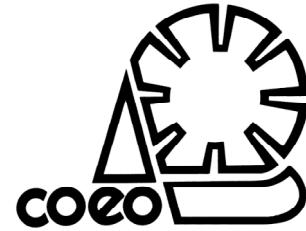


# **FRIENDS OF COEO NEWSLETTER**

The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario

[www.coeo.org](http://www.coeo.org)

Editor: Grant Linney  
July 20, 2007



## **COEO ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2007**

Fri. Sept. 28<sup>th</sup> to Sun. Sept. 30<sup>th</sup>

YMCA CAMP WANAKITA, Haliburton Highlands

This fall, COEO returns to a Retreat-style conference, bringing back the “weekend with friends in the great outdoors” feel of years gone by.

This year’s theme is ***Reconnecting Children Through Outdoor Education***, in support and recognition of our just-published 80-page Research Summary concerning the great and lasting values of outdoor and experiential education.

For more information about the conference, go to [www.coeo.org/conference.htm](http://www.coeo.org/conference.htm)  
And, please contact Shane if you are willing to help out! [shanerkra@yahoo.ca](mailto:shanerkra@yahoo.ca)

## **CALL FOR COEO CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

**O.K., FOLKS, STEP UP, STEP RIGHT UP!**

**We need your proposals for presentations at our annual conference!**

The success of our conference is very dependent upon your willingness to share your passion and expertise re the great breadth and depth of OEE with your colleagues.

**What can you do to ensure yet another successful COEO conference?**

Please go to [www.coeo.org/conference.htm](http://www.coeo.org/conference.htm), download the conference flyer and call for presentations, and send us something you’re willing to share.

## **CALL FOR COEO AWARD NOMINATIONS**

Our annual conference is also the time for us to recognize and celebrate the efforts and achievements of COEO members and other outdoor educators throughout the province.

Please go to <http://www.coeo.org/membership.htm> and read about our five major awards. For four of the awards click on their titles on the top left of this page. For our newest award, scroll down to the Awards heading in the main text and click on The COEO Amethyst Award, in Memory of Brent Dysart.

A nomination form can be downloaded from this section.

**Please consider nominating a deserving colleague.**

## **THREE KEY DOCUMENTS OF INTEREST TO ALL OUTDOOR EDUCATORS**

### **1) GREENING THE WAY ONTARIO LEARNS (EEON)**

I have a confession to make. While I've skimmed through what I deemed to be relevant sections of this document once or twice before, last week was the first time that I actually sat down and read this 126 page report right through, from beginning to end. I regret that I did not do this some time ago.

*Greening the Way Ontario Learns* (GWOL) is a most impressive accomplishment, both in terms of process and product. It is published by Environmental Education Ontario (EEON), an organization that describes itself as *a citizen's coalition of educational and other professionals* who are concerned about *the quality of environmental learning across the province*. Like most small volunteer-based organizations, EEON's success depended upon the tremendous vision and sustained commitment of a few dedicated individuals. At the risk of missing a few key contributors, I feel compelled to thank Dave Arthur, Jane Forbes and Elise Houghton for being the driving force behind GWOL. They initiated and saw through an amazing consultative process that took a year to complete and actively engaged more than 500 individuals and 200 organizations from across the province and from 17 identified sectors of our society. While they were inspired by the previous work of a number of U.S. states, EEON's work here is unique both in terms of the number of audiences engaged in the process and the comprehensiveness of their results.

Process informs product. GWOL is an outstanding example of this, and I think it only becomes evident if one reads the entire report. It is very well written and, in its clear and systematic examination of desirable outcomes, needs and strategies concerning environmental education for each of the 17 audiences, it provides a comprehensive, unique and powerful template for a sustainable and fulfilling future. I was particularly taken with new (for me) language such as *traditional ecological knowledge* (First Nations), *genuine progress indicators (GPI)*, *industrial ecology*, and *precautionary principle*, but it's the overall accumulative impact of this publication that blows me away. It should not be left on your bookshelf. It requires a full reading and a careful consideration of what it means for each reader. It deserves our support. It needs an ongoing and much more comprehensive public profile. It merits further input and revision in the near future (having been published in 2003). It requires political leadership in order to coordinate all these sectors of our society so that meaningful actions will follow.

We can't know for sure, but perhaps GWOL has already had a major impact. Perhaps it played a role in having our current provincial government not only appoint an Environmental Education working group chaired by astronaut Roberta Bondar, but subsequently adopt all 32 of its recommendations. And, perhaps the highest tribute I can pay to GWOL is to suggest a change of title. Drop the word *Learns* and replace it with *Lives*, because *Greening the Way Ontario Lives* (how we work, play, learn, worship, travel, etc.) is really what this visionary and practical document is all about. Perhaps this minor change will help GWOL to garner the public attention it rightly deserves.

*Greening the Way Ontario Learns: A Public Strategic Plan for Environmental and Sustainability Education* is available online at [www.eeon.org](http://www.eeon.org).

## **THREE KEY DOCUMENTS OF INTEREST TO ALL OUTDOOR EDUCATORS**

(Continued)

### **2) REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

There is no doubt that the Ontario government's recently published Bondar report (*Shaping Our Schools, Shaping Our Future*) is a very significant document given its comprehensive 32 recommendations and Education Minister Wynne's declaration that they will all be adopted (albeit dependent upon both election results and subsequent unwavering political will). Copy & paste the following link into your browser to access the entire report:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/curriculumcouncil/shapingSchools.pdf>

I believe that the Bondar report is as good as can be expected, given that it comes from seven highly committed citizens working valiantly within an incredibly short (nine week) time frame. However, I feel obliged to record my disappointment with its inadequate addressing of the role of outdoor and experiential education (OEE) in producing the *engaged and environmentally responsible citizens* it seeks. Page six of the document (under the heading, *Defining environmental education*) makes explicit mention of outdoor education *as a distinct and critical component of environmental education*, but the rest of the report does little to support this claim. For example, in the key *Vision for Environmental Education in Ontario* section, the authors only make vague reference to a context for learning that *will combine classroom learning with experiential learning (p. 4)*, (why does it not say outdoor and experiential learning?) and no mention is made of this vital approach to learning in any of the other seven Vision sections including *Learning and Leadership*.

In the *Discussion and Recommendations* section, the report refers to the need for students to explore *multiple environments* and to *engage in learning activities that are situated in the outdoor environment (p. 11)*; this strikes me as little more than an addendum that fails to convey the great import of such experiences ... as well as the unique set of skills required in order to make such outdoor learning both safe and effective.

When it comes to the 32 recommendations, OEE receives the following indirect mention:

- #15 with the need for elementary students *to explore and investigate their local environments (p. 14)*,
- #18 with the need for secondary students to engage in *environmental action projects* as part of their Civics course (p. 15), and
- #24 with its reference to *first-hand experiences that put students in touch with nature (p. 16)*.

The last recommendation is the only one that directly refers to outdoor education, and I believe it does so in a very misguided way, recommending that the Ministry of Education *consult with relevant ministries and education partners to ensure the adequate funding of outdoor education in Ontario (p. 16)*. Good heavens, if OEE is to be *a distinct and critical component of environmental education (p. 6)*, then why on earth would the Ministry of Education seek to farm it out to other government agencies? Isn't this a passing of the buck that is doomed to failure?

OEE should not be considered as some "addendum" to a comprehensive and much-needed new approach to environmental education. Instead of timid and peripheral mention, it deserves the kind of distinct, bold and unequivocal support as is voiced by the following prominent Canadians. (The full text of their statements can be found at: [www.coeo.org/aboutus.htm](http://www.coeo.org/aboutus.htm))

## **THREE KEY DOCUMENTS OF INTEREST TO ALL OUTDOOR EDUCATORS**

(Continued)

*I cannot comprehend how our provincial government fails to see the connections between the many pressing environmental concerns of our times and the need to expose our children to publicly funded, teacher-led experiences in the outdoors. It is only through such direct and hands-on experiences that our children (and future citizens) will develop the ecological literacy to sustain life on this planet.*

Thomas Homer-Dixon

*Respect for nature and the natural require close and frequent contact with nature and the natural. .... I have deep concern that many children lack a connection to the natural world that engenders the respect for the natural required to protect some of our most important shared values. .... Young people long to experience the awe and wonder of nature and we can help them to do so. To do this is not only a moral undertaking – it is a moral necessity.*

Margaret Somerville

*I think outdoor education is one of the most basic parts of education and ought to be a mandatory part of every curriculum in the country. It is not a frill or luxury, it is fundamental if we are to meet the real issues of our time.*

David Suzuki

*The overwhelming reason to increase nature study and outdoor education in the schools is nothing short of the salvation of the planet.*

Robert Bateman

### **3) RECONNECTING CHILDREN THROUGH OUTDOOR EDUCATION (COEO)**

A few months ago, COEO published an 80-page summary of the current and international research into the multiple, measurable and lasting benefits of OEE. While OEE for Environment presents particularly compelling outcomes when it is combined with environmental education, a wide array of evidence is also presented in support of OEE as a major contributor to other major government priorities such as education for curriculum (e.g., enhanced academic performance), education for character development (both individual traits and social skills), and education for physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

*Reconnecting Children* continues to receive widespread praise.

Here's our latest testimonial:

*Congratulations! COEO has produced an informative, highly readable and fascinating summary of relevant research in outdoor and experiential education. The summaries are concise, well written and colourfully presented. This makes navigating the complex world of educational research into outdoor education an easy and refreshingly straightforward task. Reconnecting Children Through Outdoor Education, a research summary is a valuable tool for anyone who intuitively knows the importance of outdoor experiences but needs the hard data and research to back up their beliefs. Well done COEO!*

**Jacob Rodenburg, Executive Director,  
Camp Kawartha & The Kawartha Outdoor Education Centre**

For further information, testimonials and order forms, go to [www.coeo.org/news.htm](http://www.coeo.org/news.htm)

## **MAKING MEDIA ACCOUNTABLE**

Last Saturday, Rex Murphy wrote a column titled *Live Earth? How about live irony?* in which he castigated the rock stars who showed up at the Live Earth concerts while at the same time being among the world's most wasteful people. Point taken. However, when he goes on to compare the self-serving, egotistic nature of said stars to politicians, and he ends his piece by saying *Madonna and Al Gore - can you spot the difference?* he has gone way too far.

It is high time that Neanderthal climate change deniers like Murphy be regularly called on such maddening drivel. The following is my letter to the editor. It was published in Monday's Globe. The title comes from the Globe.

### ***Murphy Warming***

*Rex Murphy's assessment of self-promoting and cliché spewing celebrity entertainers at the recent Live Earth concerts is scathing (Live Earth? How about live irony? July 14). Yes, too many of these "rock star plutocrats" have no clue about their own destructive impacts on this planet, but Mr. Murphy's comparison of Madonna with Al Gore is every bit as shallow and irresponsible. Whatever personal weaknesses Mr. Gore may possess, many of us know him to be a long-standing, much needed and highly credible advocate for one of the most critical issues of our time.*

*Take a look in the mirror, Mr. Murphy. Don't your breezy generalizations about politicians being self-serving and cynical apply to many of you media types also? We get the leaders we deserve and you, my pompous pontificator, are setting the bar very low.*

## **STEPPING UP TO THE PLATE FOR OEE & COEO**

Here's a few things that you can do for COEO, your organizing for promoting OEE within Ontario and beyond.

- 1) **Renew your membership** in COEO for the new school year (September 1, 2007 to August 31, 2008). Membership provides you with multiple benefits, as outlined on our web site ([www.coeo.org](http://www.coeo.org)). It also provides COEO with the human and financial capital essential to the realization of our mandate. Membership renewal can be done online with a credit card, or you can continue to respond to the upcoming membership mailing.
- 2) **Save the dates for our annual conference**: Support COEO and give yourself a great experiential affirmation by planning to join us at Camp Wanakita in the Haliburton Highlands this coming fall (September 28-30, 2007). Registration details to follow.
- 3) **Volunteer**: Stay tuned for a potential re-organization of the COEO Board of Directors, designed to actively engage more COEO members and from across the province ... and please consider joining our efforts on behalf of a most worthy and timely cause.
- 4) **Purchase Reconnecting Children Through Outdoor Education**