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Adventure plants seed of confidence in our children - Craig Mathieson

We all yearn to explore. For children, exploration can be building a den or running free in the woods. The child revels in this joy of freedom and self-discovery yet too often is stymied by well-meaning parents unable to suppress the urge to risk assess their every move.

That's unfortunate, for with every new experience, a little more self-confidence is nurtured, physical and mental ability tested and the child's appreciation sown for the natural wonders beyond their front door.

By their teens, the innate drive to explore and push their physical and mental boundaries is too often quashed by years of immersion in a bubble-wrapped, risk-averse society. Moreover, there are too many whose troubled formative years at home or school have served to erode ambition and mire them in self-doubt. These "invisible" pupils drift through school devoid of direction or purpose in life.

I was one of them. However, deep down I still had a dream. Though a myopic teacher quipped, "Mathieson, exploring is for other people", I longed to follow in the footsteps of polar explorers like Fridtjof Nansen and Sir Ernest Shackleton. In 2004 I would realise that dream, but only after overcoming self-doubt and the elements to ski 730 miles to the South Pole.

It was a tough experience and one that convinced me of the power of the polar environments to inspire and unleash the potential within younger generations. Within two years, a troubled Scottish teenager and I journeyed to the North Pole. The experience (by his own and his parents' admission) positively transformed his life and rekindled previously shattered self-confidence.

As an explorer, I don't do risk or adventure. For me, such terms imply a lack of focus and planning. People like Nansen were meticulous in their planning, a discipline embedded in the operation of The Polar Academy, the Scottish charity I set up in 2014 to inspire young adults through exploration.

Navigating across sea ice, camping in the snow and hauling your 45kg sledge for days in the wilderness is hugely challenging and rewarding. It nurtures invaluable life skills and self-confidence soars. It's a positive, life-changing experience and one each pupil subsequently shares with thousands of their peers.

Not all youths will venture into the Arctic but, as a society, we must remove that mental bubble-wrap and empower the young to redefine their physical and mental limits. In doing so, we plant the seed of confidence that germinates into self-belief and a recognition that "ordinary" young people can achieve the extraordinary.

Craig Mathieson is a polar explorer and founder of the registered youth charity The Polar Academy