



Adventurous Learning

Uncertainty, agency, authenticity, and mastery

Simon Beames
(with special thanks to Mike Brown)

Who has had an
adventure
recently?



Overview

- ◆ Education indoors and outdoors has become too rigid and prescriptive: this limits student learning
- ◆ Student learning can be increased by making teaching more adventurous
- ◆ There are four features of adventurous learning: Uncertainty, agency, authenticity, and mastery
- ◆ These can be used to consider the degree to which our teaching practices can be considered ‘adventurous’ — and how this might be increased

Definitions of adventure

- ◆ ‘An unusual, exciting, or daring experience’ (The Oxford Concise Dictionary, 2008, p. 18)
- ◆ ‘outcomes cannot be predicted to any great degree’ (Higgins, 2001, p. 102)
- ◆ Involves ‘a degree of uncertainty’ (Mortlock, 1984, p. 14)
- ◆ ‘...a challenge that will demand the best of our capabilities — physically, mentally, emotionally’ (Mortlock, 1984, p. 19)

Meanings of adventure

- Individually and culturally relative
- Multiple meanings = 'adventure' is too vague to be of academic use
- Need to reconceptualise adventure and gain 'theoretical purchase' on the term



Social 'backdrop'

- Constantly evolving technology, global migration, communications — more and more, faster and faster (Elliot & Urry, 2010)
- 'Risk culture' dominates (Giddens, 1991), as people are obsessed with 'minimising bads' (Beck, 1992)
- Daily life is increasingly complex (Morrison, 2008)
- 'Liquid times' (Baumant, 2007)

Academic 'backdrop'



- Neo-liberalism and market forces have shaped educational practices
- Education has become bits of information to be taught and tested (Ross & Gibson, 2006)
- Standardised testing reigns (Hursh, 2006) and the curriculum narrows (Hess & Brigham, 2000)
- This limits teachers' capacities to respond to students' individual needs (Garrison, 1997)

Adventure Education Critiques

- Has become highly rationalised, prescribed, and calculable, and predictable — *McDonaldized* (Loynes, 1998)
- Is becoming characterised by performative labour, theming, and merchandising — *Disneyized* (Beames & Brown, 2014)
- Central concept of transfer of learning is problematic (Brookes, 2002; ; Brown, 2008; Wolfe & Sandahl, 2005)
- Ignores place (Brookes, 2004; Baker, 2005)
- Disempowering (Beames, 2006; Brown & Fraser, 2009)
- Features misplaced ideas of using risk to manipulate emotions (Davis-Berman & Berman, 2002; Brown & Fraser, 2009)

Not very adventurous!

Stock take:

- Life in liquid times is characterised by uncertainty, change, and complexity
- Education of all kinds is going in the opposite direction: it is becoming increasingly predictable, standardised, and rationalised

How can learning be more adventurous?

It needs to equip young people with the tools to thrive in a world that is constantly changing.

Adventurous Learning



Four features:

Uncertainty

Agency

Authenticity

Mastery

Uncertainty

- Outcomes and processes are not fully predictable: Tasks offer multiple possible courses of action — there is not one right answer
- Deep reasoning and innovation is required
- Elicits creative responses from students imagining solutions, refining ideas, putting them into practice (Robinson, 2011)
- Draws on Aristotle's need to practice reasoning and moral decision-making (see Stonehouse, 2010), Dewey's Indeterminate situation (1938), Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance (1957)

Agency

- Students must have the power to influence what is learned and how it is learned.
- Key is teachers providing appropriate ‘autonomy support’
- Students need to be given the ‘right’ kinds of choices: *relevant, not too many, and cognitive* (rather than organisational) (Assor et al., 2002; Stefanou et al., 2004)
- Facilitators need to allow criticism and encourage independent thinking (Assor et al., 2002)
- Draws on Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1987)

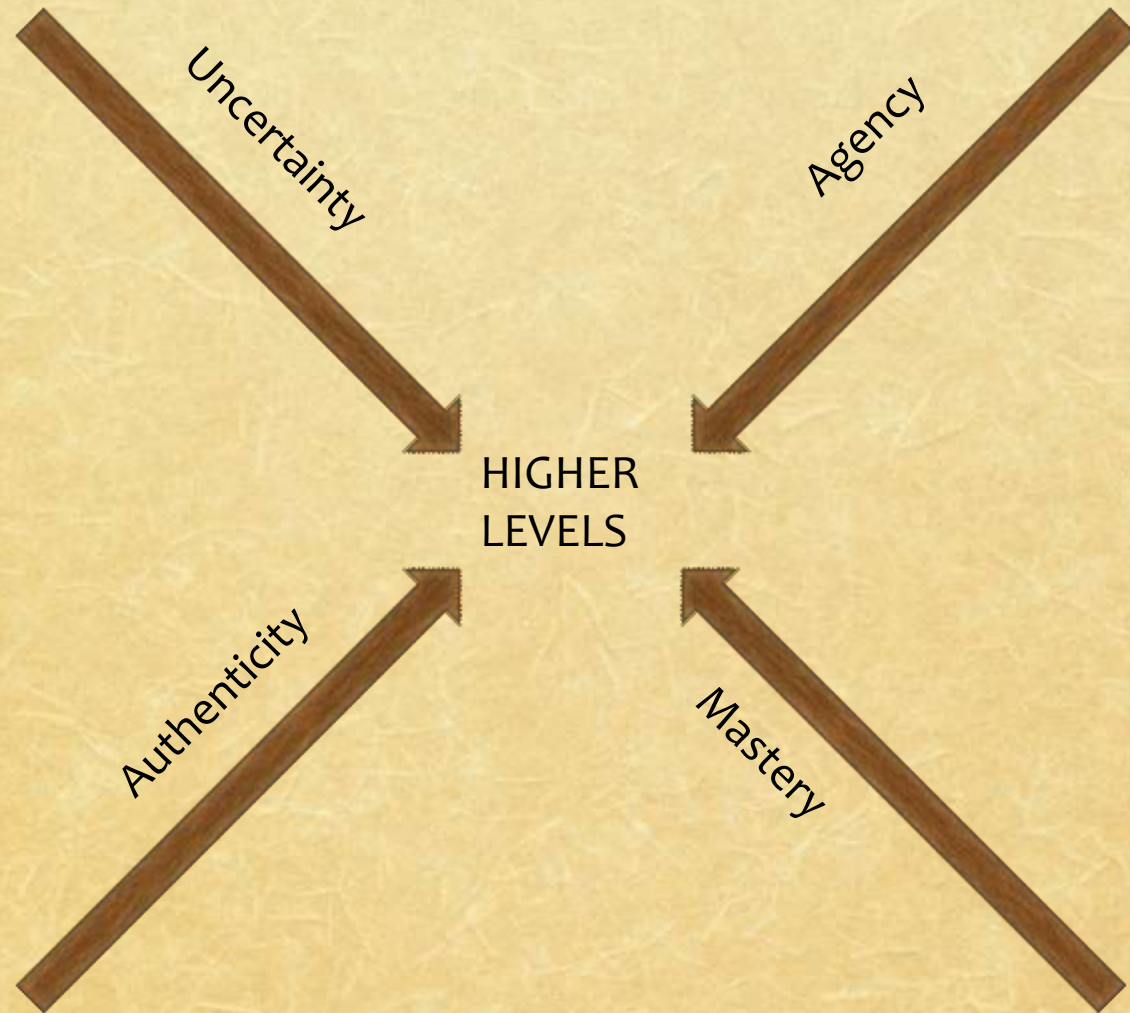
Authenticity

- ◆ Concerns what is 'real' and encountered in ordinary life experiences
- ◆ Starting point is landscape's inherent curriculum.
What can be learned here?
- ◆ Responds to place and community (Wattchow & Brown, 2011; Smith & Sobel, 2010)
- ◆ Does not rely on contested notions of transfer of learning between greatly differing contexts
- ◆ Draws on Dewey's *Criteria of experience* (1938a), and Dewey's 'process of living' rather than 'preparation for future living' (1897)

Mastery

- ♦ Is about consummate skill and commanding knowledge
- ♦ Is rooted in discourses of **challenge** — not risk
- ♦ Challenging tasks demand acquisition of skills and knowledge to make decisions, take responsibility, and take action
- ♦ Overcoming challenges requires tenacity, personal investment, and an ability to overcome setbacks
- ♦ Draws on Bandura's *Self efficacy* (1977), Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow theory* (1990), and Berman and Davis- Berman's *Autotelic experiences* (2005)

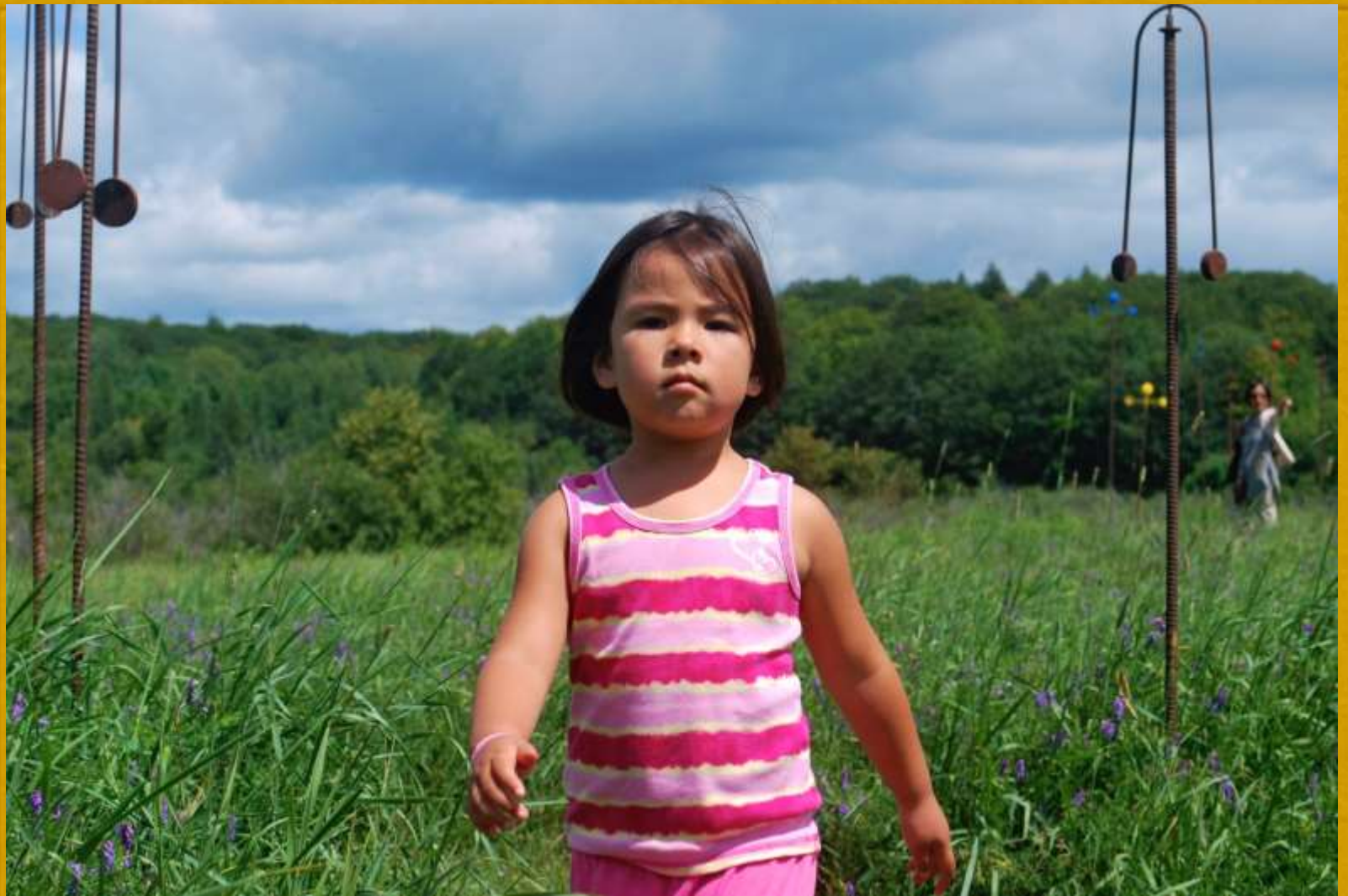
Putting it all together...



Final thoughts

- ◆ The four dimensions are not necessarily value-laden — educators may have good reasons for using prescribed methods and artificial settings
- ◆ The dimensions of Uncertainty, Agency, Authenticity, and Mastery are together an heuristic tool to enable meaningful discussions
- ◆ Adventurous learning is not about outdoor vs indoor education.

It's about appropriate contexts and methods for deep and meaningful learning.



How adventurous is your teaching?

References

- Assor, A., Kaplan, H. & Roth, G. (2002). Choice is good, but relevance is excellent: Autonomy-enhancing and suppressing teacher behaviours predicting students' engagement in schoolwork. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 72, 261-278.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Towards a unifying theory of behavioural change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191-215.
- Bauman, Z. (2007). *Liquid times: Living in an age of uncertainty*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beames, S. (2006). *Losing my religion: The struggle to find applicable theory*. *Pathways: The Ontario Journal of Outdoor Education*, 19(1), 4-11.
- Beames, S. & Brown, M. (2014). Enough of Ronald and Mickey: Focusing on learning in outdoor education. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 14(2), 118-131.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. London: Sage.
- Berman, D. & Davis-Berman, J. (2005). Positive psychology and outdoor education. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 28(1), 17-24.
- Brookes, A. (2003a). A critique of Neo-Hahnian outdoor education theory. Part one: Challenges to the concept of "character building". *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 3(1), 49-62.
- Brown, M. (2008). Comfort zone: Model or metaphor? *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*, 12(1), 3-12.
- Brown, M. (2010). Transfer: Outdoor adventure education's Achilles heel? Changing participation as a viable option. *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*, 14(1), 13-22.
- Brown, M. & Fraser, D. (2009). Re-evaluating risk and exploring educational alternatives. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 9(1), 61-77.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Davis-Berman, J., & Berman, D. (2002). Risk and anxiety in adventure programming. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 25(2), 305-310.
- Deci, E. & Ryan, R. (1987). The support of autonomy and the control of behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53(6), 1024-1037.
- Dewey, J. (1897). My pedagogic creed. *The School Journal*, 54(3), 77-80.
- Dewey, J. (1938/1990). *Experience and education*. New York: Touchstone.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Logic: The theory of inquiry*. New York: Henry Holt and Co.

References (cont'd)

- Elliot, A. & Urry, J. (2010). *Mobile lives*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Garrison, J. (1997). *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and desire in the art of teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Higgins, P. (2001). Learning outdoors: Encounters with complexity. In *Other ways of learning* (pp. 99-106). Marburg: European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning.
- Hess, F.M. & Brigham, F.J. (2000). None of the above: The promise and peril of high-stakes testing. *American School Board Journal*, 187(1), 26-29.
- Hursh, D.W. (2006). Marketing education: The rise of standardized testing, accountability, competition, and markets in public education. In E.W. Ross & R. Gibson, *Neoliberalism and education reform* (pp. 15-34). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Loynes, C. (1998). *Adventure in a bun*. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 21(1), 35-39.
- Morrison, K. (2008). Educational philosophy and the challenge of complexity theory. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 40(1), 19-34.
- Mortlock, C. (1984). *The adventure alternative*. Milnthorpe, UK: Cicerone Press.
- Oxford English Dictionary (n.d). *Adventure*. Retrieved from <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/2923>
- Robinson, K. (2011). *Out of our minds: Learning to be creative*. Chichester, UK: Capstone.
- Ross, E.W. & Gibson, R. (2006). *Introduction*. In E.W. Ross and R. Gibson, *Neoliberalism and Education Reform* (pp. 1-14). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Stefanou, C., Perencevich, K., DiCintio, M. & Turner, J. (2004). Supporting autonomy in the classroom: ways teachers encourage student decision making and ownership. *Educational Psychologist*, 39(2), 97-110.
- Stonehouse, P. (2010). Virtue ethics and expeditions. In S. Beames (Ed.), *Understanding educational expeditions* (pp. 17-23). Rotterdam: Sense.