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Outdoor and Environmental Studies: More challenges to its place in the curriculum.

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Abstract

In Victoria, Australia, outdoor education has been a legitimate subject in the school curriculum for over 25 years. However its place has been debated and challenged over this period. This paper traces the history of the subject, its current status in the Victorian Certificate of Education, future challenges to its place in the curriculum – particularly from the Education for Sustainable Development agenda – and strategies for using challenges towards defining the subject with its own identity.

Introduction

Outdoor education as a legitimate subject in the curriculum of senior secondary schooling has been subject to much contestation and politics, and this article provides a case study of the experiences in one particular location – the state of Victoria, Australia.

From its first introduction in 1982 as *Outdoor Education*, an accredited senior secondary subject, its journey to its current place in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) as *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [VCAA], 2005a) has encountered a number of challenges, but the subject has nevertheless sustained its presence and participation rates over the years. However, its ongoing status can never be seen as certain or secure. Subjects in the VCE are reaccredited every four or five years (the current study design is accredited from 2006-2009), and the next accreditation review will commence during 2008. As the subject moves towards this accreditation, old and new challenges are likely to arise, including: will the subject be revised yet again to take into account the content of other environment related subjects in the VCE, and what will be the influence of the agenda from the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)?

As well as being a VCE subject, outdoor education has been formalised as a legitimate part of the curriculum in Victoria since its inclusion in the *Personal Development Framework P-10* (Ministry of Education, 1989), and subsequent documents. However, within the latest Victorian curriculum document, the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards*, outdoor education is marginalised to a single mention in the Health and Physical Education standards: “students perform confidently and efficiently in a range of movement environments (indoor, outdoor, and aquatic)” (VCAA, 2007c). A discussion of the place of outdoor education in the wider secondary school curriculum is beyond

the scope of this article, however the lack of emphasis on outdoor education within the context of the physical education and personal development curriculum should be of concern to outdoor educators.

This article briefly traces the history of *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* in the VCE curriculum and discusses the future challenges to the subject, particularly from an environmental perspective, but also taking into account the other (social and economic) pillars of sustainability which may exert further pressure on the subject’s content in the future.

Environmental education in the VCE

Environmental education has a long (but not necessarily all that successful – see Table 1) history at the senior secondary level in Victoria. It was introduced as a separate subject in the curriculum at the senior secondary level in 1975. Initially entitled *Agricultural and Environmental Science* it became *Environmental Science* in 1977. In 1991 it moved from the ‘Science’ to the ‘Earth Studies’ field of study and was re-titled *Environmental Studies* (Board of Studies, 1994a) as part of the new VCE.

In 1997 the Board of Studies reviewed the VCE and recommended that there should be:

- Discontinuation of *Environmental Studies and Science*.
- Strengthening of the environmental education components of other studies, specifically *Geography, Biology, Chemistry and Economics*.
- A new science study, *Environmental Science*, in the Science Key Learning Area.

- Rewriting of the study Outdoor Education as a new subject 'Study of the Environment and Outdoor Education' in the Health and Physical Education Key Learning Area. (Mitchell, 1999, pp. 6-7)

Environmental Science was to replace the low enrolment subject Science in the Science Key Learning Area (see Table 1), taking a similar multidisciplinary approach to science and complementing government environmental priorities (Mitchell, 1999). The merging of *Environmental Studies* with *Outdoor Education* was intended to give an academic orientation to complement the perceived skills basis of the *Outdoor Education* study design (Gervasoni, personal communication, August 24, 1999; see also Brookes, c1999; Keeble, 2003). Since 2001 there have been two environmental education subjects at the senior secondary (VCE) level – *Environmental Science* (a science subject, Board of Studies, 2000a; VCAA, 2004) and *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* (a health and physical education subject, Board of Studies, 2000b; VCAA, 2005a).

The course outlines of *Environmental Science*, and its predecessor *Environmental Studies*, are multidisciplinary in their approaches. *Environmental Studies* drew on both natural and social sciences to develop an understanding of different environments and to provide a context for investigating strategies for conservation management (Board of Studies, 1994a; Mitchell, 1999). *Environmental Science* is a broadly based science subject that draws on the traditional disciplines of biology, chemistry and physics and applies their concepts in environmental contexts. It focuses on developing an understanding of natural ecosystems and human impact upon them as well as the application of environmental science to ecologically sustainable development and environmental management (Board of Studies, 2000a; VCAA, 2004). The discourses of the *Environmental Science* document have been regulated

so that there is a greater likelihood that the subject will be acceptable to scientists and science teachers whereas the study design for *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* (Board of Studies, 2000b; VCAA, 2005a) has been allowed to be more holistic in its approach, while aiming to be acceptable to outdoor educators.

Since its inception, *Environmental Science* has been a marginalised subject within the senior curriculum. Although accepted for entry purposes as a science subject by the major universities in Victoria in the 1980s (such status was removed when the subject changed to *Environmental Studies* in 1991), the subject never reached anywhere near the level of enrolments of any of the traditional senior science subjects and, indeed, declined in enrolments during the 1990s (see Table 1).

Fensham (1990) and Mitchell (1999) have documented various aspects of the seemingly constant battle for survival that the subject has faced since the late 1980s. The arguments for abolishing it have had two main themes. Firstly, there have been attempts "to hoist environmental education on its own petard... that there is a weakness in a sectional and optional subject approach" (Fensham, 1990, p. 18). Instead of *Environmental Science/Studies* being a separate subject opponents have argued that the environment should be included as a dimension of other subject areas. Supporters of a separate subject have countered that, until the ideal of an environmental ethic over-arches "the whole curriculum and indeed the life and practice of the school and educational system... environmental subjects need to exist to exemplify what environmental education is" (Fensham, 1990, p. 18). The challenge is to raise the level of acceptability of the environmental subjects and bring them in from the margins.

Table 1: Enrolments in relevant VCE subjects in selected years.

SUBJECT	1992#	1995#	1997#	2000#	2001*	2002*	2003*	2004*	2005*	2006*
Biology	15183	10918	10823	10546	10668	11123	11579	11499	11648	11465
Chemistry	10737	8503	9051	8090	8166	8348	8712	8770	9083	9125
Physics	10176	7234	8005	7534	7697	7632	7871	6970	6978	6812
Psychology	7831	9428	11352	12272	13418	14014	14781	14727	14439	14924
Science	668	253	127	59						
Environmental Studies	980	826	893	662						
Environmental Science					530	408	360	376	319	301
Outdoor Education	Not available	1531	1925	2148						
Outdoor & Environmental Studies					2263	2287	2492	2112	2390	2176

Unit 4 enrolment figures * Unit 3 enrolment figures

The second argument focused on the overlap of subject matter between *Environmental Science* and other subjects such as *Geography* and *Biology* and some of the other sciences. As Fensham (1990) notes, "except for *Psychology* which at this point is very individually oriented," *Physics*, *Chemistry* and *Biology* "quite explicitly refer both to the importance of the sciences for solving social and environmental problems and to the problems that the application of science in the form of various technologies have caused" (p. 23). However, the focus in these subjects is on education *about* the environment rather than *for* the environment, i.e. on facts and concepts rather than the values, cognitive tasks and social skills that characterise environmental education. The study design for *Geography* (Board of Studies, 2000c; VCAA, 2005b) is very like that of the old *Environmental Studies* (Board of Studies, 1994a), but that is because *Geography* has expanded its territory to include studies *for* the environment as well as its traditional focus on studies *about* and *in* the environment.

Based on enrolments statistics since its introduction in 2001, the decline of interest in *Environmental Studies* evident from 1992 to 2000 has continued into the new decade with the new subject *Environmental Science*. From an environmental education perspective the enrolments in *Environmental Science* are significant. They will be affected by the number of universities that are willing to accept *Environmental Science* as a legitimate science subject for pre-requisite entry purposes and the number of schools that are willing to offer the subject, as well as student interest in the new subject, but, as the statistics currently stand, the future is bleak. In order to survive as a subject must meet the VCAA (2003) criteria that "A VCE study will not be developed or approved unless it can be demonstrated that it has maintained an enrolment of 1 per cent of the year cohort, or in the case of a new study will do so within three years of its implementation" (p. 5). The year cohort in 2006 for students doing at least one Unit 3/4 subject was 79,724, whereas the enrolment for VCE *Environmental Science* Unit 3 was only 301 which is considerable less than 1 per cent of the year cohort.

It is against this background of environmental education and *Environmental Science* as a subject in the VCE that I discuss the creation of the new subject, *Outdoor and Environmental Studies*. But first I will outline a history of the relationship between outdoor education and environmental education.

Outdoor education and environmental education

Environmental education and outdoor education have very different histories in the formal curriculum in Victoria. *Outdoor Education* was introduced as an accredited senior secondary subject in 1982, and

by 1993 it was studied by over 5000 Years 11 and 12 students, with many more students taking it at junior secondary levels (Brookes, 2002, p. 412). This level of interest has been sustained: more than a decade on, in 2006, a total of 5423 students were studying *Outdoor*

Table 2: Enrolments in VCE Outdoor and Environmental studies.

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Unit 1	3489	3033	3070	2923	2998	3247
Unit 3	2263	2287	2492	2112	2390	2176
No. of students successfully completing VCE	46,422	47,626	47,585	47,218	46,549	47,344
Unit 3 enrolment as % of VCE completions	4.87	4.80	5.23	4.47	5.13	4.60

and *Environmental Studies*¹, although enrolment numbers seem to have stabilised (see Table 2).

In contrast, environmental education in the P-10 curriculum has been a peripheral activity – encouraged but not mandated through two iterations of ministerial policy statements (Ministry of Education, 1990; Department of Education, 1998) – and with questionable curriculum foci indicated by a leaf symbol in the Curriculum and Standards Framework documents (Gough, 2002). Environmental education – in the form of sustainability – is now a cross-curricular perspective in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) (VCAA, 2007a) and only time will tell as to how teachers implement this. It is too soon at present but given all the other pressures that teachers are under with the myriad of changes to government schools covering curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting (following the *Blueprint for Government Schools*, DEET, 2003) the cross-curricular perspectives may well only be noticed by those who are already in this space (another example of environmental education for the converted).

The relationship between environmental education and outdoor education has been much discussed by outdoor educators (see, for example, Brookes 1989, 1994, c1999, 2002; Lugg, 1999; Martin, 1999; Payne, 2000, Thomas, 2004), and the relationship has often been problematised – for example the title of Brookes' (1989) article is 'Outdoor Education: Environmental education reinvented, or environmental

¹ VCE subjects comprise four units which traditionally were taken in Years 11 and 12 (Units 1 and 2 at Year 11, Units 3 and 4 at Year 12). However increasingly Year 10 students are taking Units 1 and 2 and Year 11 students are studying Units 3 and 4 as they position themselves to maximise their university entrance ranking.

education reconceived?’ and Thomas’ (2004) paper is ‘Skills and thrills in outdoor environmental education: A contradiction or a beautiful tension?’

Outdoor education has traditionally distanced itself from physical education by associating itself with environmental education and emphasising its environmental content (Brookes, 1989), although within VELs, outdoor recreation is solidly situated within the Health and Physical Education Domain (VCAA, 2007b).

Environmental educators have tended to see outdoor education as simply education *in* the environment, and not possessing the distinguishing characteristic of being education *for* the environment, or even teaching much education *about* the environment. Evidence for such impressions can be found in McRae’s (1990) listing of “programs and practices to which the label ‘outdoor education’ have been applied” (p. 1) and Brookes’ (2002) description of outdoor education in Australia. Nevertheless, many environmental educators as well as outdoor educators have argued for the importance of outdoor experiences in developing people’s relationships with natural environments (in addition to the aforementioned, see, for example, Chawla, 1998; Kahn & Kellert, 2002).

The personal and social development and experiential aspects of outdoor education are much stronger than these aspects in environmental education (see, for example, Lugg, 1999; Martin, 1999; Payne, 2000). Environmental education has different emphases; it is concerned with awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills and participation related to the resolution of environmental problems (see, for example, Gough, 1997).

In a document that informed the deliberations of the committee which developed the first *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* Study Design (Board of Studies, 2000b), Lugg (1999) concluded that outdoor education is inextricably linked with environmental education through providing students with a unique opportunity for:

- direct interaction with natural environments for developing understanding of those environments and the relationships of humans with them,
- students to interact with each other, solve problems and make decisions in a context that has immediate, tangible consequences for themselves, others and the environment,

- developing positive beliefs, attitudes and understandings of the world and our place in it,
- developing knowledge and skills that may lead to a healthier, more fulfilling lifestyle. (p. 17)

There are obvious resonances between Lugg’s conclusion and the goals and objectives for environmental education recommended at the UNESCO-UNEP Tbilisi intergovernmental conference on environmental education (UNESCO, 1978):

1. The goals of environmental education are:

- (a) to foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;
- (b) to provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment;
- (c) to create new patterns of behaviour of individuals, groups and society as a whole towards the environment.

2. The categories of environmental education objectives:

Awareness: to help social groups and individuals acquire an awareness of and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems.

Knowledge: to help social groups and individuals gain a variety of experience in, and acquire a basic understanding of, the environment and its associated problems.

Attitudes: to help social groups and individuals acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment, and the motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection.

Skills: to help social groups and individuals acquire the skills for identifying and solving environmental problems.

Participation: to provide social groups and individuals with an opportunity to be actively involved at all levels in working toward resolution of environmental problems. (pp. 26-27)

Outdoor and Environmental Studies

Some years ago, Brookes (1989) argued that outdoor education potentially provides “powerfully affective forms of de-schooled environmental education” and that it “can allow powerful forms of environmental education to develop” (p. 15). He saw a distinguishing characteristic of outdoor education being that it has arisen from a persistent practice of taking students out of school and into a new environment rather than from a curriculum specification.

Herein lies a tension for *Outdoor and Environmental Studies*. Outdoor education distinguishes itself by its separation from schools and its experiential orientation, yet environmental studies are generally school and text based. In order to achieve its aims, *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* students require “well-crafted outdoor experiences [to] help participants understand that they have an inherited worldview and [to] become aware of alternatives” (Brookes, 1994, p. 39). But, as Brookes (1999) queried, who will teach this subject?

According to Goodson (1985), a new subject needs to define its boundaries with other subjects – so how does this new subject *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* define its boundaries? One way of analysing a subject’s boundaries is to look at its aims. *Outdoor Education* (Board of Studies, 1994b) had the following aims:

This study is designed to enable students to develop:

- an understanding and appreciation of the relationship between people and the outdoors;
- physical, sensory and intellectual abilities for safe and worthwhile exploration and protection of the outdoors;
- knowledge of outdoor environments and their effect on outdoor activities; and
- an understanding of the direct and indirect influence of biological, social and cultural factors on outdoor activities and environments. (p. 6)

The list of aims for the first version of *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* (Board of Studies, 2000b) was considerably longer and reflected the marriage of *Outdoor Education* with *Environmental Studies*. The study is designed to enable students to:

- develop an appreciation and understanding of outdoor environments;
- develop an understanding of basic ecological principles;
- develop an understanding of the diversity of views of nature and that outdoor environments may or may not be synonymous with nature;
- develop an understanding of human impact on and relationships with nature;
- develop skills and knowledge related to practical experiences of outdoor environments;
- acquire practical skills for safe outdoor travel and living;
- acquire skills for minimum impact travel, living and investigation of outdoor environments;
- develop skills of observation, data collection, analysis, synthesis and evaluation fundamental to outdoor environmental inquiry;
- develop an understanding of the role of the outdoor environment in contributing to Australian culture;
- develop respect for the outdoor environment and a concern for its conservation;
- develop an understanding of the strategies used to protect, conserve and manage the outdoor environment. (pp. 7-8)

In the second edition of the study design (VCAA, 2005) the list was shortened and tightened to more closely reflect an emerging new subject with its own distinct identity rather than a marriage of two different subjects. The study is designed to enable students to:

- develop experience-based relationships with, and knowledge of, natural environments;

- develop an understanding of the ecological, historical, economic and social factors which have had an impact on and will influence natural environments over time;
- develop skills and knowledge that promote safe, sustainable interaction with natural environments;
- develop skills and knowledge to live comfortably for short durations in natural environments;
- identify and analyse the strategies and rationales used to protect, conserve and manage natural environments in a sustainable manner;
- understand the implications of trends towards sustainable environmental relationships;
- critically analyse interactions with natural environments in shaping Australian cultural practices. (p. 8)

There has been little discussion on the new subject in academic outdoor education and environmental education literatures to date, although both *Journeys*, the Victorian Outdoor Education Association journal, and the *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education* have published some articles. One of these, 'John's story' (Keeble, 2003), provides a teacher's perspective, which may or may not be a typical one, on the differences between the old and new study designs.

As reported by Keeble, John Geary makes a number of comparisons between the two study designs. In *Outdoor Education*, "the obvious learning for students could be the outdoor skills... with some environmental knowledge and impacts thrown in", and a key element was "the power of experiential learning", kids forming "their own sense of inquiry" and "personal interaction with the environment" (Keeble, 2003, pp. 20-21). However, with *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* "you need to focus on nature, human relationships with nature and environmental outcomes... the outdoor skills are the incidental learning from practical trips" and "you have to complete much of the theoretical work before you go into the field" (Keeble, 2003, p. 20). John has been able to maintain his old *Outdoor Education* trips but he has changed their style and focus which has made them interesting and effective. However he acknowledges that some teachers' biases towards outdoor skills have made them frustrated in the new course "because they did not have the teaching tools, resources or

perhaps the desire to challenge themselves or change their pedagogical practices" (Keeble, 2003, pp. 21-22). Geary concludes that "it would be a step in the wrong direction if we were to go back to what could be seen as the old activity-focused curriculum of VCE *Outdoor Education*... it was time for a change" (Keeble, 2003, p. 22).

But where is *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* going to move forward to? The total enrolment for Years 11 and 12 has stabilised around 5000-5500 students for 5 years now (between 4.5% and 5.2% of VCE completions), and the number of schools offering Unit 3 has reduced from 153 in 2002 to 139 in 2006. Is this sustainable? And will *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* survive another review of overlaps between VCE subjects? The revised study design (VCAA, 2005) describes a more differentiated subject than the earlier iteration, so signs are good as long as enrolments can be sustained or increased. Then there is that other sustainability issue ...

The challenge of education for sustainable development

Internationally, during the 1980s and 1990s, use of the language of sustainable development and sustainability began to emerge, popularised by the World Conservation Strategy in 1980, the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 (the Brundtland Commission) and revisited in 1992 through the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro). Many educators have since placed a much stronger emphasis upon trying to integrate thinking and action around ecological, social and economic systems.

The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) has its origins in the succession of international environmental events which culminated in the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September 2002. Here, previous notions of environmental education (EE) were "broadened to encompass social justice and the fight against poverty as key principles of development that is sustainable. The human and social aspects of sustainable development meant that solidarity, equity, partnership and cooperation were as crucial as scientific approaches to environmental protection" (UNESCO, 2004, p. 7).

At a somewhat simplistic level, environmental education and education for sustainable development (ESD) are concerned with achieving the same ends: enabling learners to question unsustainable practices and participate in changing these practices. The difference is in the scope covered in achieving this goal, and in the focus. Environmental education has traditionally been problem-focused: its goals and

objectives have usually referred to the environment and its associated problems, and resolving these. Education for sustainable development encompasses environmental education, setting it in the broader context of socio-cultural factors and the socio-political issues of equity, poverty, democracy and quality of life as well as a development perspective on social change and evolving circumstances. It still has much in common with earlier conceptions of environmental education, including objectives encouraging critical thinking, values analysis and active citizenship in environmental contexts, but differs in that ESD is envisaged as “ultimately about education and capacity building and only secondly about environmental problem-solving” (Fien, 2001, p. 19).

Implementing ESD in schools involves approaches to teaching and learning that integrate goals for conservation, social justice, appropriate development and democracy into a vision and a mission of personal and social change. It also involves developing the kinds of civic virtues and skills that can empower all citizens, and through them our social institutions, to play leading roles in the transition to a sustainable future. As such, ESD encompasses a vision for global society that is not only ecologically sustainable but also one that is socially and economically sustainable. Thus, the key areas identified with the concept of ESD, and interlinked through the dimension of culture, are society, environment and economy.

Given the relationship between environmental education and outdoor education that has developed through *Outdoor and Environmental Studies*, what are the implications for *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* of this broader notion of ESD?

Up until the present time, both in Victoria and nationally, the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development has had a very low profile and has been interpreted as an environmental sustainability agenda rather than one which includes social and economic sustainability. The narrowness of this response is obvious when compared with the fifteen strategic perspectives “and the connections between them [which] must inform education and learning for sustainable development” (UNESCO 2004, p. 17):

Socio-cultural perspectives

- Human Rights
- Peace and human security
- Gender Equality
- Cultural Diversity and intercultural understanding

- Health
- HIV / AIDS
- Governance

Environmental perspectives

- Natural resources
- Climate change
- Rural transformation
- Sustainable urbanisation
- Disaster prevention and mitigation

Economic perspectives

- Poverty reduction
- Corporate responsibility and accountability
- Market economy

How does the current content of *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* engage these perspectives? There are aspects of *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* that do move beyond the environmental perspectives listed above – which is more than can be said for participants in the Sustainable Schools Initiative (Gough, 2006). For example, from the socio-cultural perspectives, gender equality issues are covered in Unit 1, intercultural understanding pervades the units, as does health, and governance is considered in Units 2 and 4. Of the economic perspectives, both market economy and corporate responsibility and accountability are touched on in Units 2, 3 and 4. Should it do more?

Outdoor and Environmental Studies could make a significant contribution to students’ understanding of global sustainability issues by taking into account many of the above ESD perspectives. For example, although some might see ‘human rights’ or ‘peace and security’ as being beyond the scope of *Outdoor and Environmental Studies*, it is useful to remember that very recently Australian Federal Police Commissioner, Mick Keelty, argued that “climate change could wreak havoc as new rainfall patterns mean Asia struggles to feed itself” (Eccleston, 2007, p. 22) and Australia’s military chief, Air Chief Marshall Angus Houston, agreed that global warming may result in the need to respond to more humanitarian assistance and extreme weather events (Eccleston, 2007). In addition, Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change were awarded the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize “for their

efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man[sic]-made climate change" (Gibbs & Lyall, 2007, paragraph 2), thus equating environmental change with peace and human security. Climate change has a single mention in the current *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* study design (VCAA, 2005a), but it would seem to need much more given the widespread impact climate change could have on outdoor activities as well as the other issues raised in the ESD perspectives. For example, the reduced availability of inland water as a result of drought will not only affect outdoor recreation activities, it will also lead to major social and economic disruption, and very different human-nature relationships over time.

Human rights, gender equality and poverty are also relevant to *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* in terms of access to outdoor recreational activities in other countries as well as in parts of Australia. Similarly, by taking a more global perspective students can study how other cultures interact with natural environments through outdoor activities and build intercultural understandings.

Students of *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* already study some aspects of the market economy through investigating the role of commercialisation of outdoor experiences in shaping relationships with natural environments. However, these studies could be expanded by focusing more on corporate responsibility and accountability.

Political and cultural developments, such as the shift towards ESD, provide ongoing challenges to curriculum content, and *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* is not alone in facing this challenge. Other curriculum areas may well be asking similar questions about how they might, or might not, respond to the challenge of ESD, and if they are not now they may be asked to do so in the very near future, particularly within the VCE context.

Conclusion

Outdoor Education, at least as represented by VCE *Outdoor and Environmental Studies*, has survived many challenges to become an established subject in the curriculum. However, there are more challenges to be faced from several sources.

The ESD perspectives discussed above provide a wide range of opportunities to engage more strongly with broader sustainability issues. The high public profile of climate change and other environmental issues makes it very likely that the accreditation committee for the next *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* study design will be charged with incorporating some of these. In addition, given the low enrolments in VCE *Environmental Science*, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority could be looking to other

strategies to address the ESD agenda within VCE. It might be strategically wise for outdoor educators to be proactive in re-visioning *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* to incorporate relevant aspects from the ESD agenda as part of defining the subject with its own identity (Goodson, 1985).

There is also the challenge of how to increase enrolments in *Outdoor and Environmental Studies*. While there are issues around rescaling of subjects in the calculation of tertiary entrance rankings that may affect some students' subject choices, and the cost of field trips and their timing may be a deterrent to others, there is a need for research to investigate students' subject choices at VCE as they relate to *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* to determine where barriers lie and to devise strategies for addressing them.

At the lower secondary school level, *Health and Physical Education* in VELS does not provide much background in outdoor education to encourage students to further their studies into *Outdoor and Environmental Studies*. The VELS cross curricular sustainability perspective could be a future growth area for outdoor educators if secondary schools can be convinced to engage this perspective in the lower secondary school years by drawing on outdoor education: then *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* would be a logical place to continue these studies in the VCE years. The challenge for outdoor educators is to develop this sustainability perspective in their schools.

By engaging with the ESD perspectives, the new possibilities posed by VELS outdoor educators, and other challenges, outdoor educators will be defining and refining the boundaries of *Outdoor and Environmental Studies* with other subjects and thus moving towards defining a subject with its own unique identity rather than one that results from a political agenda. In the Victorian context, now might be the best time to do this.

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