a relationship formed in 2015 between the Adventure Sports Department at South Devon College and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) English Riveira Global Geopark Management Group (English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark, 2022). The partnership was formed, partially because of the researcher wanting to include local environmental knowledge in a range of modules delivery (unwittingly at the time moving the department to what could be described as a more place-responsive curriculum). At that time, UNESCO Global Geoparks were attempting to develop further Geopark links with the African continent. Turing Project funding requires there to be a 'host organisation' and whilst multiple attempts were made to form one with Ngorongoro Lengai Geopark, unfortunately it never came to fruition. The South Devon College 'Projects Team', determined to use the funding, sought another 'host organisation' and through Kaya Travel (Kaya Responsible Travel, 2023) were connected to African Impact. African Impact works

in four sub-Saharan countries delivering 'responsible volunteer and internship projects' (African Impact, 2024). These are based in local communities, facilitated by the Indigenous population and include cultural, educational, health and environmental focused projects. Kaya Travel partnered with African Impact to offer a seventeen-day residential experience to Zanzibar, Tanzania, focused on the following outcomes:

- Work experience with African Impact's Jambiani based, environmental sustainability, educational and community projects.
- Cultural experiences including national and local history, language, flora, and fauna.
- Education through UNSDGs lessons and presentations.

Adventure Sports level three FE learners from both years one and two were informed of the sixteen places available for this trip. There was an application and interview process (as per Turing Project guidance) designed to make sure that the participants had considered why they wanted a place on the trip. Eighteen learners applied for the sixteen places and eventually sixteen were interviewed (due to two dropping out), so all those that wanted to attend were able to. The trip was fully funded meaning that there was no financial barrier to participation. The final group consisted of six females and ten males all aged between sixteen to nineteen.

Dissertation structure

The dissertation is organised into six main chapters, each serving a distinct purpose.

Chapter 2: Methodology - Outlines the research design, data collection, and analysis methods employed in this study. This chapter will also address ethical considerations and the limitations of the chosen approach.

Chapter 3: Literature review – Provides a critical examination of existing research and theoretical perspectives related to place-based education, eco-literacy and environmental concern. This chapter will also highlight gaps in literature and provide the theoretical foundation for the study.

Chapter 4: Data analysis and findings – Presents the results of the thematic analysis, highlighting the key themes that emerged from participant experiences.

Chapter 5: Discussion - Interprets the findings within the broader context of outdoor and environmental education research, considering their implications for theory and practice.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations - Summarises the study's key findings and offer recommendations for future research and outdoor education practice.

A full list of references and any relevant appendices is included at the end of the dissertation.

Conclusion

This introduction has outlined the study's background, research rationale, objectives, and methodological framework. By investigating the role of place-responsive education in shaping environmental knowledge and concern, this study contributes to a growing body of literature advocating for more sustainable and engaged approaches in outdoor education. Specifically, it examines whether a sense of place can be developed or enhanced in non-local environments through an alternative, environmental sustainability-driven expedition model. The following chapters will further explore these themes, situating this research within broader academic and practical discourse on environmental sustainability in outdoor education.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed justification of the research design, methods, and approaches employed in this study. It outlines how the research questions were addressed by specifying the philosophical underpinnings, research paradigm, and methodological choices. The chapter describes the intervention, data collection procedures, and analytical methods, ensuring transparency and rigour. Ethical considerations and the rationale for selecting specific methods are also examined, demonstrating their alignment with the study's objectives. By presenting this comprehensive overview, the chapter establishes the methodological robustness of the research, ensuring that the findings contribute meaningfully to the academic discourse on place-based outdoor education. This study investigates how a place-responsive approach to an expedition fosters a sense of place among participants, potentially leading to the development of environmental knowledge and concern. Additionally, the research focuses on the development of the researcher's own practice, offering insights and recommendations for broader outdoor education practice.

Research philosophy

The methodology of this study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed through subjective experiences and interactions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). This aligns with a relativist ontology, which posits that multiple realities exist as individuals interpret their environments differently. A subjectivist epistemology underpins this study, emphasising that knowledge is co-created through intersubjective engagement and lived experience (Telford, 2019).

Phenomenology is central to this paradigm, as it seeks to understand how individuals experience and interpret the world around them. This is particularly relevant to place-responsive education, where meaning is derived from embodied, sensory, and perceptual engagement with the environment. Heidegger's (1927) concept of 'being-in-the-world', highlighted how individuals construct meaning through their lived interactions with their surroundings, an idea that resonates with place-based outdoor education (Wattchow, 2021; Brown *et al.,* 2014).

Furthermore, the integration of autoethnography within this paradigm acknowledges the researcher's role as a co-constructor of meaning, bridging subjective experiences with broader cultural and environmental narratives (Humberstone and Nicol, 2019). This approach allows for a nuanced exploration of how learners develop a sense of place and environmental awareness through a combination of personal reflection and shared narratives.

Research approach

Given the study's focus on lived experiences within a place-responsive educational context, a phenomenological qualitative approach was adopted. Phenomenology enables an in-depth exploration of how individuals engage with and make sense of their environment. Specifically, Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology was employed, emphasising interpretation over objective description (Brown *et al.,* 2014; Telford, 2019).

Autoethnography was selected as the primary methodology due to its capacity to integrate personal narrative with cultural critique. Humberstone and Nicol (2019) described autoethnography as an "approach that can uncover unique insights into embodied experiences of the life-worlds of being and becoming within social, cultural and political concepts" (p.111), and highlighted its "potential for understanding lived sentient experiences and evoking social and environmental awareness". Porter and Couper (2023) suggested that autoethnography seeks to articulate or critique culture and cultural practices by 'zooming in' on personal, embodied experiences and 'zooming out' to wider cultural concepts and framings.

Ethnographic principles also informed this research design, particularly participant observation, and the collection of student journals as ethnographic data. Ethnography is described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) as "a descriptive, analytical and explanatory study of the culture (and its components), values, beliefs and practices of one or more groups" (p.351). Research conducted on expeditions requires a reflexive and adaptable approach due to the dual role of participant and researcher (Allison and Beames, 2010). It is important to balance immersion in expedition life with the need to collect meaningful data, without compromising the experience or altering participant behaviour (Allison and Beames, 2010). Ethnographic methodologies such as participant observation, provide deeper insights by allowing the researcher to live closely

with participants, fostering a level of understanding of outdoor educational processes (Stan, 2019). However, this level of engagement necessitates a high degree of reflexivity to avoid influencing group dynamics or losing objectivity (Stan, 2019). To mitigate potential biases and to ensure ethical and credible research, the researcher will only provide time and a reminder to use the prompts to complete their journals. There will also be no 'external framing' of each activity. External framing refers to how a facilitator guides participants by giving specific instructions, objectives, or interpretations before, during or after the activity (Roberts, 2011). The participants will be left to reflect upon their experiences on their own and with their peers.

Research methods

The intervention

The intervention (Appendix 1) was a seventeen-day place-responsive expedition to Jambiani, a village on the east coast of Zanzibar. The expedition included three days of travel by plane and fourteen full days staying in the same accommodation within a secure compound in central Jambiani, approximately 100m from the beach. Jambiani, along with its coastline, has only recently (15 years) seen tourism development. Participants were accommodated two or three to an ensuite room, with locally sourced meals provided by two local cooks. The compound was maintained by two housekeepers, and a Maasai security guard provided overnight security from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. Daily activities, selected, organised, and led by African Impact, were primarily based in Jambiani, where African Impact operate multiple community projects. When activities required travel outside the village, a variety of local transport was arranged. A key component of the intervention was Indigenous leadership, with an African Impact project leader, who usually worked with educational projects in Jambiani, serving as project lead, educator, fixer, and liaison. Indigenous leadership in place-based education is essential for deep and authentic connection to land, culture, and sustainability. Ordons and Hill (2024) emphasised that Indigenous leadership ensures that learning is framed within relational ethics, self-determination, and decolonial perspectives, fostering a meaningful sense of belonging.

The intervention was planned specifically to be place-responsive (Wattchow and Brown, 2011). Staying in one location allowed time to 'dwell' as so many have recommended (e.g. Wattchow and Payne, 2008; Leather and Thorsteinsson, 2021). The planned activities included authentic and Indigenous place-based narratives and embodied experiences relating to local history, culture, and ecology. The intervention also recognised that the learners 'comfort zones' were already being challenged in terms of foreign travel to sub-Saharan Africa (Brown, 2008). Having a secure, clean, and safe place to call 'home', with nutritious local cuisine provided, meant that the learners could fully engage with the planned activities whilst also providing employment and income to the local community. Finally, with African Impact staff and other key members of the local community organising and leading the daily programme of activities, the researcher's role was primarily pastoral, allowing for reflexivity.

Data collection methods

Qualitative method 1: Participants maintained an ethnographic reflective daily journal of their experiences, guided by prompts from the researcher (Appendix 2). This method enabled real-time documentation of sensory and emotional experiences, fostering reflexivity and deeper engagement with learning and sense of place (Humberstone and Nicol, 2019). However, variations in writing skills or engagement with the prompts could affect the quality of the reflections (Allison and Beames, 2010). Additionally, the use of prompts poses the risk of participants framing their responses to align with perceived researcher expectations, potentially reducing authenticity (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

Qualitative method 2: Semi-structured group interviews were conducted on the final day of the expedition. In the morning, all sixteen learners were briefed to reflect on their most significant personal learning outcome related to culture, environment, and personal growth. In the afternoon, they participated in video-recorded group interviews in groups of four on the beach near the accommodation. A familiar setting where they had spent time, such as watching the sunrise. This method encouraged collaborative reflection, allowing participants to build on each other's insights and collectively recall experiences. Group interaction has been shown to stimulate memories and perspectives that may not immerge in individual settings (Cohen,

Manion and Morrison, 2018). However, peer dynamics may have influenced responses, with participants potentially conforming to perceived group norms rather than expressing their authentic views (Flick, 2004).

Qualitative method 3: Semi-structured individual interviews (Appendix 3) were conducted one-month post-expedition to explore participants' sense of place and identify key experiences shaping their perceptions. A reduced sample of five participants, selected to represent different genders and year groups, was used. The responses were audio-recorded. This approach allowed for deeper, personalised reflections without group influence. The one-month interval was chosen to give participants time to process and articulate more enduring impacts. While Prince (2021a) classified long-term impact measurements as three months post-experience, time constraints limited the study to a shorter period. A potential limitation was recall bias, as participants may have forgotten or embellished specific details over time (Leather, 2019). Additionally, the reduced sample size restricted the diversity of perspectives, potentially narrowing the scope of the findings.

Qualitative method 4: An autoethnographic reflective journal was maintained by the expedition leader as an additional dataset to contextualise participant experiences by documenting the researcher's observations and interpretations (Stan, 2019). This approach also enhanced reflexivity, enabling the researcher to critically evaluate their role and influence on the research process (Prince, 2021b). However, researcher bias may have influenced interpretations, reflecting personal assumptions rather than entirely objective observations.

All data were digitally transcribed to MS Word (Microsoft Corporation, 2024) using a process of re-reading, re-listening, and re-watching to ensure accuracy and capture inflections. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes related to participants' experiences and the expedition's contribution to their sense of place. A combination of deductive codes derived from the research question and inductive codes based on the researchers' observations were applied to analyse the three participant data sets. The coding table (Appendix 4) was migrated to an MS Excel Spreadsheet (Microsoft Corporation, 2024), where dialogue from all three data sets was recorded under the appropriate codes. This enabled the researcher to identify

patterns across participants, days, and activities. A more in-depth review of data analysis can be found in the next chapter.

Participants

The research group consisted of sixteen learners aged sixteen to nineteen who were in year one (five females and four males) or two (seven males) of an Adventure Sports course at South Devon College, a Further Education college located in Torbay. All participants went through an application and interview process to earn a place on the fully funded (Turing Project) trip. All who applied were successful and gave informed consent to participate in the research study. Participants were informed on consent of the right to withdraw from the research project at any stage. Assurances were also given at this point about how personal data would be used, stored, and eventually deleted, in line with the University of Wales, Trinity St Davids GDPR policy.

Timescale for research project

Topic	Date
Research proposal approved	November 2023
Recruitment of study group	January 2024
Intervention inc. daily journal writing	June 11th – 27th 2024
Final day interviews	June 27th, 2024
Post intervention semi-structured interviews	July 24th-28th 2024
Data analysis	September 2024
Dissertation write-up	October 2024 – March 2025
Final submission	April 4th 2025

Figure 1: Research timeline

Ethical considerations

The trip was conducted under the South Devon College (SDC) offsite policy in partnership with African Impact, which collaborated with UK-based agent Kaya Travel. The appropriate policies

and insurance were in place. All participants and NOK were informed before applying that SDC's expedition specific risk assessment stipulated adherence to UK Foreign Travel Advice (UK Government, 2025), including seeking medical guidance on vaccinations and anti-malarial drugs. By applying and accepting their place, participants acknowledged these risks. As part of SDC's 'travel pack' by SDC participants submitted proof of vaccination. This research study was formulated after the trips logistics and funding were established, meaning the study itself was secondary to the trips purpose. It is recognised that the expedition involved multiple air journeys, which contribute to global climate change, potentially conflicting with the study's environmental focus. However, Smith (2002) in a joint Youth Explorers Trust/British Ecological Society report, argued that the educational and experiential benefits of extended expeditions outweigh the environmental costs. Huddart and Stott (2019) emphasised that expeditions involving air travel need to be well planned to justify their ecological impact. The study was approved by the Postgraduate Committee after following the Ethical Approval process set by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (Appendix 9).

Cultural sensitivity was another key ethical consideration, particularly in Zanzibar's predominately Muslim community. To ensue appropriate behaviour and cultural respect, participants received pre-trip guidance on dress codes and community interactions (Huddart and Stott, 2019). Additionally, recognising the mixed gender participant group, the accompanying staff included both male and female leaders, ensuring role modelling, mentorship, and psychological and physiological support as recommended by Allison and Higgins (2002).

Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined the philosophical and theoretical foundations of the study, adopting an interpretivist paradigm to explore how knowledge is co-constructed through experience. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed, integrating auto/ethnographic methods to examine the personal, cultural, and environmental dimensions of the study. This methodological framework was designed to align with the study's objectives, ensuring a rigorous and reflexive approach to data collection and analysis. Ethnography, as defined by

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018), provided an analytical lens for understanding cultural practices, while autoethnography (Humberstone and Nicol, 2019; Porter and Couper, 2023) allowed for deeper engagement with participants lived experiences, linking personal narratives to broader societal and environmental themes. A combination on deductive and inductive coding was applied to analyse the data, facilitating the identification of patterns across participant experiences. Ethical considerations were central to this study, ensuring participant confidentiality, informed consent, and researcher reflexivity throughout the process. While the methodology provided a robust foundation, limitations such as potential bias and recall variability were acknowledged.

In the following chapter, key literature is examined to contextualise this study within the broader field of outdoor education and environmental learning. Drawing on existing research, the chapter critically explores theoretical and pedagogical perspectives on outdoor education, expeditions, place-based and environmental education, establishing a foundation for the analysis of findings presented in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3: Literature review and theoretical framework

This literature review critically examines the diverse and contested field of outdoor education, focusing on its definitions, philosophical foundations, and practical applications. This review explores place-based and expeditionary learning within the broader framework of environmental education, examining their roles in fostering ecological literacy, pro-environmental behaviours, and a sense of place (Grunewald, 2003). This chapter seeks to identify key debates, such as the tension between adventure-focused and environment-focused pedagogies, the commodification of outdoor experiences, and the integration of social and ecological dimensions within outdoor education practices. This review identifies gaps in the literature, particularly the limited exploration of how place-responsive and expeditionary pedagogies operate in non-local or dynamic environments. Addressing this gap, the study examines whether such approaches can foster a meaningful sense of place beyond familiar settings. By synthesising these themes, this chapter establishes the theoretical and empirical foundations for the study, situating it within the broader academic debates and clarifying its contribution to outdoor and environmental education research.

Outdoor Education – a confusing and contested construct

Outdoor education is a multifaceted and contested construct that takes diverse forms across the United Kingdom and globally (Higgins and Nicol, 2002). Numerous scholars have attempted to define it, yet consensus remains elusive, with many suggesting that a singular definition may be inadequate (Priest, 1986; Higgins and Loyne, 1997; Humberstone, 2000; Dickinson and Gray, 2022). Humberstone (2000) coined the term 'Outdoor Industry' to encapsulate outdoor education, adventure recreation and 'associated phenomena', avoiding a singular definition. Scholars have long engaged with philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of outdoor education including the debate around whether it is a method or a standalone subject (e.g. Nicol, 2003; Quay and Seaman, 2013; Quay and Seaman, 2016). Various efforts have been made to define, model, or explain the different constituent parts of the 'outdoor industry' (Department for Education and Science, 1975; Higgins and Loyne, 1997; Gilbertson, 2006). But as Humberstone (2000) indicated, how the outdoor industry is interpreted can be very much dependent on the context in which the activities occur. The context is constantly evolving and

can be shaped and influenced, both internally and externally, by individuals and through society (Beames, Mackie and Atencio, 2019).

One of the original definitions of outdoor education proffered by Donaldson and Donaldson (1958) was 'education in, about, and for the outdoors'. Priest (1986) described the Donaldson's definition as "the classic definition of outdoor education" (p.13) but also recognised its many criticisms and went on to offer his own framework. This framework sought to include the value of personal and social development through taking part in adventure out-of-doors (Quay and Seaman, 2013). Priest (1986) suggested that outdoor education was the 'umbrella' term that covered two distinct forms 'environmental education' and 'adventure education. Mortlock (1989) suggested that the framework of outdoor adventure facilitation was to create an increased awareness of self, others, and the environment.

The environment or environmental education has featured heavily in literature relating to the development of outdoor education in the United Kingdom. Since the establishment of what later became the Institute for Outdoor Learning in 1970 (Ogilvie, 2013), environmental education has been recognised as one of the key pillars. This emphasis is evident in the widely adopted model proffered by Higgins and Loyne (1997), which, alongside outdoor activities and personal and social development, has environmental education as one of the central tenets underpinning outdoor education practice in the United Kingdom. Recently this foundation has been challenged, particularly in relationship to the development of nature connection and pro-environmental behaviours (Lugg, 2007; Wattchow and Brown, 2011; Sandell and Öhman, 2013; Pleasants and Gough, 2021). Due in part, to what has been posited as the commodification of outdoor education, with a current focus on adventure activities and the use of the environment as merely a location in which the activities take place (Loynes, 1998; Loynes, 2002; Brookes, 2002; Payne and Wattchow, 2008; Wattchow and Brown, 2011). Many have identified that commodification seen in outdoor activities replicates the globalisation of dominant market forces internationally (Humberstone, 2000; Higgins, 2003; Beames and Brown, 2016; Cooper, 2018). Ultimately, this globalisation born partly from the first industrial revolution in the developed world, has impacted greatly and led to 'environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and human induced (anthropogenic) climate change' (Hill, 2012).

Whilst it is recognised that many of the attempts to define outdoor education are born from the desire to prove, improve, and establish outdoor education as a valuable and meaningful approach to education, this confliction can also be challenging. Recent firsthand experiences in designing outdoor courses and curriculum, in particular what to name the courses themselves, have induced drawn-out debates with colleagues. The South Devon College Further Education level three course is called Adventure Sports (an inherited name), primarily due to the college marketing team's desire for it to appear 'exciting' to young people. The course is primarily skills-based, underpinned with a knowledge base guided by an Awarding Organisation specification. As Mannion and Lynch (2016) highlighted, that whilst education out-of-doors can be concerned with all three areas highlighted in Higgins and Loynes (1997) model, most current practices tend to focus on two out of the three. This is recognisable in the Adventure Sports Department approach, utilising adventurous activities in a range of increasingly dynamic environments to develop the inter and intrapersonal skills required to lead, instruct, and keep others safe in the outdoors. As previously highlighted, many have suggested that this approach is at the expense of contact with nature and the many opportunities that the environment can present for learning.

Expeditions – a contested delivery model

A popular delivery method used in outdoor education in the United Kingdom is through expeditions. There is a myriad of examples of its use in terms of duration, location, style and outcomes. There has been a long tradition of using journeys or expeditions for educational purposes in the United Kingdom (Loynes, 2010; Allison and Stott, 2021). Further, that the undertaking of these 'journeys' has "been a fundamental component of outdoor and environmental education in schools, colleges and universities" (Allison and Stott, 2021, p.163). Indeed, the Adventure Sports Department at South Devon College has an expedition module embedded in delivery in both the Further and Higher Education courses that it facilitates. Loynes (2010) suggested that the word "expedition" is important, "conjuring up something specific that is different" to say "journeys" or "trips" (p.1). Allison and Stott (2021) used the terms 'journey' and 'expedition' interchangeably. Once again, there is lingual confusion and contest based on the many different fields of interest in relation to their

historical, cultural, and educational use. Loynes (2010) provided some context by proffering that for some the word expedition implies a “wilderness setting”, and for others it means “contrasting cultures and landscapes”. Nevertheless, many do agree that careful planning, clear identification and consideration of learning outcomes, and careful leadership and facilitation are essential (Loynes, 2010; Mannion, Fenwick and Lynch, 2013; Stott *et al.,* 2015; Prince, 2021a). Further, Loynes (2010) suggested that expeditions that engage with the issues faced by the world provide one of the strongest rationales for their use. Prince (2021a) identified that expeditions, along with field trips and environmental education activities, can be components within the ‘typology’ of outdoor adventure residential programs. Adventure is commonly defined as an experience that contains a degree of uncertainty regarding the outcome (Mortlock, 1989; Hopkins and Putman, 1993; Beames and Brown, 2016). Beames and Brown (2016) suggested that outdoor journeys have the potential to provide a balanced approach (in terms of mastery, authenticity, agency, and uncertainty) to adventurous learning. Considering that many of the participants of this research study have never left the UK, and for those that have mainly in the form of a traditional family holiday abroad to Europe, the planned intervention could be identified as an ‘adventure’.

Numerous prior studies have assessed the impact of expeditions (e.g. Stott and Hall, 2003; Pike and Beames, 2007; Takano, 2010), with many adopting outcome-focused methodologies that utilised pre and post data collection approaches (Prince, 2021a). Recognising the plethora of research was ‘disparate’, Stott *et al.,* (2015) carried out a thematic analysis on the benefits of overseas expedition experiences, theming the results around Greenaway’s (1998) Four Arrows model of inward (personal), outward (others), upward (one's potential) and downward (connection to earth). Thirty-five previous studies were included with a range of impacts ‘themed’ into Greenaway’s model. Impacts included personal and social development in terms of resilience, team building, self-sufficiency, and an increase in environmental awareness. *Stott et al.,* (2015, p.220) identified two primary themes related to the environment: appreciation of the natural environment and, more relevant to this study, environmental awareness. They concluded that environmental awareness could have a social or political dimension, whereby participants recognised their privileged position in the world and the development of cultural

understanding. Whilst making this conclusion, Stott *et al.,* (2015) recognised that further research should understand the context in which the learning was framed by the leaders. This was critically important to fully analyse the impacts of expedition experiences.

Quay and Seaman (2013) suggest that Donaldson's and Donaldson's (1958) original definition of in, for and about the outdoors all have equal importance, "working together to connect people, place and activity" (Mannion and Lynch, 2016, p.86). Further, Mannion and Lynch (2016) argue that place should be regarded as a central and dynamic element in understanding human experience within the world. They proposed that outdoor education can be designed and implemented more effectively when it intentionally incorporates a sense of place, a consideration they see as essential for addressing the complex ecological and social challenges facing planet earth.

Place – introduction of theoretical framework

One of the first to explore the notion of place was the geographer Tuan (1977). Tuan proposed that human experience is influenced by the act of dwelling within spaces and places, whilst emphasising the distinction between the two. Drawing on the work of Tuan (1977), Leather and Thorsteinsson (2021), characterised spaces as generic and broadly applicable to any location and places as more intimate, personal, and imbued with narrative and local significance. Drawing on the work of Relph (1976), Wattchow (2021) identified the "existential space" that cultures such as the Aboriginals inhabit are sacred and symbolic, whilst technological and industrial cultures see them as mainly geographical for functional and utilitarian purposes. Leading to what Relph (1976) called 'placelessness', Leather and Thorsteinsson (2021) suggested that space becomes place through experiencing it both aesthetically and cognitively, developing belonging and attachment. Wattchow (2021) suggested that place is a "dynamic, unifying and transdisciplinary concept" (p.102) that utilises body's senses to assist us to work with, rather than against, the environmental conditions. Higgins (2009) suggested that forming a bond with a place serves as a foundation for building relationships within a community. This, in turn, fosters personal growth by encouraging individuals to recognise the impact of their actions and develop a sense of responsibility, citizenship, and care for others. Once this occurs

at a local level, it also has the potential to generate the knowledge and desire to act globally (Beames, Higgins and Nicol, 2012). Further, Gruenewald (2003) posited that developing an understanding of place allows for a connection that is much deeper and at a more political level and that this has the potential to pave the way for people to take action to improve them. Place-based education replaces the notion of conquering something and the activity itself loses significance. Instead, the location, environment, and community that the activity occurs in should be the central focus for learning and personal development. Wattchow (2021) suggested that "place grounds us and is a good fit for the work of outdoor environmental educators who are attentive to their learners and locales" (p.102).

Place-based pedagogy in outdoor education

The emergence of place-based education in relation to outdoor education can be seen as both a response to the modernity and globalisation, and the recent criticisms on dominant practices in outdoor adventure education. Wattchow and Brown (2011) suggested that its emergence has come from a "concern about the cumulative effects of modernity upon our ability to respect and care for the local places we call home and the remote places we encounter when we travel" (p.51). The focus on conquering nature to achieve a target, or 'quick hit' activities often in fabricated environments such as high ropes courses, contribute to what Wattchow and Brown (2011) called a 'denial of place'… ultimately, using the activity environment as 'space'. Baker (2005) highlighted the 'landlessness' endemic in much programming, meaning that activities are taking place in what Baker labelled 'Any Woods USA', missing opportunities to build connection and awareness. Baker (2005) suggests

> The day has passed when participants can leave adventure-based programs with a sense of accomplishment, but without a sense of their relationship to the land.
>
> (Baker, 2005, pp.268–269)

Place-based pedagogical approaches encourage developing a connection with place that could be in the "near and far, urban and rural and everything in between" (Beames, 2015, p.28). Williams (2019) suggests that considering the past, present and future use of land whilst in these places, encourages discourse and student-led learning.

Place-based education is concerned with “facilitating meaningful relationships with places” (Mannion and Lynch, 2016, p.87). Gruenewald’s (2003) Critical Pedagogy of Place contributed to the development of educational discourses and practices that explicitly “examine the place-specific nexus between environment, culture, and education” (p.10). Place-based literature encourages practitioners to rethink outdoor education as more than just activities and consider the relationships between self, people, and the more-than-human world (Wattchow and Brown, 2011; Beames, Higgins and Nicol, 2012; Mannion and Lynch, 2016). A critical pedagogy of place asks educators to consider how their curriculum choices and the environments we inhabit relate to one another, and what this may mean in the future. Influenced “by an ethic of eco-justice and other socio-ecological traditions that interrogate the intersection between cultures and ecosystems”, place pedagogy is connected both culturally and ecologically (Gruenewald, 2003, p.10). Wattchow and Brown (2011) suggested place-based educators see and feel places as educational synergies, where environment, nature, culture, past, present, and potential futures created fertile educational ground.

Place-responsive pedagogy

As highlighted, place-responsive outdoor education involves responding to the places that you are in, so a generic prescription is not possible. Acknowledging this, to guide outdoor educators Wattchow and Brown (2011) proposed four signposts for place responsive education. First, being present in and with place; This calls for patience, personal space, and calm to give students time to adjust to their surroundings. This is not likely to happen if students are afraid or moved too quickly through areas. Secondly, the power of place-based stories and narratives; Learners can make sense of the world through experience that entails interpretation and introspection. This requires a facilitative approach that incorporates authentic and Indigenous story telling in the places they work, to help build understanding and attachment to places. Thirdly, apprenticing ourselves to outdoor places; this involves a combination of point one and two and requires an understanding of how our experience is shaped through embodied encounters and knowing about places through history, environment, and culture. Finally, the representation of place experiences; this involves developing the learners’ capacity to interpret

how the places they are learning in are portrayed, and the personalisation of these interpretive works in ways that learners wish to respond.

Sense of place

'Sense of place' represents a multidimensional construct encompassing the social, emotional, and cognitive connections individuals develop with specific locations (Leather and Thorsteinsson, 2021). Tuan (1977) introduced the notion of topophilia, describing the emotional attachment people feel toward certain places. This emotional connection, also termed place attachment (Seamon, 2013), is integral to outdoor education, as fostering these relationships can deepen participants' engagement with and appreciation for the natural environment. Kudryavtsev, Stedman and Krasny (2012) suggested that there were two components of sense of place; place-attachment and place-meaning (see Figure 2).

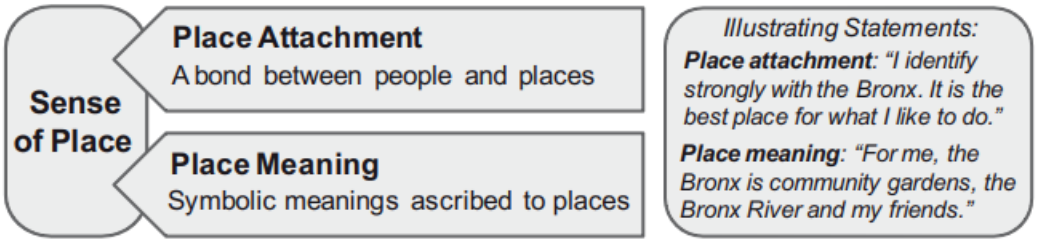

Figure 2: Components of a sense of place (Kudryavtsev, Stedman and Krasny, 2012)

Deringer, Hodges and Griffin (2020, p.129) added another dimension in terms of "place-awareness" through the development of emotional bonds, suggesting that place-based experiences can add to a "sense of harmony" with a positive influence on wellbeing. Thorsteinsson *et al*., (2024) identified four themes that contribute to the development and variation of a sense of place, offering insight and meanings around the experiences that contributed to a sense of place. Each of which has significant implications for outdoor education pedagogy. The first being the conditions for learning and group identity. Thorsteinsson *et al.,* (2024) highlighted that Dewey's (1938/1997) concept of transactional nature of the education process involving students, educators, and the environment underscores the reciprocal relationship within learning environments. Specifically, how people, places, and interactions shape a learner's connection to the surroundings. Further, Smith, Steel

and Gidlow (2010) added that structured cooperative experiences such as collaborative projects and shared responsibilities help to foster a collective identity and sense of belonging within the group, reinforcing a connection to the learning environment.

The second theme being the role of time and slow pedagogy. Thorsteinsson *et al.,* (2024), suggested that time is a crucial factor in cultivating a deep sense of place, where prolonged, unhurried exposure to an environment enhances sensory and emotional awareness. Payne and Wattchow (2008) recognised the importance of the 'slowing down' of our journeys, to allow a certain amount of 'dwelling and responding'. A slow pedagogy, which intentionally allocates time for students to experience, reflect, and interact with their surroundings, fosters a more profound sense of place (Leather and Thorsteinsson, 2021). For example, extended journeys or activities within a place enable learners to attune to the subtle layers of sensory input which may enhance their awareness and emotional connection.

Thirdly, physical engagement and embodied activity. Direct interaction with an environment enables people to form emotional and sensory connections that can strengthen their bond and understanding of that location. According to Thorsteinsson *et al*., (2024), being on the sea, for example, can result in a transforming relationship that combines feelings of freedom, trust, and connection to the physical environment. These embodied experiences support Quay's (2013) suggestion that outdoor learning requires sensory and aesthetic encounters to strengthen the emotional and cognitive ties that create a lasting sense of place. A deeper, multisensory connection and appreciation of the environment is therefore made possible by physical involvement, which stimulates a variety of senses (Wattchow and Brown, 2011).

Finally, historical, and cultural awareness. Learning about the historical significance or cultural narratives of a location transforms it from a mere backdrop to a site of meaning and memory. For example, understanding local history imbues the place with a narrative that links past to present, enhancing students' emotional and intellectual connections (Williams, 2019). This theme supports Mannion and Lynch's (2016) perspective that place-based education fosters a holistic understanding by connecting students with both the physical and cultural dimensions of place. Such awareness allows learners to see places not only through their own cultural lenses

but also through those of others, fostering a respect for the diverse ways in which people connect to, value, and preserve their environments (Wattchow and Brown, 2011).

In summary, a sense of place in outdoor education arises from the integration of social bonds, adequate time, physical engagement, and cultural and historical context. Together, these factors foster a holistic, multidimensional relationship with a place that enables learners to develop an enduring, meaningful connection to their environment.

Environmental knowledge and concern

Outdoor education has traditionally been seen as a valuable tool for public environmental concern (Place, 2004; Sandell and Öhman, 2010). Chawla (1998), building on the work of Tanner (1980) suggested that experiences of nature are one of the most significant life experiences that can contribute to positive environmental attitudes. Thomas, Dyment, and Prince (2021) argued that the need for outdoor environmental educators, who understand the ecological crisis that humanity and the planet are facing, has never been more critical. Further, they highlight the requirement for a "demanding set of knowledge, experiences and skills to be able to provide outdoor, experiential programmes that prepare their participants for the challenges that lie ahead" (p.1). One of the essential knowledge elements should include environmental knowledge. Environmental knowledge encompasses an understanding of natural systems, ecological processes, and the impact of human activities on these systems. Drawn from a wide range of disciplines, this knowledge includes insights into ecosystems, biodiversity, climate dynamics, and sustainability (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002; Rickinson, 2001). It can also involve the comprehension of environmental policies, ethical considerations, and conservation practices, providing a basis for informed decision-making (Hill and Brown, 2014). David Orr (1992) coined the term eco-literacy, describing the goal of ecological literacy as fostering a mindset that seeks connections. Suggesting that this was in contrast with the specialisation and narrow focus characteristic of much traditional education. Eco-literacy is characterised as "the ability to use ecological understanding, thinking, and habits of mind for living in, enjoying, and/or studying the environment" (Berkowitz, Ford and Brewer, 2005, p.228, quoted in Martin, 2008). Capra and Stone (2010) proposed that eco-literacy serves as an educational framework

emphasising the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living organisms and environmental phenomena. Further, Capra (1999) highlighted the importance of shifting perceptions from understanding objects to recognising relationships, identifying this transition as the essence of "systems thinking" and the intellectual foundation of eco-literacy (Capra, 1999, p.11, quoted in Martin, 2008). Eco-literacy or environmental knowledge can help learners to recognise the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic issues and has the potential to foster environmental concern and greater engagement in pro-environmental behaviours (Chawla, 1999).

Environmental concern is defined as an individual's awareness, emotional investment, and behavioural commitment toward protecting and sustaining the natural environment. It embodies both cognitive and affective dimensions, encompassing knowledge of environmental issues, ethical responsibility, and readiness to take action to mitigate environmental degradation (Fransson and Gärling, 1999; Dunlap and Jones, 2002). In the context of outdoor education, earlier studies suggested that outdoor learning experiences can amplify environmental concern by engaging learners emotionally and sensorially, encouraging pro-environmental behaviours such as conservation and stewardship (Rickinson *et al.*, 2004). Whilst agreeing with this premise, Sandell and Öhman (2013, p.37) highlight that this can be problematic for two reasons. The first being the difficulty in discerning the relationship from empirical evidence due to being "multifaceted and context dependent" and the relationship between student's previous experiences. The second is that environmental concern can mean many different things, due to the broadening and deepening of the topic as awareness increases. Clark and Mcphie (2014) added a third concern around the transferability of this exposure back into what they called the "artificial surroundings of their normal lives" (p.199). Lugg (2007) identified a discourse expressing concern that the potential for outdoor experiences to foster environmental awareness and action is limited by the absence of a structured learning process. Further, Lugg (2007) suggested that researchers have tended to focus on 'what' rather than 'how' questions in the development of curricula and pedagogy, revealing a deficiency in knowledge generation. Could place-based education be the learning process or the 'how' that Lugg (2007) referred to?

Sandell and Öhman (2013) emphasised the importance of enhancing environmental engagement through place-related illustrations of the societal-environmental interdependency. Pleasants and Gough (2021) examined how differing worldviews influence perceptions of and relationships with the environment, especially in educational contexts. They argued that environmental education must address the diversity of cultural and philosophical perspectives shaping learners' attitudes towards nature. By integrating these varied worldviews, educators can more effectively foster ecological understanding and responsiveness. Further, Pleasants and Gough (2021) emphasised the importance of broadening environmental education to encompass not only scientific knowledge but also ethical, cultural, and philosophical dimensions that impact how people relate to and care for their surroundings.

Place - relation with environment

As identified, place has multifaceted significance that can encompass both human and non-human dimensions. Leather and Thorsteinsson (2021) emphasised the importance of recognising humans as part of, and in relationship with, the broader systems of a place. There is clear alignment between the perspective and aims of environmental and place-based education. By engaging with places through a combination of ontological (focused on being) and epistemological (focused on knowing) approaches, place-based education can transcend traditional classroom boundaries, encouraging learners to move beyond conventional structures and immerse themselves in the complexities of their social and natural surroundings (Mannion and Lynch, 2016). Place-based education and environmental education have the potential to converge in their shared aim to integrate knowledge of the natural world with an understanding of human communities. Smith (2007) highlighted that place-based education uniquely emphasises both the social and ecological dimensions of places, differentiating it from more traditional environmental education approaches. By situating learning within specific places, educators can create opportunities for students to explore how human and non-human systems interact, fostering a deeper appreciation for the relationships that shape the world. Further, Nicol (2002) suggests that such approaches challenge the separation between humans and nature, cultivating a more integrated and relational perspective. These shared principles encourage learners to view places as dynamic contexts where ecological, social, and cultural

knowledge converge. Place-based education has the potential to use local environments as live classrooms, providing experiential learning opportunities that promote environmental awareness, cultural understanding, and active engagement with ecological systems. This approach not only enriches environmental education but also helps bridge the gap between theory and practice, fostering a more holistic understanding of sustainability and interconnectedness (Gruenewald, 2003). By moving beyond the classroom and engaging directly with communities and ecosystems, these approaches provide a rich foundation for developing ecological literacy and a deeper commitment to environmental stewardship.

Place and expeditions

Wattchow and Brown (2011) identified that "journeys or expeditions have long been part of the staple diet of pedagogical approaches to outdoor education" and ask the question "can a sensitive and place-responsive approach to outdoor travel be developed?" (p.106). Masculinity, militarism, and imperialism are all historical criticisms of outdoor adventure practice with specific reference to long expeditions far away from home (Loynes, 2002; Wattchow and Brown, 2011; Thorsteinsson *et al*., 2024). As well as many suggesting that place-based and place-responsive educational experiences are best located in the local environment (Smith, 2007; Lugg, 2007; Mannion, Fenwick and Lynch, 2013; Leather and Thorsteinsson, 2021). Further, criticisms of overseas expeditions as a pedagogical tool also include the cost, which can be a barrier to inclusion and access (Allison and Stott, 2021); the environmental impact, including both travelling to and time spent in the location (Huddart and Stott, 2019); cultural impacts, especially insensitivity to cultural norms such as religious codes of dress (Allison and Beames, 2010) and the level of challenge and risk within the activities undertaken (Wattchow and Brown, 2011; Leather and Nicholls, 2016).

Wattchow and Brown (2011), when answering their own question, concluded that for the participant it requires both vulnerability and an absence of fear, whilst also having a heightened sense of comfort in one's surroundings. For the educator, it is important to provide a "simplistic and everyday quality" of experience and teach the learners 'how' to travel. Further, of the importance to pull the students back from the romanticised nuances of the experience to the

"harsh demands of politics, ecology, economy that may imperil a place's future," (Wattchow and Brown, 2011, p.120).

> A traveller becomes an empathetic insider the moment that he or she commits to make the effort to both open their sensing body to the possibilities of a place and to learn what a place is to a local community and to the broader region for whom the place has significance.
>
> (Wattchow and Brown, 2011, p.122)

As the Adventure Sports Department at SDC continues its journey to consider and embed place-based education in its practices, changing the focus of an integral part of our (and the wider sector) delivery model provides an opportunity to explore the benefits for both the learners and wider practitioners. As identified, this could be crucial considering we are responsible for training the next generation of outdoor leaders and educators. Prince (2017) identified the importance of role models in environmental sustainability. Whilst a wholesale transformation of education systems to focus primarily on the issues global challenges facing the planet may be the utopia (Hill and Brown, 2014). It is important to recognise that the next generation of outdoor educators will become the managers and academics of the future, with the ability to embed cultural change within the 'outdoor industry'.

There is potential for an expedition, planned intentionally with a place-responsive focus, to integrate two vastly different worldviews and explore the impact of these on learning in relation to place. Part of the intentionality of the intervention design must consider the ethical concerns relating to expeditions raised by Beames and Allison (2010). The researcher has attempted to address these in the methodology chapter. This study aims to explore whether a place-responsive approach can be applied to an expedition far from home and identify the factors that may contribute to this. Specifically, a balance through dwelling within a community and taking part in activities that are led by and have a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of that community and its environment. Allowing for an exploration of the intersections of culture and ecology, and the influences of these on the development of a sense of place and environmental knowledge and concern.

Chapter summary

This literature review has critically examined the contested landscape of outdoor education, highlighting its evolving definitions, philosophical foundations, and pedagogical applications. A key insight emerging from this review is the growing recognition of place-responsive and expeditionary learning as viable frameworks for developing eco-literacy, pro-environmental behaviours, and a deeper sense of place. However, gaps remain in the literature, particularly regarding how these pedagogies function in non-local environments, where learners engage with unfamiliar landscapes and cultural contexts. This study directly responds to these gaps by investigating whether a sustainability-focused, place-responsive expedition can cultivate a meaningful sense of place and environmental awareness beyond local settings. By bridging the divide between adventure-based and environmentally embedded approaches, this research contributes to ongoing discussions on redefining outdoor education to align with contemporary sustainability imperatives.

Building on these theoretical insights, the next chapter presents the empirical findings on how participants navigated a non-local environment through a place-responsive expedition. Using a thematic analysis, it examines how engagement with place shaped their environmental knowledge, ecological awareness, and sense of belonging in unfamiliar landscapes.

Chapter 4: Data analysis and findings

This chapter presents the findings of the research investigating the influence of an environmentally sustainability-focused, place-responsive outdoor education expedition on participants' sense of place, environmental knowledge, and concern. Qualitative data was collected through participant interviews, reflective journals, and field observations. Thematic analysis was utilised to identify and categorise key themes and patterns within the data. The analysis revealed several key themes, each elucidated with supporting evidence from participant narratives and relevant literature, highlighting the expeditions impact on participants' experiences and perspectives. These findings lay the foundation for the subsequent discussion and conclusions, addressing the broader implications of the study.

Data Analysis

The three datasets generated from participants were all transcribed to MS Word (Microsoft Corporation, 2024) documents (Appendices 5-7.). Handwritten daily journals were transcribed using voice recognition in MS Word (Microsoft Corporation, 2024), followed by manual verification for accuracy. The group interviews and semi-structured interviews were transcribed using MS Stream (Microsoft Corporation, 2025), with all transcripts subsequently reviewed against the original audio and video recordings. This familiarisation process allowed the researcher to become "intimately familiar" with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2013 p. 204). The transcription process adhered to best practices outlined by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) using both audio and video files to capture the tone, emotion, and inflections. This ensured the responses were contextualised accurately. Filled pauses were removed from the transcriptions for clarity.

Thematic analysis and coding

Thematic analysis was conducted in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework which involves:

1. Familiarisation with data – As previously detailed, this phase involved transcribing the data and immersion in its content to gain and in-depth understanding.

2. Generating initial codes - A hybrid approach to coding was applied, combining deductive (theory and research question driven) and inductive (data-driven) coding (Thomas, 2006). Emergent patterns and themes not previously identified were captured during the familiarisation and observation phases (Coding table: Appendix 4). The combination of deductive and inductive coding ensured a nuanced exploration of the interplay between personal, cultural, and environmental narratives (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

Theme	Sub-theme 1	Sub-theme 2
Enhanced sense of place through cultural exchange	Language acquisition as a tool for connection and place attachment	Reflection on simple life and environmental values
Enhanced sense of place relearning cultural-historical perspectives	Decolonial approach to outdoor education	Importance of historical learning in relation to place
Environmental knowledge through learning Indigenous perspectives	Indigenous knowledge systems and embodied practice	Direct experience and ecoliteracy
Environmental concern through direct exposure and sharing with others	Direct experiences as catalysts for environmental awareness	Sharing with others
Improved physical, mental, and social wellbeing	Wellbeing and place	Dwelling and place-based wellbeing

Figure 3: Themes and sub-themes derived from data analysis

3. Searching for themes – Post coding, data was systematically categorised into overarching themes (Figure 3). This process involved iterative cross-comparison, where initial codes were grouped into broader conceptual patterns based on semantic similarity, frequency, and theoretical alignment (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Additionally, the researcher's autoethnographic journal provided a reflexive lens, ensuring that interpretive bias were critically examined throughout the thematic categorisation process.

4. Reviewing themes – The initially identified themes were rigorously evaluated for coherence and relevance resulting in a refined thematic structure (Figure 3).
5. Defining and naming themes – Each theme was clearly delineated, with sub-themes identified based on both existing literature and key findings. These sub-themes were then used to formulate sub-headings in the discussion chapter.
6. Producing the report – The final analysis and interpretation of the themes are comprehensively presented in the discussion chapter.

Findings

The thematic analysis yielded five primary themes, each encompassing several sub-themes that elucidate the factors influencing participants' development of a sense of place, environmental knowledge, and concern. The sub-themes were identified through a combination of deductive analysis, informed by existing literature, and inductive analysis, which allowed for the emergence of unexpected patterns within data. Notably, emergent themes highlighted the relationship between place-based learning and wellbeing, as well as the combined influence of cultural immersion and learning from Indigenous perspectives. The following sections will delve into each theme, integrating participant reflections and relevant literature to provide a comprehensive understanding. Additionally, data from semi-structured interviews conducted one-month post-expedition will be incorporated to assess the sustainability of the expeditions impact and any reported actions reflecting the transfer of learning in the participants sense of place or environmental concern.

Enhanced sense of place through cultural exchange

A deepened sense of place emerged from immersive cultural exchange. Learning the local language, participating in village life, and reflecting on personal and historical connections contributed to participants' evolving perspectives on place and identity.

Many participants reflected on the impact of learning Swahili (Figure 4), describing it as a gateway to creating connection and belonging with the local community and increasing their confidence in unfamiliar surroundings.

'What stuck out to me was us speaking to the locals in Swahili. It was fun because not only did it boost my knowledge and my language improved, but it also boosted our confidence, and we really got on with the locals a lot more when we spoke in Swahili'

Figure 4: P2 reflection on the impact of learning Swahili

The participant's day-to-day interactions with the African Impact team at the compound base and with the locals in Jambiani village appeared to help shape perceptions of the participants own lifestyle and values. During the final day group reflections one participant (Figure 5) highlighted the importance of the time given for cultural immersion:

'I have learnt a lot about myself on this trip. I have found that taking a step back and really thinking about how you act, speak, and present yourself is a big thing. It changes the way people see you. Trying new things like speaking to the locals in Swahili, make a few jokes and being as open to their culture as I can be. It has really helped me to be more in tune with myself and just live life the best I can. To see everyone change, grow, and try new things and just be a part of their culture. It feels like we have come here and become part of their community'.

Figure 5: P15 personal development reflection on final day

One-month post-trip it appears one participant's (Figure 6) sense of place was maintained:

'When I came back home, I said to my family that when I was there it felt like home. Like it was not, oh, we are going back to our accommodation in Jambiani, I would think, oh, we are going back home. I think it is because of the people we were surrounded by; they were just so welcoming. If you had any questions, they were really happy to help you. If you did not understand anything, then they were there for you within an instant. Even the locals, when you were just walking around the street, they were wanting to talk to you. They wanted to ask you questions and you wanted to ask them questions. There was a really nice community of people there'.

Figure 6: P4 reflection one-month post-expedition on sense of place

These reflections support Tuan's (1977) concept of place attachment, where lived experience fosters deeper emotional and intellectual connections. By engaging with language and daily cultural practices, the participants moved towards a place-responsive understanding of their surroundings. The contrast between local lifestyles and their own also prompted reflections on materialism and their wellbeing, reinforcing Gruenewald's (2003) argument that place-based education can serve as a critical lens for examining personal and societal values.

Enhanced sense of place through learning cultural historical perspectives

Several participants described moments of profound reflection when engaging with the region's history whilst acknowledging the impact of being present in the place. This excerpt is taken from the one-month post-trip data, highlighting the lasting impression being present in the slave chambers had on this participant (Figure 7).

'You know we went to the cells, to that place where the slaves were held? Yeah, that was a big thing. Going into the place and seeing where they were, actually being there. As much as someone told you about it, you feel it because you were actually where they were, you can imagine them being there. You can actually see it, it was hard to be in there, seeing that'.

Figure 7: P1 reflection on being present in place

Another participant noted in their daily journal (Figure 8).

'We then went to a primary school where it was crazy to see how different the learning environment was. We were cooked a meal by the elders. Being here in person shows how completely different they live their lives and what skills they have, which we have forgotten through money and laziness. It has been really sad to see how much we take for granted'.

Figure 8: P11 reflection on different lifestyles and privileges

This supports Williams (2019) assertion that place-responsive education should include cultural and historical narratives alongside ecological learning.

Environmental knowledge through learning Indigenous perspectives

A sense of place is intricately linked to environmental knowledge. The participants' development of eco-literacy was influenced through direct ecological learning from Indigenous perspectives. Participants frequently described moments where Indigenous knowledge provided a new lens for understanding ecological connections (Figure 9).

'Today we learned about numerous different plants and trees and how they help the locals, as well as the knowledge that these people have. Whether this may be making medicine, soap, or food. They know what each plant does along with how to get coconuts down. This was interesting and exciting to listen to and experience'.

Figure 9: P16 daily journal reflection on learning from Indigenous perspectives

Another participant reflected on their senses being opened in their daily journal (Figure 10).

‘Today we went to Zala Park which is owned by a large community and is filled with thousands of trees and plants. The community lives inside the forest and uses flora for remedies, herbs, and spices. Each plant helped in a different way, such as with eczema and to help with asthma. They all smell amazing, citrusy, and minty’.

Figure 10: P4 reflecting on the use of plants by the local community

These reflections align with Li and Shein's (2023) argument that Indigenous ecological knowledge offers an alternative, place-based understanding of ecology.

Environmental concern through direct exposure and sharing with others

Direct exposure to environmental degradation, such as coral bleaching, appeared to influence participants' environmental concern (Figure 11).

‘Learning about the coral and getting out and seeing what has happened because you wouldn't here. Here you would talk about it and hear about it, but you never actually witness it. So, witnessing the coral and the bleaching and the effect of climate change, it is like, wow! It is actually a real thing’.

Figure 11: P5 reflection on the impact of seeing coral bleaching one-month post-expedition

Another participant observed on the final day of the trip (Figure 12).

‘One of the most fascinating things I have learned about the environment is the underwater ecosystems, the coral reefs. They are vital to the health of the ocean and the livelihoods of many coastal communities and the locals here. But sadly, they are facing severe threats from our coral bleaching and climate change. It is something that has made me think about how I act when I am back home and just how I have been acting out here, the little things can make a big difference. That is something I will definitely carry with me’.

Figure 12: P3 reflection on their main environmental learning outcome

Participants reflected post-trip that the environmental knowledge and concern cultivated through their experiences were actively shared with their family members on their return to home (Figure 13).

‘I have talked to my family about a lot of things that I learnt, especially the bleaching. I showed them the video on my phone. They said that it was so clean and so nice. I said it is nice, but look at the video, the majority of them are bleached and a lot of it is dead. Their reaction would just change immediately. They were like that is so sad. Then I would tell them about how we can resolve this problem’.

Figure 13: P4 sharing environmental knowledge with family members

Information sharing illustrates how place-based experiential learning can extend beyond the individual, fostering wider environmental awareness and concern within their own communities. Direct engagement with ecological degradation provided an experiential understanding that classroom-based learning alone may not achieve. These embodied experiences allowed participants to form emotional and cognitive connections with the environment, reinforcing the principles of place-responsive education (Mannion and Lynch, 2016).

Improved physical, mental and social wellbeing through place-based expeditions

Many participants described increased confidence, resilience, and social adaptability, highlighting the holistic benefits of place-based learning (Figure 14).

'This evening was one of the most incredible events of my life. Swimming in the Kuza Caves and heading up to listen to live music and have an amazing meal. I met a local lady and spoke to her in Swahili. I learnt that she was a primary teacher in Jambiani. I am usually too shy to talk to locals in any country abroad. I have really picked up some confidence on this trip'.

Figure 14: P10 reflection on a rise in self confidence

Another participant reflected on the positive impact of cultural immersion (Figure 15).

'This trip has taught me a lot about myself and my own confidence. I found myself laughing and dancing with the Maasai warriors, haggling in the markets to get a cheaper price and striking up conversations with strangers. I realised that when I get involved and open myself up to new experiences, amazing things can happen. I will return home with a new sense of self-assurance and a desire to keep exploring the world'.

Figure 15: P3 final day reflection on their personal outcome

This finding aligns with Ordons and Hill (2024) who emphasise that place-based education fosters secure, trusting connections, enhancing wellbeing.

Chapter summary

These findings suggest that place-responsive expeditions serve as a transformative learning experience, fostering ecological literacy, cultural connection, and personal growth. However, questions remain regarding the longevity of these impacts and their scalability within broader outdoor education frameworks. The next chapter critically examines these findings through the

lens of experiential, place-based, and environmental pedagogy, assessing their broader implications for curriculum design, policy development, and outdoor education practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This discussion critically examines findings in relation to existing literature and broader theoretical frameworks within outdoor education. The research explored the impact of an environmental sustainability-focused, place responsive expedition on participants' sense of place, environmental knowledge, and concern. By analysing the key themes of cultural immersion, historical learning, Indigenous perspectives, direct encounters with environmental degradation, and wellbeing this chapters highlights how these experiences shaped participants engagement with place and sustainability.

Enhanced sense of place through cultural exchange

Findings appear to indicate that cultural immersion played a pivotal role in fostering a deeper sense of place, demonstrating that meaningful engagement with local language, traditions, and daily life enhances the participants ability to connect with place beyond its physical attributes.

Language acquisition as a tool for connection and place attachment

Learning Swahili emerged as a powerful enabler of cultural integration, cultivating a sense of mutual respect, belonging, and deeper relationships with the local communities. The observed cycle of appreciative reciprocity reinforced participants' confidence and sense of place, allowing them to move beyond surface-level interactions towards genuine cultural engagement. Participants highlighted how learning songs and dances from both Zanzibarian and Maasai cultures not only deepened cultural exchange but also encouraged them to share their own traditions. This sense of mutual exchange, supported by use of the local language, fostered mutual respect, reciprocity, and a more authentic experience of place. This aligns with Hill's (2021) assertion that language acquisition facilitates meaningful interactions, shaping both personal identity and social integration, allowing for the navigation of cultural landscapes with confidence and respect.

Reflection on simple life and environmental values

Experiencing a lifestyle with fewer material possessions yet strong community ties prompted participants to critically reflect on their own consumerist behaviours, values, and assumptions.

Participants reflected on the perceived happiness of local communities despite material limitations, prompting critical examination of industrial consumerist values versus ecocentric perspectives (Hill and Brown, 2014). Deeper analysis was evident with some participants observing the relationship between this and the local populations enhanced connection to both nature and community. However, Pleasants and Gough (2021) caution that outdoor educators must be mindful about how these experiences are constructed and facilitated. Their concept of the "the policing of value systems" (p.31) warned against delivery that appeared 'ecocentric' on the surface but inadvertently shaped from an anthropocentric worldview. Cultural experiences must be critically examined to avoid 'romanticising simplicity'. This study supports their concern as some participants initially idealised the local way of life before deeper reflection. This also highlights the importance of debriefing, particularly with locals and from a local perspective, and critical questioning to ensure nuanced engagement with environmental values.

The role of cultural learning in place-responsive education

Engagement with local culture was central to participants' evolving sense of place. Cultural learning offered more than just context, it strengthened emotional and intellectual connections to the environment by illuminating the lived experiences, social histories and worldviews of those that inhabit it. For many, this was their first opportunity to understand a place through the eyes of its people, making the experience not only immersive but transformative. This supports Wattchow's (2021) perspective that place-responsive outdoor education must engage with the stories and lived realities of place, rather than merely treating it as a setting for activities. Similarly, Thorsteinsson *et al.,* (2024) highlighted the value of extended immersive experiences for developing authentic, embodied place attachment, something mirrored in the participant reflections across this study. Dwelling in one place, forming relationships with local people, and engaging in community rhythms fostered a grounded and relational connection to the environment. Several participants' spoke of increased cultural humility and a shift in how they see their role as visitors. Gruenewald (2003) emphasises that viewing place through both ecological and sociopolitical lenses is relevant here. Participants began to see place as an intersection of culture, history and environment, an evolving entity shaped by people and practice.

By intentionally designing the expedition to include language learning, cultural immersion, and time for reflection, the programme enabled participants to identify and challenge their own assumptions. This place-responsive environment gave participants the freedom and confidence to make mistakes, and through group or individual reflection – often with the Indigenous project team at base camp – critically examine any shallow synthesis or misconceptions of new cultural and environmental learning. The participants had time and space in comfortable surroundings to interrogate their assumptions rather than make simplistic conclusions about alternative lifestyles, supporting the development of deeper cultural understanding.

Enhanced sense of place through learning cultural historical perspectives

Exposure to historical sites and educational visits, both cultural and environmental, prompted powerful emotional responses and critical reflections on their position in the world and wider global inequalities. Participants reported a range of emotions relating to both the environmental challenges and the reality of historical narratives, reinforcing the importance of immersive and embodied experiences of a place.

Decolonial approach to outdoor education

A decolonial approach to outdoor education challenges traditional narratives of exploration and conquest that have historically shaped outdoor and adventure education. Participants' encounters with historical sites prompted emotional reflection on colonial histories and their continued impact on the environmental and cultural landscapes. Nicol (2014) suggested that place-based education should actively critique dominant historical narratives and encourage learners to question whose histories are being told. One of the most significant environmental interactions occurred when the participants learned from Mohammed about his personal thirty-year mission to restore the Mangrove swamps to support and protect his community. Participants expressed awe and admiration of his sustained efforts, particularly his ability to inspire and mobilise his community to act without external governmental or financial support. By exposing participants to alternative narratives and marginalised histories, this study suggests that historical learning can cultivate a more complex and ethically engaged sense of place.

However, one of the challenges in integrating historical learning into outdoor education is ensuring that participants engagement with Indigenous historical narratives leads to sustained critical awareness rather than temporary emotional reactions. Smith (2007) argues that place-based education must bridge historical learning with contemporary socio-environmental issues, rather than positioning history as a static past. This study suggests that participants' experiences contributed to a more nuanced understanding of historical injustices and power dynamics embedded in a place. Structured post-experience reflections through journalling, and the application and relationship of the lessons on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to the local community, were intentionally included within the activity programme to create transformative engagement. These structured activities helped sustain the emotional and intellectual responses beyond the immediate experience, reinforcing the importance of continued engagement and application.

Importance of historical learning in relation to place

Historical learning within outdoor education provided a deeper understanding of place by connecting past and present socio-environmental realities. Williams (2019) argues that place-responsive education must acknowledge historical narratives to promote a critical awareness of place. Learning about past injustices and environmental degradation through direct engagement helped participants develop a more nuanced appreciation of place, moving beyond romanticised connections towards a decolonised, critical engagement with history and the environment. Potentially a key factor in creating a deeper connection to place and the roles of insider/outsider in that place.

Environmental knowledge through learning Indigenous perspectives

Findings suggest that engagement with Indigenous land practices provided participants with new ecological knowledge. Learning about how the Indigenous communities maintain their connection to the environment for everyday living, along with their self-led conservation efforts in response to climate change impacts, provoked critical reflection and respect among participants. These experiences reshaped participants' perspectives on sustainability and resource use.

Indigenous knowledge systems and embodied practice

Indigenous knowledge systems provide a place-based ecological framework rooted in lived experience, reciprocity, and sustainability. Participants' engagement with these alternative knowledge systems encouraged critical reflection on dominant industrial-consumer value systems, whilst acknowledging their own diminished connection to nature. Pleasants and Gough (2021) emphasise that environmental education must integrate diverse world views, incorporating ethical, cultural, and philosophical dimensions to deepen ecological understanding. This aligns with Li and Shein's (2023) assertion that place-based learning enhances eco-literacy through engagement with local traditions and practical applications. By learning Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), participants viewed land as a relational entity, rather than merely a resource to be managed. Learning from local conversationists such as Mohammed, challenged participants' assumptions about environmental responsibility. Mannion and Lynch (2016) reinforce the idea that outdoor education experience should move beyond passive exposure, emphasising relational engagement with place. Their work highlights that interacting with human and non-human entities enables meaning-making, supporting the argument that learning from Indigenous perspectives fosters eco-literacy as an embodied, rather than abstract practice.

Direct experience and eco-literacy

Participants' interactive engagement with local ecosystems underscored the role of sensory experiential learning in fostering eco-literacy. Activities such as plant identification, herbal medicine preparation, daily food harvesting and conservation practices deepened their connection to the environment, emphasising learning through direct lived experiences rather than passive observation. By physically engaging with Indigenous land stewardship practices, participants internalised sustainability as a lived, relational practice. Exposure to these practices prompted reflections on their own lack of environmental knowledge, nature connection and resource use. The findings suggest that Indigenous perspectives offer a holistic ecological framework, reinforcing eco-literacy through embodied, experiential learning.

Environmental concern through direct exposure and sharing with others

The key findings for this theme suggest that direct engagement with environmental degradation heightened participants awareness of climate change impacts. Furthermore, participants continued to share their knowledge and concern with family members, leading to an extended influence of these issues beyond the expedition setting.

Direct experiences as catalysts for environmental awareness

Experiencing environmental degradation firsthand had a notable influence on participants ecological awareness, reinforcing existing research that suggests direct encounters with environmental damage often serve as transformative moments. Chawla (1998) highlights that significant life experiences play a crucial role in shaping environmental awareness, positing that such encounters cultivate an 'empathetic perspective' to sustainability. Similarly, Bonnett (2013) argues that experiencing environmental integrity in natural settings develops a deeper ecological consciousness. Participants' exposure to degraded environments evoked strong emotional responses, including disbelief, outrage, and frustration reinforcing an affective response that appeared to strengthen environmental concern. Prince (2017) highlighted the importance of experiential learning in fostering pro-environmental behaviours, suggesting that firsthand exposure makes the concept of sustainability more tangible.

Whilst place-based learning literature suggests that learning should occur locally, this study found that participants were able to relate the environmental degradation witnessed firsthand in Zanzibar to their actions back home. For instance, after witnessing coral bleaching firsthand, participants drew clear links between their consumerist lifestyles, greenhouse gas induced climate change, and rising sea temperatures. This reinforces Chawla's (1998) theory of significant life experiences as catalysts for environmental awareness, demonstrating that the emotional and cognitive responses extend beyond the immediate experience. This suggests that the intentional design of place-based learning experiences has the potential to imbue environmental concern, regardless of the geographical location, by ensuring that the direct experiences are framed within boarder socio-environmental discussions and reflective practice.

Improved physical, mental and social wellbeing through environmentally focused place-based expeditions

The findings suggest that a place-based approach to expeditions contributes to enhanced physical, mental, and social wellbeing. These benefits appeared to emerge both within and beyond the planned activities, reinforcing the connection between nature, confidence, and identity formation.

Wellbeing and place

The structured yet flexible design of the expedition, with informal interaction spaces intentionally introduced in the programmed activities appears to have provided participants with an increase in confidence, resilience, and adaptability. Particularly when navigating social interactions in new cultural settings such as swimming, dancing and shopping in the market. This aligns with research suggesting that nature-based learning enhances emotional resilience and self-efficacy (Hill and Brown, 2014). Further, Ordons and Hill (2024) argue that place-based outdoor education fosters a sense of belonging and collective wellbeing, emphasising that relational belonging to the living world is a crucial developmental need that supports both individual and eco-cultural change. Additionally, Derringer (2020) emphasises the role of mindfulness in place-based education, demonstrating that a mindful approach enhances participants' ability to engage deeply with their surroundings, supporting self-awareness and emotional resilience. This aligns with the broader notion that intentional reflective practices strengthen the transformative potential of outdoor education, fostering a sense of ecological responsibility, social connection, and psychological wellbeing.

Dwelling and place-based wellbeing

The concept of dwelling, as discussed in place-based outdoor education literature, highlights the importance of developing deep familiarity with a place over time. Participants experienced a growing sense of belonging through repeated interactions with the environment and local community. Wattchow (2021) suggests that dwelling fosters embodied knowledge where individuals develop a sense of home in a place through movement, reflection, and social

engagement. This aligns with the study's findings that participants' sense of place became more deeply embedded through extended time spent in the community of Jambiani.

Ordons and Hill (2024) build on this perspective by emphasising that a sense of belonging to a natural place enhances both individual and collective wellbeing. Their research suggests that place-responsive education provides continuity and emotional security, fostering attachment to a place that supports mental health and resilience. This study's findings suggest that the benefits of dwelling extend beyond familiarity with a location to developing deeper emotional security and relational connections. However, when forging a strong attachment to a place far from home, it is important for practitioners to consider the emotional impact of departure. Some participants reported a sense of loss, sadness, and frustration when leaving the community, highlighting a potential challenge of transient, place-based experiences.

Bridging experience, reflection, and long-term engagement

A combination of firsthand experiences, structured reflection, and intentional pedagogy played a crucial role in fostering lasting environmental concern and the development of sense of place. This discussion intersects with the five key themes already explored, highlighting how intentional design of outdoor learning can amplify the transformative impact of cultural immersion, historical engagement, Indigenous knowledge, encounters with environmental degradation, and wellbeing benefits.

Participants consistently referenced the power of experiencing environmental degradation firsthand, particularly when linked to guided discussions and opportunities to connect these experiences to their own behaviours and environmental responsibilities. One month after the expedition, reflections from some participants suggested that these experiences continued to influence their perspectives on sustainability and their personal actions, reinforcing the notion that intentional, structured post-experience engagement is key to long-term environmental commitment. Hill and Brown (2014) emphasised the intentionality required in designing outdoor learning experiences to maximise their transformative potential. They suggested that structured engagement with environmental challenges, combined with guided reflection and opportunities for real world application has the potential to strengthen participant sense of

agency and environmental responsibility. This aligns with the findings that those who had opportunities to discuss their learning after the expedition were more likely to continue engaging with sustainability discussions and behaviours.

Sandell and Öhman (2013) introduced the concept of outdoor pedagogic bridges as a mean of bridging the gap between experiential outdoor education and long-term environmental engagement. Their research highlighted that outdoor contexts should serve as platform for structured discussions or sustainability, environmental ethics and socio ecological dependence. Without these pedagogic bridges, place-based learning risks fostering ephemeral responses rather than sustained environmental engagement. The study's limitations reflect this, recognising that the reduced sample size for the one-month post interviews and the lack of longitudinal study evidence make it difficult to determine whether these pedagogic bridges were consistently maintained. This aligns with Lugg's (2007) argument that outdoor education must move beyond passive encounters with nature, instead integrating critical reflection, ethical engagement, and post-experience dialogue. The interconnected nature of the findings highlights that structured post-experience discussions, such as those incorporating the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, can help solidify the links between personal experience, environmental concern and long-term action. An example of the 'How' Lugg referred to.

Reflection was particularly crucial in transforming passive experiences into active advocacy. Smith (2007) suggested that post-trip discussions, journalling, and other reflective activities help participants process their experiences and connect them to broader sustainability issues. Prince (2017) similarly emphasised that post-experience dialogue enhances the longevity of environmental learning and facilitates the application of knowledge to real-world contexts. Findings from this study support these arguments. One month after the expedition, interviewed participants appeared to have transitioned from passive learners to environmental advocates by sharing their experiences and knowledge with their families and demonstrating sustained behavioural change. For example, they reported reducing shower time, conserving and reusing water, donating excess personal belongings, and strengthening their connection with nature by spending more time in local outdoor spaces.

By adopting a more intentional instructional approach, outdoor educators can create pedagogic bridges that sustain transformative learning, ensuring that significant life experiences extend beyond the moment of encounter and contribute to lasting environmental consciousness. These findings highlight the need for intentional long-term scaffolding of outdoor learning experiences, ensuring that emotional responses are harnessed into critical engagement and sustained action, rather than remaining isolated short-term reactions.

The findings of this study underscore the transformative potential of place-responsive outdoor education, particularly when structured to allow for deep cultural, historical and ecological engagement. Participants' experiences highlight the necessity of intentional activity design, ensuring that outdoor education fosters meaningful, sustained connections to a place. Key themes, including cultural immersion, historical learning, Indigenous perspectives, and firsthand encounters with environmental degradation, all contributed to an enhanced sense of place, eco-literacy and critical reflection.

A major implication of these findings is the importance of structuring expeditions to include opportunities for reflection, unstructured engagement, and post-expedition follow-up to sustain learning outcomes. Without these elements, place-based education risks reinforcing short-term emotional engagement rather than fostering long-term environmental advocacy and awareness. These insights inform the following recommendations for practice.

Implications for outdoor education

Integrate linguistic and cultural immersion to enhance participants' sense of belonging and confidence

Language was identified as key to deepening engagement and fostering relationships with local communities. Embedding language learning in place-responsive expeditions enables participants to develop a more relational understanding of place. Additionally, structured language exchange opportunities during the expedition can strengthen participants' confidence and cultural integration.

Embed historical and ecological narratives for a more holistic place-based education experience

Findings suggest that cultural-historical engagement deepens a critical awareness of place. Place-responsive learning should encompass both ecological and socio-political dimensions. To maximise impact, historical narratives should be critically examined in relation to contemporary environmental and social challenges bridging past and present for amore transformative learning experience. Additionally, educators should use pedagogic bridges – structured discussions and critical reflections – to link historical learning to participants' personal and professional contexts, ensuring that insights gained extend beyond the trip.

Collaborate with Indigenous educators to ensure authentic and ethical engagement with local knowledge systems

Traditional ecological knowledge deepened participants' environmental awareness and responsibility. Partnering with Indigenous educators ensures meaningful knowledge exchange that moves outdoor education beyond shallow engagement towards a more meaningful authentic exchange of knowledge. However, engagement must be reciprocal and sustained, ensuring that Indigenous voices are centred and respected throughout the educational process. Educators should also integrate pre-expedition learning about Indigenous histories to provide context and meaningful engagement.

Encourage post-trip reflection and environmental advocacy to sustain long-term learning and action

Without structured post-expedition activities, any learning risks becoming temporary rather than transformative. Guided reflection and maintenance of relationships with the community can help to extend learning beyond the expedition. This aligns with concept of pedagogic bridges, ensuring experiential knowledge translates into sustained engagement. Strategies such as structured journalling, facilitated post-trip discussions, digital engagement with host communities, and advocacy projects can help to maintain momentum and reinforce participant commitments to environmental and cultural responsibility.

Recognise place-based outdoor education as a tool for mental wellbeing by integrating with local communities

Findings suggest that dwelling fosters psychological wellbeing, and longer-term engagement in nature should be prioritised over short intensive experiences. Programs should integrate slow pedagogy, allowing participants to engage deeply with a place rather than being rushed through activities. Extended time in a location and opportunities for mindful reflection and community integration can enhance both ecological awareness and individual well-being.

Design outdoor education programs that intentionally centre place-based engagement

Moving beyond traditional expedition models focused on conquest or achievement, this study highlights that place-responsive outdoor learning fosters deeper connections than physical challenge alone. Outdoor educators should prioritise ongoing, reciprocal relationships with place, ensuring that participants develop lasting environmental and cultural connections with the land they are using. This can be achieved through repeat visits, long-term community partnerships, and programme structures that facilitate sustained engagement.

Chapter summary

This discussion highlighted how immersive outdoor education experiences can transform participants' environmental awareness, cultural understanding, and self-confidence. The findings reinforce existing literature on place-responsive learning, eco-literacy, and personal growth, while also identifying a different approach to expeditions and potential new pathways for integrating cultural and historical perspectives into outdoor education. The next chapter will summarise the key findings, reflect on the study’s contribution to research and identify future research directions. This synthesis will reinforce the value of immersive place-based learning and its potential for transformative change.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter synthesises the study's key findings, critically assessing their implication for outdoor education. The research highlights the transformative potential of place-responsive expeditions in fostering a deeper sense of place, eco-literacy, and environmental concern. By integrating cultural immersion, Indigenous perspectives, and reflective practice, this study contributes to rethinking outdoor education beyond adventure-based models. Additionally, the chapter examines study limitations and presents recommendations for future practice and research, emphasising the importance of pedagogic intentionality, long-term engagement, and inclusive approaches to outdoor education.

Key conclusions

Structured, immersive engagement with place fosters eco-literacy, deeper environmental connections, and critical reflection on personal and societal behaviours. Participants engaged in language learning and community interaction reported increased awareness of their own lifestyles and socio-economic privileges, with these insights extending beyond the trip to influence their perceptions of home and social contexts. Experiential learning, such as coral reef conservation, direct exposure to ecosystems and climate change discussions strengthened ecological consciousness, reinforcing the pedagogical value of immersive environmental education. This study underscores the importance of dwelling and structured reflection in place-based education. When participants were afforded time for intentional reflection within immersive settings demonstrated deeper, more meaningful insights. Additionally, the study highlights the value of Indigenous perspectives in environmental learning. Engagement with Indigenous guides and community leaders broadened participants' understanding of sustainability and ecological responsibility, reinforcing the importance of decolonising outdoor pedagogy. Finally, wellbeing emerged as a central theme, warranting further exploration into its role in shaping learning outcomes within the place-based education. The interplay of historical-cultural immersion, environmental engagement, dwelling, structured reflection, and Indigenous knowledge systems suggests that a holistic model of place-based education beyond local settings merits further scholarly investigation.

Strengths and limitations of the study

One of the key strengths of this study lies in the rich qualitative data collected through reflective journals, group interviews and individual post-trip interviews, which provided diverse insights into participants' experiences and learning outcomes. The authenticity and intentionality of place-responsive learning was another strength, as the expedition was designed to be fully immersive with activities led by local guides and facilitators, enhancing historical-cultural and ecological engagement. Additionally, the study employed an interdisciplinary approach integrating environmental education, cultural immersion, and adventure-based learning, allowing for a holistic examination of place-responsive education. Finally, the inclusivity provided through the affordance of offering a fully funded trip, meant that the study's participants were from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds.

Despite its strengths, the study had several limitations. Lack of control over planned activities was a key constraint, as the research was conducted within an existing structured expedition program. This meant that many elements of the itinerary were predetermined, limiting the ability to adapt activities in response to emerging participant needs and reflections. This included the over-scheduling of activities. While the diverse experiences provided valuable exposure, some participants noted that the schedule was too intensive, reducing opportunities for dwelling, in-depth reflection, and deeper engagement with place. This underscores the need for balancing structured activities with intentional dwelling, as well as recognising the power of cultural exchange outside of the planned activities. Furthermore, reflexivity and researcher presence presented both opportunities and challenges. The researcher's dual role as pastoral lead and observer, as well as the relationships built as their course lead over the year or two years, may have influenced participant reflections. There was potential for discussions to be enriched but also the acknowledgement that they could have been subtly shaped (Berger, 2015). Alongside this, it is recognised that the participant group had spent either a year or two engaged on a course with a focus on developing the skills, knowledge, and behaviours to become outdoor educators themselves. This prior learning and engagement in team development may have influenced their perceptions. Finally, the short post-trip reflection period limited insights into the long-term impact of the experience. Data collection occurred

only one month after the expedition, capturing immediate reflections but not allowing for an exploration of longitudinal effects.

Recommendations for practice

Based on the findings, recommendations emerge to enhance the effectiveness of place-responsive outdoor education practice.

1. Refinement of expedition activity structure: Future expeditions should adopt a more intentional approach in activity design, ensuring alignment with specific learning outcomes while allowing for time for meaningful community engagement. A more focused selection of activities centred on themes such as climate change impacts can foster deeper participant engagement. This approach recognises the importance of unstructured learning opportunities, where participants can engage with place beyond the planned activities.

2. Expedition outcomes: Future expeditions should adopt a holistic perspective that extends beyond achieving singular objectives. Treating locations solely as sites for goal attainment risks neglecting the relational and transformative aspects of place-responsive education. Instead, expeditions should be designed to embrace cultural, environmental, and social dimensions, ensuring participants develop a sustained connection to place.

3. Duration and dwelling: Findings highlight that extending the duration of expeditions and allowing for sustained presences in a single location enhances participants ability to develop authentic relationships with local communities and environments. Programmes should prioritise dwelling and slow pedagogy, integrating extended periods of reflection and immersive engagement.

4. Integration of Indigenous perspectives: Partnering with Indigenous educators provides participants with alternative ecological worldviews, enriching their understanding of sustainability and place. This aligns with the broader movement towards decolonising

outdoor education practices and ensuring diverse ontological perspectives are integrated into learning experiences.

5. Encouraging language learning: Integrate structured language learning before and during expeditions to enhance cultural immersion and participant confidence. Pre-trip preparation should include conversational training, while on-site language practice should be embedded into daily activities to reinforce engagement.

6. Cultural Sensitivity Training: Pre-trip cultural sensitivity training is essential in preparing participants for respectful and ethical engagement with local communities. Structured training should include critical discussions on privilege, ethical tourism, and decolonial approaches, ensuring participants enter new environments with awareness and humility.

7. Post-expedition reflection and advocacy: To ensure long-term impacts, structured post-expedition activities should be implemented. Pedagogic bridges, such as post-trip debriefs, sustainability projects, and continued engagement with host communities, can reinforce learning and translate experiences into sustained environmental and cultural advocacy.

Areas for future research

The findings of this study highlight areas for further investigation into place-responsive outdoor education. Future research should investigate how place-responsive expeditions influence participants' environmental concern and advocacy over time, providing insights into whether place-based experiences translate into long-term environmental engagement. Furthermore, the role of cultural background in shaping place-responsive learning experiences away from home merits further exploration. Exploring how learners from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds interpret and respond to place-based education could support the design of more effective programs. Alongside this, there is the potential for the exploration of strategies for making place-based education more inclusive and accessible. There is a need to explore how place-based education can be adapted for diverse learners, particularly for those with limited access to outdoor spaces due to socio-economic constraints or disabilities. Finally, comparative

studies of the impacts of place-responsive expeditions across different geographical settings. Investigating how they operate in a variety of different worldviews has the potential to offer insights into the flexibility and adaptability of this pedagogical approach.

Final reflections

The study underscores the interconnectedness of historical, cultural, environmental, and reflective learning within place-responsive education. Cultural exchanges primarily facilitated reflection on life back home, while direct engagement with environmental activities, led by the Indigenous community, enhanced participants' environmental knowledge and concern. In response to Wattchow's (2011) question regarding expeditionary learning's potential to enhance a sense of place away from home, the findings support the necessity of an "absence of fear" and a "heightened sense of comfort in one's surroundings" (p.120). Through intentional embodied engagement, participants opened their sensing bodies allowing them to connect with the local community in Jambiani and relate the many issues explored to their lives back home. This study aligns with the perspective that outdoor educators should teach learners how to travel, emphasising the importance of language and cultural sensitivity. Since the Adventure Sport learners at South Devon College are likely to travel and lead others, they must develop the ability to be responsive to the places that they visit and engage with.

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Appendix 1: Intervention programme

Day	Date	Am	Pm	Eve
1	11th June 24	Depart SDC	Fly to Turkey	Fly to Dar El Salaam
2	12th June 24	Fly to Zanzibar	Settle into accommodation, explore local area	
3	13th June 24	Introduction to African Impact and programme from lead (Suzi)	Jambiani village tour with Dullah, Jambiani school visit	
4	14th June 24	Zala Park butterfly conservation project	UN Sustainable Development Goals part 1 learning and presentations	
5	15th June 24	Zala Park tour – intro to local village and their use of the forest for food and medicine	Kizimkazi Ladies Gardening Group	
6	16th June 24	Zala Park dugout canoe tour of restored Mangrove swamps	UN Sustainable Development Goals part 2 learning and presentation.	Chapati making with Jambiani ladies group
7	17th June 24	Paje old town tour and beach picnic		Dinner at Usumba Rock
8	18th June 24	Jambiani town litter pick and visit to Jambiani community recycling centre, cleaning and sorting waste for recycling.		Swimming in Kuza Caves, African history, food, drumming & dancing
9	19th June 24	Visit to Stone Town – Spice farm tour and meal with farmers	Stone Town history tour, including religion, slave chambers, and heritage.	Stone town evening food market

10	20th June 24	Rest day, learners had a chance to relax in accommodation, local beach and village, hand wash clothes and reflect.		Evening meal with Jambiani Ladies base (sewing, nursery, classrooms)
11	21st June24	Mangrove seed picking and planting in Charawe	Ecobrick making & Jambiani Challenge	Film: Futuma
12	22nd June 24	Jambiani Marine Cultures – Sponge cleaning	Jambiani coconut workshop	
13	23rd June 24	Jambiani Seaweed Farm	Maasai cultural exchange	
14	24th June 24	PUGUME: Dolphin tour, fish market, lunch on sandbank, coral reef survey		
15	25th June 24	Coral reef presentation	Jambiani coral reef survey, Dhow boat ride	Final evening meal and dancing
16	26th June 24	Jozani Nature Reserve Tour	Final afternoon reflections	Depart for airport – Fly to Dar El Salaam
17	27th June 24	Fly to Turkey	Fly to London	Drive to SDC

Appendix 2: Journal Prompts

Please use the prompts below to aid you in completing your diary entry. Start with a narrative of your day – 2-3 sentences that help to 'set the scene' of the day.

Then, using the prompts below, consider...

What were you thinking: how focused were you? On what? Did something pop into your mind unexpectedly? Was something playing on your mind? Considerations may include...

● The place: where you are; the environment, coastal, the work you are doing and why

● How you are feeling, emotionally: whether you are, exhilarated, worried, nervous, angry (with someone else or yourself), happy, relieved. . .

● How you are feeling, physically: whether you are excited, tired, temperature, drained, full of energy or focused.

● Your interactions with the environment you are in, others in the group; their interactions with each other; the local community.

● Other things you noticed: Things you have learnt about yourself, others or the environment. Could we do anything differently in the future?

Appendix 3: Semi-structured interview questions

1. A month post trip, what are some of your main reflections about the trip?
    - What elements (what was it about the trip) of the trip contributed to this?
    - Did you feel attached to the place? Why? How?
    - What happened to your sense of time? Present?
    - Did the cultural experiences play a role?

2. How would you describe the term 'nature connection'?
    - Is your connection to nature something you have thought about before?
    - What impact (if any) did the trip experience have on your connection to nature?
    - Why? How?

3. Environmental knowledge
    - Did the trip help you to develop your environmental knowledge?
    - If so, what?
    - If so, what was it about the trip that contributed to this?

4. Environmental concern
    - Did the trip manifest any environmental concern?
    - If so, what was it about the trip that contributed to this?

5. What do you think were the main outcomes for you personally from this trip?
    - What was it about the trip that helped to manifest this?

Appendix 4: Coding table

Theme	Category	Code
Enhanced sense of place	Connection to environment	Interconnection with nature
	Deep emotional (embodied) ties to a place	Emotional connection to place
	Identification with place	Feeling of belonging
	Transformative moments in nature	Awe at natural beauty
Increased environmental knowledge	Environmental education	Learning about ecosystems/eco-literacy
	Environmental learning	Awareness of biodiversity
	Collective learning and dialogue	Group discussions on sustainability
	Cultural and historical education	Learning Indigenous perspectives
Development of environmental concern	Concern for environmental challenges	Emotional response to climate change impacts
	Environmental awareness during activity	Observing ecosystem fragility
	Reflection on personal habits	Awareness of personal impact
	Reflection on material needs	Minimalist living through expeditions
Cultural understanding and respect	Cross-cultural engagement	Participating in cultural activities
	Learning sustainable cultural practices	Natural resource management
	Cultural knowledge through storytelling	Indigenous land practices Understanding local traditions
	Community bonding through culture	Shared cultural traditions

Improved social, mental and physical wellbeing	Building resilience and confidence	Overcoming challenges
	Emotional/mental restoration	Finding joy in nature Finding peace in nature
	Shared experiences	Building relationships