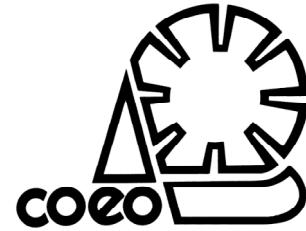


FRIENDS OF COEO NEWSLETTER

The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario

www.coeo.org

Editor: Grant Linney
September 7th, 2007



COEO ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2007

Fri. Sept. 28th to Sun. Sept. 30th

YMCA CAMP WANAKITA, Haliburton Highlands

The conference registration form is now available: www.coeo.org/conference.htm
Due to a shortage of volunteers, we need you to mail the completed form and your cheque to the person and address indicated. If it's postmarked no later than Wednesday September 12th then you can pay at the early bird rate.

A summary of confirmed sessions to date can also be viewed and downloaded from the web site. A more detailed description of the program will be posted next week.

Please note that you must be a current member of COEO (the new year started September 1, 2007) in order to register for the Conference. You can add your membership fee to your conference cheque, or pay for your membership using your credit card online. www.coeo.org/membership.htm

Please contact COEO President & Conference Chair Shane Kramer if you are willing to help out, either with our conference or during this new membership year.

shanerkra@yahoo.ca

STILL LOOKING 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.

Our awards will be that much more meaningful if we receive a good number of nominations from our membership. **Please consider putting forward a deserving colleague**. A nomination form and instructions can be downloaded from the bottom of this same page on the COEO web site. The deadline for submitting nominations is Monday September 10, 2007.

THE OLD FART STRIKES AGAIN

Yes, I have landed another Op Ed in the Globe and Mail, more specifically today's online (globeandmail.com) edition. This web version also features a link to the COEO web site and an online follow-up discussion forum.

Here's a slightly longer version of the Globe piece.

The last paragraph is an addition that I thought of after submitting the piece.

Let's expose children to the environment – not dump it on them

Government decisions to teach about climate change in our elementary and secondary classrooms create the false illusion that we are doing something significant about an unprecedented global concern. This fallacy occurs when we announce that the topic will be covered, but fail to place it within the sequenced curricular context of a well-designed environmental science course. It is even more so the case when we commit to such teaching without demonstrating that we are actually doing something about this huge issue.

Actions speak louder than words. Teaching about climate change without acting on it carries with it the unspoken but very real message, "We adults have screwed up, and it's now up to you kids to solve the problem." Surely this is "downloading" of the worst kind. If the current generation of adults abdicates responsibility towards concrete and significant measures in the here and now and across a broad range of societal fronts, we demonstrate hypocrisy. We express grave concern, but we fail to actually do something about it. How then can we expect our young people to become an active part of the solution?

Early last April, I received an email from a mother in Deep River, Ontario, inquiring about the appropriateness of a local school's possible showing of *An Inconvenient Truth* for Grades 4 to 6 students during Earth Week. She added that "A local principal thinks so, but I'm not so sure." While I believe that Al Gore, warts and all, has done more than anyone else I know to provide a "tipping point" for genuine corrective action concerning one of the most pressing global issues of our times, my response was an emphatic "No." My reasons are as follows.

First, such a film is entirely inappropriate for this age of student. It creates an unnecessary fear in children who, at this point in their lives, can do little about such concerns except feel overwhelmed, helpless and fearful. This "ecophobia," as noted American author David Sobel calls it, is the sort of negative and counterproductive experience that educators must avoid exposing young minds to.

Second, Earth Day and Earth Week should instead be a celebration of the amazing and bountiful life and life support systems of this planet, and the best way to do this is to take our children outdoors to directly experience our natural surroundings. This is

square one. This is the fundamental first step in developing and nurturing ecological consciousness and a lasting environmental ethic that informs one's daily actions.

It begins with a variety of safe, teacher-led and carefully planned experiences in local parks where there is some remnant of a wild and untended part of nature, where children can find bugs and other small creatures on a forest floor, in a field, pond or creek. Adults can share their delight in such direct and hands-on discoveries. Teachers can use the engagement and connection brought about by such experiences as a springboard to learning about how ecosystems work, about how their living and nonliving parts are intricately interrelated, and how we as humans can profoundly impact upon these relationships.

There is a repeating cycle here, constantly fuelled by the rich and deep soil of direct experience: take them outdoors and provide them with an ongoing variety of opportunities to connect. Spark their wonder, stir their curiosity, encourage the questions that inevitably follow, and then take full advantage of the powerful content learning and commitment to action that can ensue. And, let's realize that such encounters should not be relegated to just one day or even one week. If we truly wish to bring about significant and long-term changes, such experiences will begin now, in September, and they will continue throughout the school year.

Oh, and about that climate change issue. It's time for the current generation of perpetually consuming and polluting adults to stop being calmed and misled by the posturing and rhetoric of many politicians (as well as others) who think that's all we want. It's time for us to both make and demand fundamental and far reaching changes in the way we live on this planet ... for any number of reasons, and for the sake of our children, if not ourselves.

Grant Linney teaches at the Upper Canada College Norval Outdoor School and is past president of The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario. He is also co-author of a just published research summary, "Reconnecting Our Children Through Outdoor Education."

A slightly shorter version of this Op Ed first appeared in the online version of the Globe and Mail on Wednesday September 5, 2007.