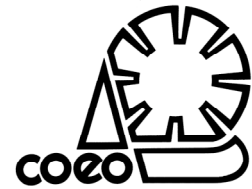


THE COUNCIL OF OUTDOOR EDUCATORS OF ONTARIO



COEO RESEARCH DOCUMENT: Executive Summary ***Reconnecting Children Through Outdoor Education***

Outdoor and Experiential Education (OEE) is a vital learning methodology for today's children and young people. Its provision of safe, educator-framed and hands-on experiences in outdoor settings provides unique, vital and lasting benefits in terms of education for curriculum and community, education for character, education for wellbeing and education for environment. This document is a compelling synthesis of a wide variety of current outcomes-based research. It offers concrete evidence as to why OEE should become an essential and publicly funded part of education for the future.

OEE relates curricula to real-life situations.

Research shows that students using OEE and the local environment as a comprehensive focus and framework for curricula demonstrate

- increased engagement with and enthusiasm for learning
- improved academic performance, including better language skills
- greater sense of pride and ownership in accomplishments
- a variety of substantially increased critical thinking skills.

OEE promotes lifelong physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

A growing body of studies suggests that

- contact with nature is as important to children as good nutrition and adequate sleep
- time spent outdoors correlates with increased physical activity and fitness in children
- exposure to green space reduces crime, increases general wellbeing and ability to focus
- children as young as five have shown a significant reduction in the symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder when they are engaged in outdoor activities in natural settings.

OEE educates for character.

It provides powerful opportunities for extensive personal and interpersonal growth, particularly when trained outdoor educators are involved in all aspects of the program. Major research studies have found that

- many character traits are significantly enhanced as a result of OEE experiences, including creativity, enthusiasm, self-motivation, self-understanding, assertiveness, maturity, independence, and self-confidence
- many social skills are also enhanced through OEE experiences, including cooperation, effective communication, decision making, problem solving, task leadership, and social competence
- OEE promotes marked improvements in behaviour for special populations such as at-risk youth. Retention and continued growth in these areas is also evident as a result of such hands-on experiences.

Finally, and in COEO's opinion most importantly, **OEE directly exposes children and youth to the natural environment in ways that develop powerful, knowledgeable and lifelong connections essential for a healthy and sustainable future.**

Leading Canadians such as Robert Bateman, Thomas Homer-Dixon and David Suzuki all strongly agree and are quoted in this document.

Research also shows that

- early, sequenced and repeated experiences in the outdoors develop a kinship with nature that can evolve into an informed, proactive and lifelong stewardship of our natural environment
- there are great benefits in the use of outdoor education methodologies for environmental education purposes
- children love to be part of the solution – especially when they are able to see the effects of their positive interaction with nature first-hand.

As a result of these findings, The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO) urges government, parents, volunteer leaders and other community members to actively reclaim the outdoors as a safe, fulfilling and essential part of growing up in this province and beyond.

COEO also makes the following major recommendations to the Ontario government:

1. Formally recognize the value of Outdoor and Experiential Education (OEE) as a unique and powerful learning methodology that particularly addresses the pressing need of education for environment as well education for character, wellbeing, and curriculum.
2. Develop a comprehensive across-all-grades sequence of school-based outdoor activities that addresses the four values of OEE and particularly education for environment.
3. Provide funding to school boards so that every student is assured a minimum of two one-day OEE programs and one five-day OEE program at recognized outdoor education centres.
4. Mandate that OEE is a recognized area of specialization at the Primary, Junior, Intermediate and Senior levels in all Ontario faculties of education.

The postgraduate schools of Ontario universities are also urged to promote further Ontario-based research into the various powerful and lasting benefits of OEE for Ontario public and secondary school students.

To order copies of the full 80 pg document, go to: <http://www.coeo.org/news.htm>

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