

# **Exploring Adventure Sports Coaches Function and Practice within the Outdoor Education & Training Board Centres in the Republic of Ireland.**

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## **Abstract**

### **Background and Purpose**

In Irish Outdoor Education and Training Centres (OETC), outdoor education (OE) has become synonymous with the use of Adventure Sports (AS) or Adventure Education (AE) as a means to assist individuals 'personal development and enhancement of life skills' (OEI, 2016). How ASCs view their role in OETCs is unclear. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the practices, function, and career pathways of the ASC within OETC in the Republic of Ireland (ROI).

### **What was done?**

Participants: Two ASCs with over fifteen years' experience working in OE participated in this study. Each has worked with all client groups associated with the OE sector including corporate groups, those with physical and intellectual needs, further education, school, youth, adult, national governing body (NGB) accreditation, coach education and to a lesser extent one to one performance coaching. They also had experience working in private centres. However, a majority of their in-situ experience has been gained working with young people in the public sector OETCs.

Process: Face to face semi-structured, open ended, interviews were used to gather data. The interviews took approximately 1.5 hours each. Topics discussed included purpose of their work in the OE sector, building a picture of their clients, methods adopted to work with them, their career path (including CPD) and its contribution to their current level of practise and expertise, and any micro political constraints in their work environment. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed to develop themes addressing the purpose of the study.

### **Key findings:**

Five themes were developed relating to the ASCs' personal and institutional practice.

These were:

1. personal development of others (e.g., building self-confidence, developing morality and values, and the sport as a by-product rather than the focus)
2. being self-monitored and engaged in CPD (i.e., focused on maximising their potential through continued learning and development)

3. an awareness of learning theory such as constructivist and behaviourist approaches (e.g., learner centred approaches, learning how to learn, empowering, self-analysis, getting them to think, orchestrate the learning to meet the needs of the learners and sow seeds for future development)
4. reflective practice (e.g., more self-aware)
5. time constraints (e.g., daily routines and practices constrained ASC's constructivist approach, learner centred approach, and opportunities to facilitate clients' self-reflection).

**Points of interest for coaches:**

The ASC's viewed their role as that of developing the whole person through cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. An understanding of 'how to' skills (pedagogical approaches) was important to facilitate this role. However, the routines within OETCs may limit the ASCs ability to adopt more learner centred, constructivist approaches.

**Conclusion**

OE work in the AS context has typically been the domain of the 'instructor' a term that no longer describes nor reflects the professionalism of ASCs. This is especially true when we consider the education role in OE. Until recently instructor training did not include any educational theory but rather focused on the development of technical skill in a didactic and behaviourist form. This paper posits that pedagogy is a missing element in the OE sector. As such the OETCs have a gap in meeting any learning needs other than that of surface learning gained from participating in the activities. In addition, the structure of the institutions practice actually reduce ASC's ability to apply pedagogical theory into practice.

If you would like further information on the research or to receive a copy of the full project please contact Marty: [oceanaddicts@gmail.com](mailto:oceanaddicts@gmail.com)