



Alternative *options* providing *inclusive outdoor learning*

by John Crosbie

In the 2015 spring edition of *Horizons* (No. 69), some of the issues relating to inclusive or specialist provision for outdoor learning were outlined and in the latest issue (No. 70) the issues relating to highly specialised adaptive equipment were considered. This article looks at some of the options and alternatives for including participants with disabilities in the outdoors.

Contemporary society has embraced in principle the concepts of inclusion of people with disabilities into mainstream society and the activities that non-disabled people participate in. However in the outdoor learning field, we are challenged by the physical, intellectual and sensory requirements of a number of our activities which do not make the inclusion of people with many disabilities easy.

Most people would agree that to offer outdoor learning that could include all members of society, including people with disabilities (PwD) would be the ideal situation. However, the nature of our work makes this virtually impossible. Designing a programme that enables universal participation would affect the essence of the experience we aim to provide and this would have a negative impact on all participants, most notably those without disabilities^(3,4). This is a justification for discrimination against disabled people which is allowed under the UK Equality Act.

Hence, including PwD requires some compromises to be made. Which aspects of the programme are compromised is the choice of the provider as there is no right answer, but a provider needs to be able to justify the decisions that have been made and be clear in their reasons behind the choice. This article explores some of the options.

In a previous article (issue 69) the options of specialist and inclusive provision were explored. But these are not the only choices.

People with disabilities (PwD) can engage in mainstream activities provided the nature of their disability does not require any adaptations to be made. Also programmes can be run that are designed to include PwD alongside non-disabled participants. However, in both cases the provision is likely to be restricted to certain types of disabilities, or levels of impairment, or levels of activity and because of this, these programmes cannot be regarded as fully inclusive.

An alternative is to include PwD only in those parts of the programme in which they can fully participate, and when the inclusion of individuals with disabilities will affect the experience of the other participants, an alternative or parallel activity is offered. This parallel programme could involve a different level of the same activity or a completely separate activity altogether. Ideally, whichever option is chosen it should offer as close an experience as the mainstream activity and as far as possible fulfil the same objectives. The advantages of this option are that those with disabilities are included where they can be fully involved, yet the non-disabled participants are not denied the benefits of other parts of the programme due to the disability of some members of the group.

Integrated programmes move closer to a segregated or specialist provision. These programmes involve PwD sharing the same facilities as non-disabled participants but undertaking a separate programme that more closely meets their needs. The advantages of integrated programmes are that disabled people are undertaking the same type of activity in the same location as non-disabled people, but are potentially working at a different level of intensity. This is no different to any other form of streaming. The disadvantages are that there is differentiation by ability which emphasises the disabilities, and that the interaction between those with and without disabilities is limited to social time which denies the opportunities for shared experiences

in the activities with the bonds and increased understanding between individuals groups that may arise from these ⁽¹⁾.

As indicated above, the inclusion of PwD into an outdoor learning programme will have an impact on that programme. Whether this impact is viewed as positive or negative will depend on the philosophical stance of the observer and the intended outcomes of the programme ⁽³⁾. For example, those who regard the physical and emotional challenge in overcoming difficult tasks as key to the learning outcomes of a programme are likely to find a reduction in the level of challenge caused by the inclusion of PwD more difficult to accept compared to those with the primary focus of mutual understanding, the acceptance of others or teamwork.

Within any programme that includes PwD the ability range within the group of participants is likely to be wider. This could be the range of intellectual ability, motivation, mobility or physical fitness. The increased range will make the choice of activity and level of challenge within it more difficult. In addition, consideration will need to be given to the presentation of information (eg instructions), the equipment needed and any reviewing techniques to be used. These will have a bearing on the type of provision offered.

This approach to inclusion is compatible with the guidance given by Sports Coach UK ⁽⁶⁾ and the above positions may be mapped onto the “Inclusion Spectrum” diagram ⁽²⁾. ■



NOTES

1. Beames, S.K. & Atencio, M. (2008). Building social capital through outdoor education. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 8(2), 99-112.
2. Black, K. & Stevenson, P. (2011). The inclusion spectrum incorporating STEP.
3. Crosbie, J.P.G. (2010). Expeditions for people with disabilities. In S.K. Beames (Ed.) *Understanding Educational Expeditions*. Rotterdam: Sense.
4. Crosbie, J.P.G. (2014). The value of outdoor education for people with disabilities: An in depth case study into the Calvert Trust. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh.
5. Richardson, D. (1986). Outdoor adventure: Programs for the physically disabled. *Parks and Recreation*, 21(11), 43-45
6. Sports Coach UK: Inclusive Coaching.

About the author



John Crosbie has many years' experience working in outdoor learning with people with disabilities. He spent 17 years managing an outdoor education centre specialising in working with disabled populations, he has advised a number of NGBs on their inclusive policies and instructor training and recently completed a PhD in this field. Photographs: Bendrigg Trust

Adventure for All

Inclusion or specialisation, that is the question!

For a number of years now, it has become almost universally accepted to argue for a more inclusive attitude towards people with disabilities (PwD) within society. These arguments have extended to the inclusion of PwD in mainstream education and outdoor learning provision. However, in these latter cases the support is not universal and below I shall outline some of the reasons for this dissent from both those with disabilities and those who provide these services.

Although the justification for inclusion is invariably made on the grounds of “social justice”, a more cynical view would be that the underlying decision is made on cost saving alone. Few, if any, inclusive policies have had an overall increase in funding attached to them and most are blatant cost saving devices. Some people with disabilities have fought hard to have their needs met in inclusive situation, whilst others, also with disabilities, have wished to be provided with more specialist provision where their needs are better met by those with expertise in the issues that the individual encounters. To some, this specialist provision is often seen as of higher quality, more empathetic and more enabling whilst so called “inclusive provision” may fail to meet the needs of the disabled person by not having the time and equipment to enable a disabled person to perform to their best in a field or activity and as a result emphasise the differences between disabled and non-disabled people. Some disabled provision can be tokenistic with disabled participants being given roles that do not reflect the essence of the activity being undertaken (for example belaying non-disabled climbers is not what climbing is all about), may be a compromise to the detriment of non-disabled participants (for example rather than climbing a mountain going on a low level walk) that may cause resentment towards the disabled participant and social exclusion. If the activity is not fully inclusive and the disabled person is not fully accepted as a members of the group, many disabled activists will not regard this as inclusive provision at all. Although some adventurous outdoor activities or field studies provision requires little or no adaptations to include some disabled people, either some compromises need to be made or the activity changed completely to make most activities more inclusive. There is no right or wrong answer to the level of compromise made or to whether an individual takes part in inclusive or specialist provision, however, I suggest we have two main challenges. The first is who chooses the type of provision that PwD experience. Should it be the school / local authority, the provider, or the individual and is a realistic “choice” offered? Secondly how can providers, whether offering specialist or inclusive experiences, offer the same type of experience with the same level of challenge and learning outcomes as intended for non-disabled participants on a similar programme with similar aims?

Although the first may be outside of our control, I hope that some of the future articles in *Horizons* may address some of the latter issues, as could joining the IOL Adventure for All SIG to tap in to the experience of other members who may have previously addressed some of these issues.

