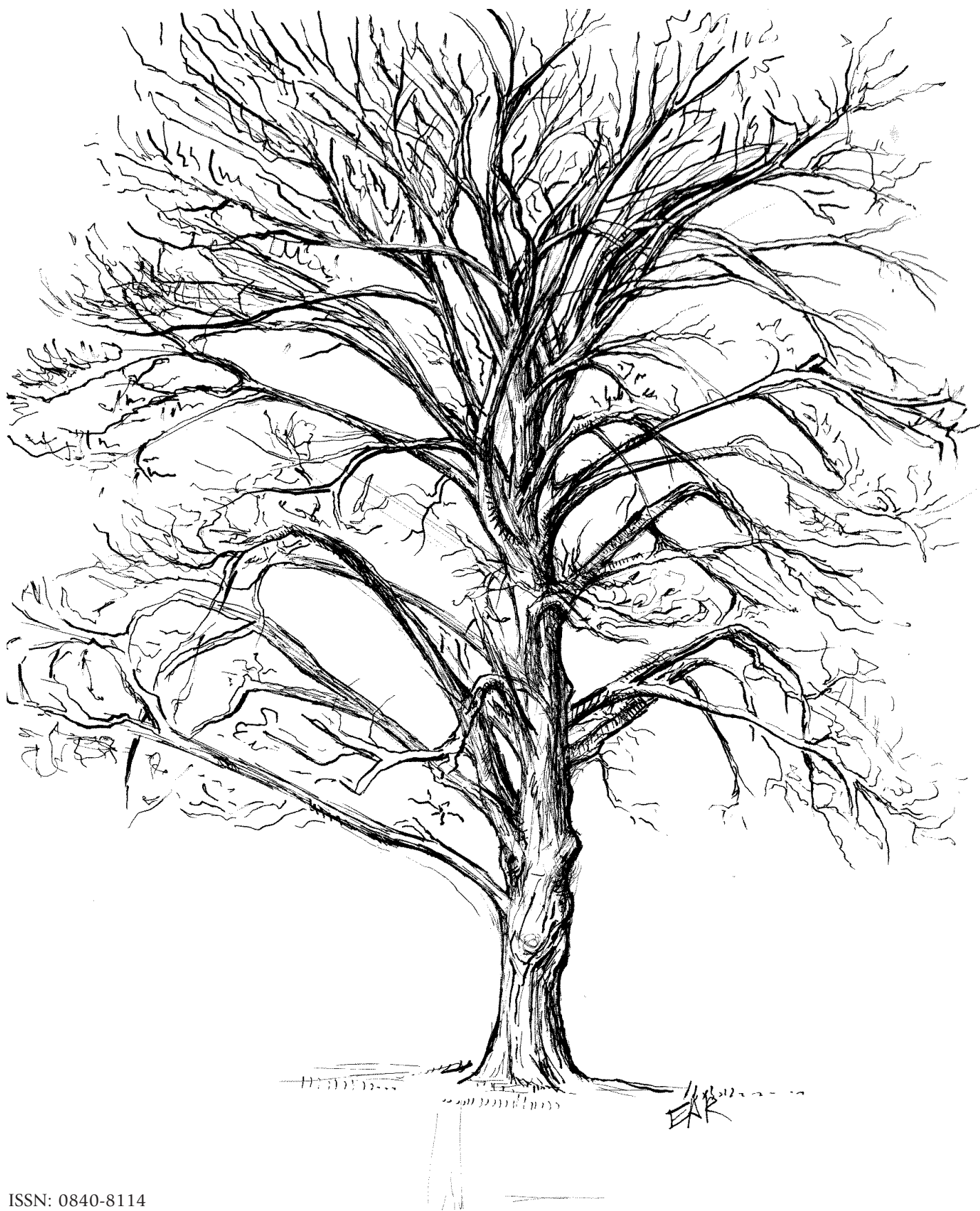
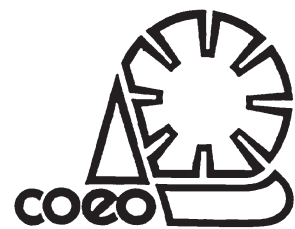


# Pathways

THE ONTARIO JOURNAL OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Spring 2006, 18(3)



# Pathways

## Our mailing address:

The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario  
1185 Eglinton Avenue East  
Toronto, ON M3C 3C6

## Our Web site address:

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

## COEO

Formed in 1972, The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO) is a non-profit, volunteer-based organization that promotes safe, quality outdoor education experiences for people of all ages. This is achieved through publishing the *Pathways* journal, running an annual conference and regional workshops, maintaining a Web site, and working with kindred organizations as well as government agencies.

## Contributions Welcome

*Pathways* is always looking for contributions. If you are interested in making a submission, of either a written or illustrative nature, we would be happy to hear from you. For a copy of our submission guidelines, please contact Randee Holmes, Managing Editor.

If you are interested in being a guest editor of an issue of *Pathways*, please request a copy of our guidelines for guest editors from Randee Holmes, Managing Editor.

If you have any questions regarding *Pathways*, please direct them to Bob Henderson, Chair of the *Pathways* Editorial Board. If you'd like more information about COEO and joining the organization, please refer to the inside back cover of this issue or contact a Board of Directors member.

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*Pathways* accepts advertisements for products and services that may be of interest to our readers. To receive an advertising information package, please contact Bob Henderson, Chair of the *Pathways* Editorial Board. We maintain the right to refuse any advertisement we feel is not in keeping with our mandate and our readers' interests.

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# Pathways

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Spring 2006, 18(3)



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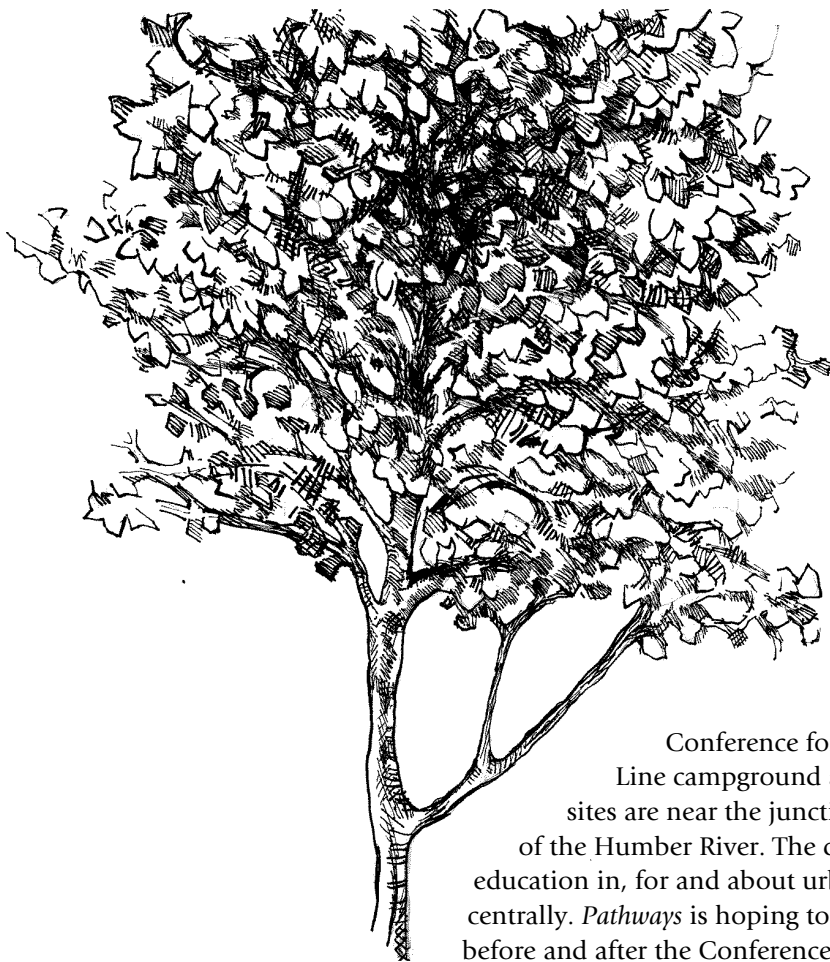
*Pathways* is published four times a year for The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO) and distributed to COEO members. Membership fees include a subscription to *Pathways*, as well as admittance to workshops, courses and conferences. A membership application form is included on the inside back cover of this issue of *Pathways*.

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*Pathways* continues to receive submissions from sources within our COEO ranks and beyond. It seems the days of heavy recruiting for submissions and using the odd quality reprint from other sources to fill out an issue (yes, we have done this shameless act in the past) is behind us. In short, our submissions roll in and we on the Editorial Team believe we all benefit from the diversity of connection to ideas, people and programs that are had. Please take special note of the Call for Articles on page 34. We hope to promote a Backcountry Learning Theme within 2006/07 along with upcoming feature issue themes: Urban-based Outdoor Education (Winter 2007, following the September 2006 conference), Sustainable Outdoor Education (Summer 2006) and regular program reports and curricular backpocket ideas.

Please refer to the Winter 2006 18(2) issue *Pathways* for news about the COEO Annual Conference for late September 2006. It will be held at the Indian Line campground and the Humberwood Community Centre. The sites are near the junction of Highways 407 and 427 and near the banks of the Humber River. The conference intentions are to bolster outdoor education in, for and about urban areas. It is time for COEO to address this issue centrally. *Pathways* is hoping to advance this mandate by seeking submissions before and after the Conference 2006.

*Editorial Team*

**Sketch Pad** — Emily Robertson is a visual artist with exhibitions and publications in both Canada and the United States. Emily discovered a love of painting during a high school exchange program with the English-Speaking Union of the United States, at Cheltenham Ladies' College in England. After graduating in Fine Art from the Ontario College of Art and Design, Emily participated with 46 other artists in the Art for Preservation exhibition and auction, sponsored by the Temagami Wilderness Society, to raise awareness of endangered old-growth forest. More recently, Emily has travelled to Western North America, where she has educated—and been educated—outdoors in the deserts of New Mexico, Idaho and Baja California. She currently resides on the outskirts of her local World Biosphere Reserve in Dundas, Ontario. Emily holds a bachelor's degree in English Literature from the University of Toronto. Emily's art is on the cover and pages 2, 8, 12, 15, 19, 21, 31 and 32.

Karen McMullen has been called a "warrior-love-adventurer." In her quest for a rich and full life, this Outward Bound Instructor savours quiet mornings on trail painting and soaking in the scene. Karen's art is on page 24.

It is my great pleasure to introduce you to Andrea Foster, COEO's first paid staff person. This is due to COEO's successful application for a 12-month Ontario Trillium Foundation grant to hire a Project Coordinator to advance some of the goals we have been working on over the past few years. After an intense search for the right person, our interview team selected Andrea from over 120 applicants. She has considerable experience in organizational capacity building, most recently with Friends of the Earth in Scotland. We feel she will help us to accomplish four broad goals over the next 12 months, both for COEO and for outdoor education in general.

First, she will help us gain a better understanding of the outdoor education community in the province of Ontario. Many people have found a home in COEO, but there are also those who are not familiar with us, or who may not see themselves as outdoor educators even though they strive for many of the same outcomes we do. We must seek opportunities for collaboration with these people and other kindred organizations—both under our own banner and collectively. This goal will allow us to expand our vision beyond the traditional definitions and limitations of outdoor education.

Second, if we wish to promote outdoor education to the governing bodies of our province, and increase awareness of the value of outdoor education among the citizens of Ontario, we must be able to back up our claims with research-based evidence. By examining, collating and synthesizing previous research about outdoor education, Andrea will help us demonstrate this value. These research initiatives will enable others to understand

what we are already doing well, and help us to learn what more we can be doing.

Third, we wish to see more educators competently involved in outdoor education. This ties in with our desire to have more outdoor education happening "closer to home," as an integral part of classroom learning. Professional development activities and resources may also benefit other community program leaders who could be part of bringing outdoor education experiences to a wider audience.

Fourth, we want COEO to develop its organizational effectiveness and stability. Much of the above work will play into this and help us to create a strategic plan for outdoor education in Ontario and our role in it.

These are the main areas we wish to work on through the OTF grant. Full details of this workplan can be found on the COEO website ([www.coeo.org](http://www.coeo.org)). I encourage you to take a look in detail at this document so you can understand what we are trying to accomplish as an organization. I also hope that when looking at this document you may find something that you may be able to help us with. Comments and input from the membership at large is what will always drive our success.

And while on the topic of introductions, I would like to take a moment to also introduce a new COEO board member. Laura Ferguson has been appointed to the board to act as Treasurer for the remainder of this year. With the addition of Laura to this position the board is again complete. Welcome Laura!

*Shane Kramer*

DATE	TIME	LOCATION
June 3, 2006	9:30 am – 4:30 pm	TBA
September 16, 2006	9:30 am – 4:30 pm	TBA

## 'Old Timers' on Pensions

Dear Editor:

It is great to be retired—no daily work obligations and no special bed times. The one drawback is a reduced paycheck, which makes it difficult to attend special events like I used to, especially the COEO conferences.

I imagine I'm not unique knowing that many experienced outdoor educators are retired, yet filled with years of experience that would benefit upcoming youth in the field.

When we worked for a school board, they helped subsidize travel and registration to attend COEO conferences because the information gained would be beneficial to the students in the board. I know that I learned a lot over the many years attending various conferences and I implemented much of what I learned into my outdoor education curriculum.

Simply because I'm retired doesn't mean that all of the knowledge I gained over the years has disappeared. With more free time I'm now in a position to share my wisdom

with others. I feel certain there are many educators, like me, with outdoor wisdom bottled up inside waiting for the opportunity for the cork to be pulled and experiences shared.

One of the main barriers for me is the cost of attending conferences. I manage to keep my membership paid to receive *Pathways*, but it doesn't offer any other benefits to a retired teacher. I propose that conference registration for retired members be reduced considerably, as low as or lower than student rates. Also, a reduced annual membership fee should be considered for retirees.

Taking this kind of action will only benefit the organization because more 'old timers' will continue to be members and contribute a great deal by sharing their knowledge either in workshops or just hanging out with other outdoor educators for a weekend.

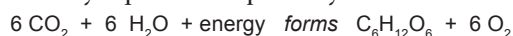
*Jerry Jordison*

## Carbon Dioxide, Oxygen and Photosynthesis

Dear Editor:

The otherwise excellent article on the planet as a dynamic self-sustaining system by Itay Keshet (*The Gaia Hypothesis*, Vol 18(2) Winter 2006) contains an unfortunate misconception about the role of photosynthesis. This misconception, grounded in bad science, prevents students who catch it from fully grasping the elegant relationship among atmospheric gasses and green plants. This misunderstanding is sufficiently widespread to justify an attempt to put it right.

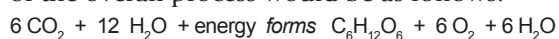
The trouble all stems from the classic summary equation of photosynthesis:



This works as a summary, but it also hides the truth of the process at the same time as it misleads. The error comes from believing that the 6 oxygen molecules (12 atoms) produced are the same as the 12 oxygen atoms in the original 6 carbon dioxide molecules.

Alas for simplicity! The oxygen atoms for the gas output of photosynthesis come from the breakdown of water, not carbon dioxide. The summary equation above does not allow

that possibility. A slightly better representation of the overall process would be as follows:



The oxygen atoms from carbon dioxide appear in the sugar and water produced. All the oxygen given off comes from breaking down water.

It's beyond the scope of this note to tell how we know this to be the case. Senior high school Biology and elementary college text books give more details, but not much on the evidence. For that see any good introduction to plant physiology.

From a strictly mechanistic view, it may not matter what the precise source of atmospheric oxygen is. The point for Gaia is that photosynthetic plants fix carbon from the atmosphere and produce oxygen, thus providing a sustained unequal distribution of elements. But from a human view, to gloss over the real mechanism is to lose the sense of wonder and elegance in the biosphere.

*Bert Horwood*

## The Challenges of High School–Community Partnerships: Learning through Leading an Earth Education Program

by Camille Dumond and Alan Warner

The dynamic growth of environmental education in North America has largely taken place outside of schools—the very institutions our society charges with educating young people (von Lupke, 2000). Although no one characterization captures the diversity within and between educational systems, public schools have a traditional purpose of maintaining the current social order through reproducing the values and norms inherent in dominant political, and consequently environmental, decision making (Hart, 1993). However, environmental education has been proposed as a tool to “transform the values that underlie our decision making from those that aid and abet environmental degradation to those that support a sustainable planet in which all organisms can live with dignity” (p. 6). Thus, schools engaging in environmental education are charged with fulfilling an educational mission that runs counter to prevailing values (von Lupke, 2000).

Public high schools are particularly challenged to meaningfully integrate environmental education into their programs given the discipline-based curriculum, rigid timetables, standardized testing, and emphasis on workforce and university preparation. Some schools have extracurricular environmental clubs or activities, typically spearheaded by a few committed individuals. They are usually dwarfed, if not invisible, relative to the traditional extracurricular emphases on team sports, drama and music.

This study looked at a school–community collaboration that addresses the challenges to providing meaningful environmental education through public high schools. In this collaboration, high school students were

trained in leadership techniques and took responsibility for teaching and guiding grade three children through an outdoor day program called Winter Treasures as part of their school curriculum. Winter Treasures, run by a municipal outdoor recreation centre, follows an earth education model (Van Matre, 1999) with its content grounded in the ethical principles of deep ecology, and its processes based on the philosophy of experiential education. While learning through service is a frequent tool used to give students meaningful experiences in community settings (Berv, 1998), there have been very few studies connecting cross-age teaching to environmental education (Jupp, 1995; Mehta & Henderson, 1996). This study explores the meanings that students construct from these experiences, be they “bright friendly spots in grey school life” (von Lupke, 2000, p. 19), or experiences with deeper meanings relating to students’ empowerment, relationship with society and the natural world.

### Description of the Program and Research Methodology

Winter Treasures is organized around an experiential one-day excursion to a wild park near an urban centre. The outdoor experience takes the form of a storyline in which grade three children learn about and explore the natural world as they play out their roles. The storyline then becomes a springboard for integrating environmental learning into the curriculum over the next few months back in their classroom (see Warner & Dumond, 2004, for a detailed description of the curriculum). The high school students worked in pairs, each leading a group of six to eight children through a day of outdoor activities that helped

them to appreciate nature firsthand, learn basic ecological concepts, and make a personal commitment to reducing their environmental impact. High school students participated in a two-day experiential leadership training process on weekend days before leading three or four school days of Winter Treasures.

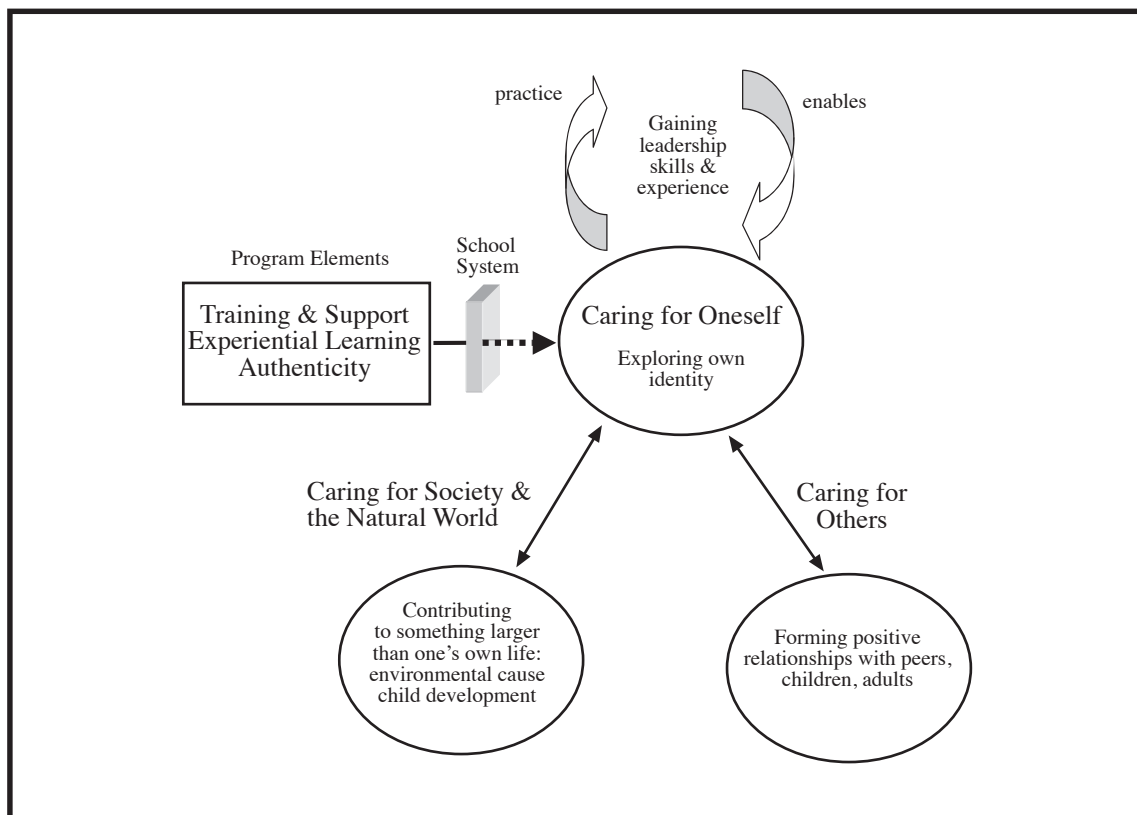
The research utilized qualitative methods, including in-depth interviewing, participant observation and a focus group to understand student perspectives and experiences. Forty-seven student leaders from an urban high school in Halifax, Nova Scotia participated in Winter Treasures during the winter of 2002. A purposeful sample was selected to maximize variation by age, gender, past leadership and cultural experiences. Fourteen students (four males and 10 females) between the ages of 15 and 18 were interviewed, the point at which additional interviews did not yield further

insights. The participants were academically average to strong, and reported that their academic work was a priority. With one exception, they were involved in other extracurricular pursuits including sports, the arts, student government, paid work and community service. The first author was a participant observer during the students' two-day leadership training and for eight program leadership days. Subsequent to the interviews and observations, a focus group of selected leaders was conducted to reflect on the initial findings.

## A Report of the Results

Students identified three important elements of the experiences: caring for themselves, caring for relationships with other people and caring about society and the natural world (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Mental map of participants' experiences leading Winter Treasures.**



Many of the key sub-themes revolved around the central sphere of participants' caring for themselves through explorations of their identity. Gaining and practicing leadership skills were important to this process. Present, but less fully developed, were participants' explorations of how to create positive relationships with adults and peers in the program and of their contribution to society and the natural world. The program elements viewed as key to facilitating these experiences were training and support from adults, the opportunity for experiential teaching and learning, and the authentic responsibility inherent in their roles. The following discussion examines these elements as they relate to students' explorations of how they care for themselves, others, and the wider world.

### ***Training and Support***

Student leaders viewed the two days of experiential leadership training in combination with the support provided by adult staff during the program as a key component of their experiences. Staff trainers presented a model of creative and child-centred leadership that seemed very influential in setting a tone for participants' own creative explorations of self in a leadership role. As Tracy, a grade 12 student, noted, "I didn't think we'd really lead like this. It's cool—I get to have fun and be myself." Participants returned again and again to their perception that staff created a safe space that enabled them to "be themselves."

Participants experienced staff relationships as "level" and friendly rather than hierarchical or overly authoritative. They emphasized the importance of collaborating with the adults to ensure the program's success. They described these relationships positively compared to those with their teachers at school. Ansel (grade 12) noted, "If I play around with the teacher, then they get all mean and like 'Oh, I'm the big teacher. Treat me with respect.' But here they treat me with respect and we can

play around!" In setting up respectful relationships with participants, staff trainers set a tone for what students perceived as non-traditional interactions between youth and adults. These qualities seemed critical to enabling participants to explore their leadership and personal identities through the program.

Finally, participants discussed how training affected how they thought about their relationship to the natural world. The two-day experiential training focussed on child-leadership techniques, program content and safety. The participants noted that further training in environmental aspects of the program would have helped them feel more confident and competent in teaching. Cassandra (grade 12) noted, "The more I know about what I'm teaching, the more comfortable I am and the more I'm going to put into it, and the better it's going to come across." The students articulated the need to have a full understanding of the rationale for their leadership and teaching rather than a narrower, task-oriented approach.

### ***Authenticity***

In relation to themselves, participants spoke about feeling "responsible" and "really having to do something for someone" as part of leading the program. They perceived their learning as having a real context with meaningful consequences. Ansel explains: "I have to learn it because I'm going to have to teach it to someone else, so there's more of a drive to learn stuff." Participants' perceived themselves as competent leaders and teachers, in part because it was a "real world" experience. Gabrielle, a grade 11 student with no previous leadership experience, noted, "I felt like I could, if I wanted to, have a job like that. I'd be able to do it."

Participants felt their involvement caused them to consider the contribution they were making to society through helping children. Ansel explained, "If you serve people like food

or something it doesn't really matter. But if you're out with them teaching them stuff and having fun, it's more making a difference." For Greg it was "a real application of education" towards "helping humanity" after years in high school with "no output for any of the stuff we learn."

Although participants received academic credit for leading the program, those who initially joined just for the credit noted that their program experiences became more important than the credit. For instance, Brenda said, the credit "slipped my mind, once I got into it. Yeah, I was thinking I really wanted to; I was scared that I wouldn't pull through for the kids. I actually thought about it, like I have to do something for someone."

In relation to the natural world, participants who began with a desire to "help the

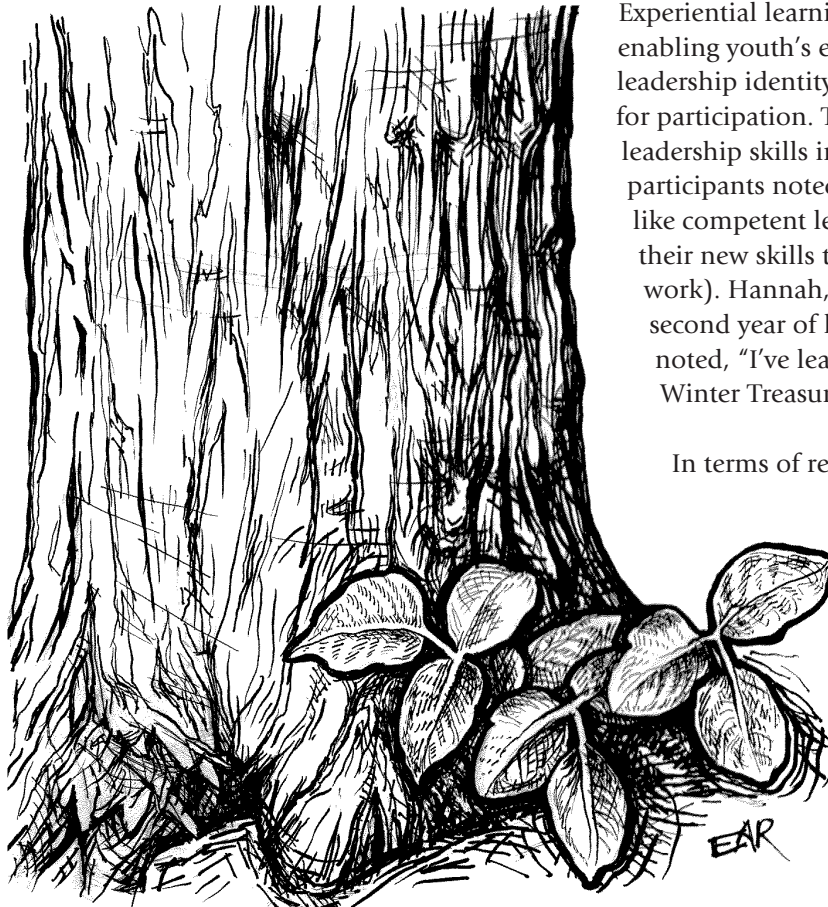
environment" considered their leadership an authentic way of doing this. For those without a strong initial connection to the environment (the majority), this aspect of making a difference was not relevant to them. However, some reported that their environmental behaviours changed. Possibly the pressure to role model what they were teaching had an impact on their daily lives.

Participants' relationships with staff can also be understood in terms of authenticity. Participants described feeling trusted, equal and "level" as compared to their relationships with adults at school. The authentic nature of the tasks, in combination with the youth-friendly support from adults, seemed to provide a sense of empowerment. As Nalini exclaimed, "They helped me realize I could actually do it! I felt so good to accomplish it!"

### **Experiential Learning and Teaching**

Experiential learning was a key element in enabling youth's explorations of their leadership identity, as well as a major draw for participation. Through applying the leadership skills in a teaching setting, participants noted that they began to feel like competent leaders who could transfer their new skills to other settings (school, work). Hannah, a grade 10 student in her second year of leading Winter Treasures, noted, "I've learned to be a good leader at Winter Treasures."

In terms of relationships with children, experiential teaching sheds light on the finding that the most successful participant leaders used friendship-based teaching approaches as opposed to teacher-like authority. Participants frequently talked about the importance of "getting down there with



the kids” as an aspect of their relationships with the children. The experiential nature of the program seemed to help participants to relate to the children in a positive manner.

## Discussion

The three key program elements promoted an exploration of students’ leadership in relation to personal competencies and attitudes, and in caring for others, particularly in teaching children. Only those that initially viewed caring for the environment as important to them viewed the program as strengthening their values in this area. Participants focused on the meaning they found in the leadership aspect of their experiences rather than in the caring for the environment aspect.

The short-term nature of Winter Treasures, combined with the limited focus on nature experiences and environmental values for leaders, may explain the participants’ lack of reflection on their roles in caring for nature. Given the importance of personal experience in nature for the development of pro-environmental attitudes (Arnold, 2004; Chawla, 1999), programs facilitators are advised to devote specific training time to working with student leaders on environmental values and philosophy through an experiential process in nature. For Winter Treasures, implementing this approach as a community partner is problematic because the schools are unwilling for students to miss more class time for the program. In addition, students have work, peer and family commitments and do not see more extensive training outside of school hours as reasonable given the few days that they lead the program.

The school system also affects three other elements of the program. First, students must be judged “academically strong enough” by the high school to participate. This is dissonant with research indicating that service learning is particularly beneficial for participants labelled as “academically poor” or “problem participants” (Berv, 1998). Second,

student leaders received a grade from the program coordinator to be used for assignment credit at school. In practice, the participants reported that the specific feedback they received from the program coordinator through end-of-the-day debriefs and a post-program phone call was the most meaningful. The academic credit seemed to initially draw students who were not motivated by a desire to contribute to their communities. The program experience itself then worked to bring these participants to value their contributions.

Third, student leaders would benefit from more authentic responsibility and experiential learning through the program turning over more of the coordinator’s organizational, administrative and large group responsibilities to the student leaders. Participants could feel more like an empowered “team” responsible for the program rather than as pairs of leaders responsible for leading small groups of children. Yet turning over broader responsibilities would also require more training time if program quality is to be maintained.

Efforts to improve environmental leadership experiences must be considered in the context of tensions between mainstream and experiential education. In engaging the school, the municipal outdoor centre attempts to make the program “fit” with the fragmented curriculum, and works with limited time and resources. Thus, using academically stronger participants and restricting the number of leadership days is required by the high school because participants miss regular class time to lead the program. The high schools demand that classroom requirements be met before experiential leadership opportunities are considered.

One powerful model that could move a program toward greater social responsibility and environmental learning for students is the integrated semester approach. Jupp (1995) examined an integrated semester program where high school students were responsible

for the complete delivery of a three-day earth education program to grade four children. All of the students' learning was integrated around the delivery of the program. They received credit for the term rather than taking separate discipline-based courses. This format allowed time for students to explore their environmental values and to work as a group to take on greater program responsibility.

Moving to this model would require significant educational reform engaging committed educators within the system. Winter Treasures takes students out of classes for a limited number of days, producing meaningful experiences for more high school leaders in a more mainstream-friendly manner. It might be even easier to implement cross-age environmental teaching programs in which high school students take a couple of class periods to teach younger children. However, greater reliance on the school context is likely to further restrict the opportunities for support and training from adults, authentic responsibility and experiential learning. Winter Treasures' leaders identified numerous negative perceptions of their school experience that would have to be overcome in a more constrained program. They also viewed these aspects as unalterable—which is not a promising basis from which to facilitate student empowerment.

This study and the associated literature suggest there are inherent theoretical and practical conflicts between facilitating environmental leadership experiences that maximize students' learning and the structure of the public school system. No one format is likely to resolve the conflicts, and successful leadership experiences may depend on the unique combination of educators and the resources they can mobilize within the community and the school system in each locality. Whatever the format, environmental educators need to ask how the experiences they facilitate can incorporate supportive adults, authentic responsibility and

experiential learning to help students reflect on how they care for themselves, others, society and nature in their leadership roles.

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*Camille Dumond, MEd, is a health and environmental educator working with youth in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Alan Warner, PhD, is an assistant professor in the School of Recreation Management and Kinesiology at Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia.*

## Winter Treasures: Commentary

by Beth Aspen Parks

The innovative thought, community connections, staff dedication and complexity found in environmental education (EE) programs for high school students constantly inspire me. The dichotomy between the complexity and the importance of simplicity is the most significant insight I walk away with after reading Dumond and Warner's article.

The complexity of EE programs reminds me of a forest ecosystem. We know that forests are more complicated in function and structure than a simple collection of trees. Similarly, EE programs are often more complicated than just a simple collection of EE goals. EE programs for high school students such as Winter Treasures are complex educational programs. They create a student-centered community classroom, are based on multiple educational theories (experiential education, service-based learning, team building in the classroom, and leadership development, to name a few), and focus on unique programs like Earth Education as teaching tools.

At the end of the day this results in a complex program that is educationally effective, as reported by Warner and Dumond, if enough time is allowed to deliver the program in a way that addresses the intricate web of educational outcomes. It is important for school administrators and educators who are delivering and developing EE programs to acknowledge this finding, and develop programs that have enough teaching and reflection time to achieve their learning outcomes. The key to good EE programs in the secondary school system is to create those that run long enough to get the job done. As the authors suggest, semester-length programs are a perfect example.

More importantly, as a teacher at a semester-long integrated EE program, Drumond and Warner's article reminded me of the simple things—specifically, to get out of the office during non-teaching time and to connect with students. Forget about booking visits with elementary schools, marketing the program, looking for external funding, sorting out bussing details. Focus on the most important part of the classroom—students. I have often taken for granted the unique relationships that can develop with students and staff in EE programs and the importance of connecting students with supportive adults.

After reading this article, I have learned not to underestimate the educational benefits of connecting with students and I am re-inspired to expose my students to “youth-friendly” educators, which was reported as a key to the success of the Winter Treasures program. Taking this one-step further, it is imperative to support any initiatives in the school system that encourage teachers to incorporate youth-friendly strategies in their classroom and it is hoped even a youth-friendly education system.

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*Beth Aspen Parks teaches at a collection of alternative programs for the Halton District School Board including the Bronte Creek Project ([www.brontecreekproject.org](http://www.brontecreekproject.org)), a semester-long integrated environmental education program for high school students. She also loves kayaking, getting dirty and playing competitive Foosball.*

## The Thin Green Line

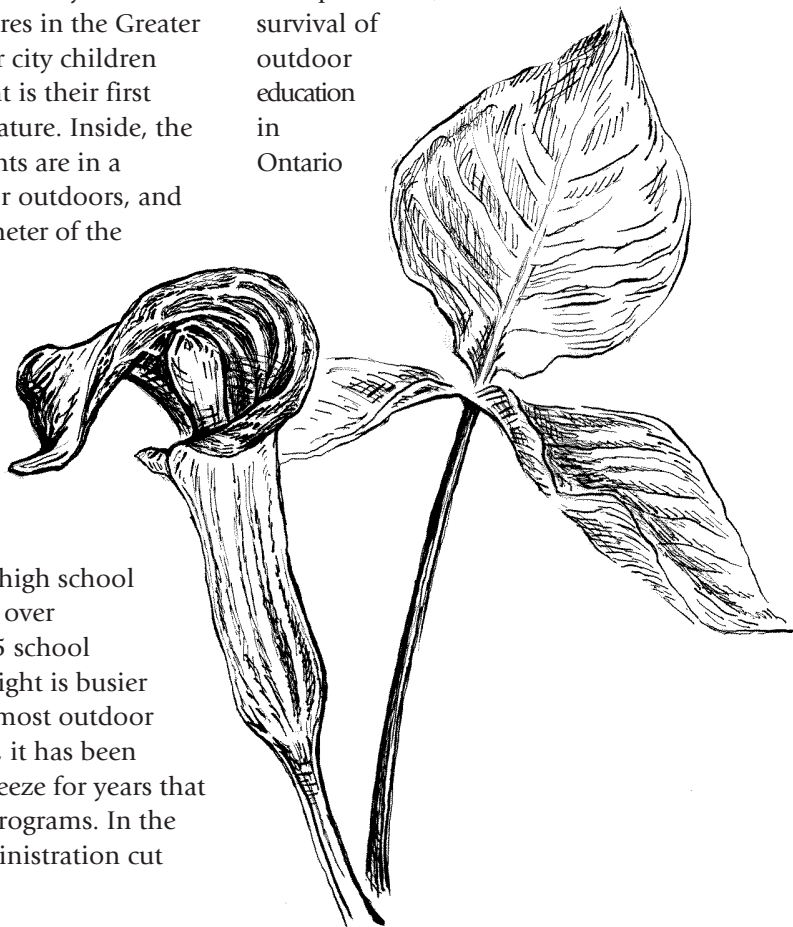
by Christine Beevis

After years of cuts, the survival of outdoor education in Ontario is not simple. As the Kortright Centre for Conservation shows, sometimes compromises need to be made in order to move forward.

On a crisp, gray morning early last November, I arrive at the Kortright Centre for Conservation in Woodbridge, Ontario. As I walk towards the main building—a late 1970s three-storey, wood-panelled structure—the constant hum of traffic reminds me of just how close the city has come to this natural retreat. Over the past decade, the surrounding farmland has quickly been encroached by urban development, but Kortright is still there, preserving 800 hectares of land and forest on the edge of the Humber River Valley. One of eight outdoor education centres in the Greater Toronto Area, for many inner city children and new Canadians, Kortright is their first introduction to non-urban nature. Inside, the main hall is quiet. The students are in a downstairs classroom now, or outdoors, and their backpacks line the perimeter of the room.

Located just west of Toronto, the 25-year old Kortright Centre is often referred to as Canada's largest day-use outdoor education facility, offering half- and full-day programs to elementary and high school classes. Every year, it receives over 130,000 visitors and 12 to 15 school groups daily. This year, Kortright is busier than ever, even though, like most outdoor education centres in Ontario, it has been going through a funding squeeze for years that threatens the survival of its programs. In the mid-nineties, the Harris administration cut

Environmental Science from the Ontario high school curriculum. Then in 2003, outdoor education was dealt a further blow when the Toronto and Ottawa-Carleton District School Boards made cuts of several million dollars to their outdoor education programs, which led to the mothballing of residential centres (where students could stay overnight for up to four days) in both jurisdictions. Today, most outdoor educational facilities in Ontario operate at a loss, and Kortright is no exception. For Alex Waters, who manages the centre, this has meant downsizing the staff complement, while trying to maintain its programs. It has also meant accepting private funding and including commercial activities in its events. As Kortright's example shows, the survival of outdoor education in Ontario



is a constant struggle to balance the books while maintaining an environmental education mandate. So far, however, Kortright is surviving, and even has to turn groups away so that “everybody’s not leap-frogging on the trails,” says Natalie Zalkind, Kortright’s Director of Education Services.

In the cafeteria, Natalie and I chat about Kortright’s many programs, with only the hum of a refrigerator in the background. I ask her whether last year’s 14% drop in attendance had anything to do with the cuts to environmental education in Ontario, but she attributes it to other things: “We had SARS, we had West Nile, we had lockouts and walkouts [in the Toronto District School Board over contract negotiations]. I just kept saying, ‘Throw it at me. What else can you throw at me?’” In fact, although the building itself is showing signs of wear (many displays are outdated and torn carpeting has been fixed with electrical tape in places), the situation seems better this year. Natalie believes Kortright has been able to maintain its enrolment targets because of the many programs designed to fit into the elementary and high school curricula. Every few minutes, I can see a group head out on the hiking trails.

Outside, a group explores the Power Trip Trail, Canada’s largest renewable energy demonstration site. If they stay quiet, they can hear the birdlike chirping of a 10-kilowatt wind turbine sponsored by Ontario Power Generation. The site is also used to teach homeowners how to install their own solar panels. In the GreenWorks building, students hold their noses as they discover how its simulated wetland reduces Kortright’s water consumption by 90 percent and filters the centre’s sewage for reuse in its toilets. The four-storey recycled steel greenhouse is the result of another partnership: it was designed and sponsored by the American Iron and Steel Institute and the International Zinc Association in 1998. Meanwhile, some of Kortright’s educational programs have been

sponsored by drink box manufacturer TetraPak.

Unfortunately, TetraPak recently informed Kortright and the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), its parent organization, that it would not be renewing its \$35,000 annual grant, which supported the centre’s education programs since 2001. TetraPak’s involvement is only one of a number of partnerships that Kortright and the Conservation Foundation, the TRCA’s funding body, have developed over the years. In fact, Kortright originally received a Wintario grant in 1979 with the understanding that the Conservation Foundation would raise matching funds from the private sector. Today, Conservation Authorities are only 60 percent government funded, mostly by municipalities that took up the slack when federal and provincial funding was slashed. Alex Waters believes that Kortright must continue to bring in corporate sponsorships and generate revenue through other avenues such as weddings and events if it is to survive. Currently, Kortright is 80 percent self-sufficient in operational revenue—through gate receipts, revenue from corporate sponsorship and gift store sales. The other 20 percent is supported by the Toronto Region Conservation Authority.

At 11:30 am, the groups spill back into the building and gather near a large sign advertising weddings at the centre. The room fills with their chatter as students pull out their lunches and sit in clusters on the carpet. They quickly get restless and start peeking at the gift shop, money gripped tightly in their hands, where they will be allowed to browse before heading out again. Soon enough, their education leader for the day, “Miss B,” begins calling them back. Wearing a green fleece vest with the centre’s logo of a coyote on it, she asks them to put away their candy and pop cans. Last minute runs to the bathroom are made, to the sound of teachers calling out, “Walk, please!” Boots are tied and toques and

mitten pulled on. Children jostle to be in the group supervised by their favourite teacher or parent and throw furtive glances at the gift shop as they pass it, where the beady eyes of huggable stuffed animals gleam.

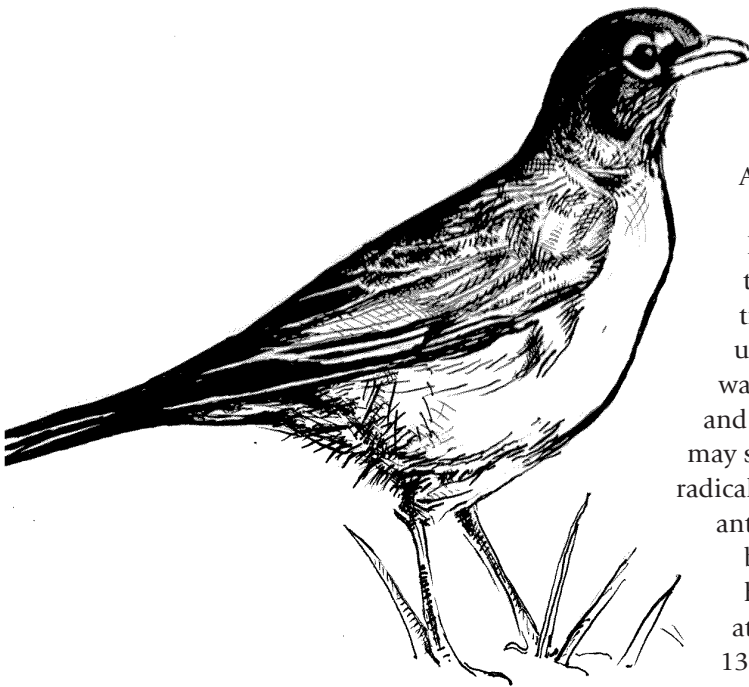
"Donors want huggable seals. Cockroaches will just get a shrug and a yawn" says Lewis Molot, who teaches environmental studies at York University. "Like charismatic mega fauna in ecology, there is an emotional appeal in Kortright's role in children's education," he explains. He notes that many educators are reluctant to accept private funding, since they worry that their programs will be co-opted to meet donors' interests. Another concern is that cash-strapped organizations will be forced to accept funding by companies with activities contrary to their mandates. "Where is the grey line?" asks Molot, "And is the TRCA prepared to cross it?" Bernard MacIntyre, who raises funds for Kortright and the TRCA, informs me that TRCA recently accepted funding from Imperial Oil, a company that many environmental organizations would be hesitant to connect with. Still another successful partnership has been with Husky Injection Molding, which provides funding for disadvantaged children to attend a TRCA residential centre. So far, he believes there have been no ethical compromises, and claims the most donors have requested is that their logos be visible.

On the lawn next to the picnic shelter sporting the logo of a local Lions Club, Miss B teaches students a game called "Oh Deer." Two of the fastest runners are selected to be wolves, and four will be deer. The deer stand at one end of the field, with the rest of the group a hundred feet behind them, and the wolves on the sidelines halfway in between, jumping up and down in anticipation of the start. When Miss B yells "go," the deer run to the other end, select a student representing the habitat, and race back to the start. When she yells "Oh deer!" the wolves must try and tag a deer, who if caught will become a wolf. Soon, the wolves increase as the habitat and deer dwindle. After

five or six passes, the game is over and Miss B recaps the principles learned that morning: that all living things need food, shelter, water and space in order to survive.

So confident is the TRCA in Kortright's survival that it is planning to raise over several million dollars for a major renovation that will redefine Kortright's role in outdoor education. Bernard MacIntyre and his team are aiming to transform the existing Kortright structure into the Living City Centre (LCC)—"the jewel in the TRCA's programs" he enthuses. Andrew Bowerbank, a member of a team of TRCA staff, architects and engineers that are designing the new building, hints that surrounding municipalities and private energy provider Power Stream have already expressed an interest in partnering with Kortright on energy programs and in the renovation. The renovated building would include a green roof, energy efficient features and two additional floors: one for corporate training and one for events. The LCC would not only offer Kortright's current programs, but could be used to teach students about sustainable design. It would also be used to train professionals about sustainable technologies. These expanded services would allow Kortright to bring in funds essential to the survival of its existing programs. Moreover, the green design could allow the centre to become self-sufficient within five years by saving 50–65 percent of its energy expenditures, thus improving its operating budget.

Once more, Miss B calls the students, still hopping with energy, into a line, and leads them towards the Canadian Peregrine Foundation shelter to show them the owls and hawks before they leave. Teachers and parents ask them to put their jackets back on, which were peeled off during the game. One little boy, his face still flushed, excitedly recalls seeing a hawk circling high above him earlier that morning on their hike. Others tell me about the chickadees who could eat out of their hand if only they had stood still long enough. Soon, the classes will depart for the



balance the bottom line.  
 "And it's difficult to get them to slow down a little bit and look around and appreciate what you have," says Alex.

Looking around me as I head towards my car, I am struck by the transformations Kortright has undergone. Ten years ago, there was no GreenWorks, no Power Trip and no Peregrine shelter. Kortright may soon go through even more radical transformations, with the anticipated opening of the new building in 2007. By 2010, it is hoped the new LCC will boost attendance to 200,000 from 130,000, "but we also have to be careful that we don't overrun the property in the pursuit of education,"

day, bringing with them experiences that their teachers can refer to in their lessons. For one little boy, the day has been worth it because he has a new friend: Al, the rubber snake he bought in the gift shop.

Kortright also earns money through gift shop sales, admission fees, contract services, events and what Alex Waters reluctantly calls "edutainment." "Take a look at our new neighbour, the Vaughan Mills Centre, which is all based on providing some sort of recreational entertainment value. Even though we know that consumerism isn't good, it's a trend, and the stores understand that," he observes. Kortright needs to be wary of its competition, since with "any whiff of rain, people say 'nah, let's go to the mall instead'" adds Alex. Which is why during Kortright's many seasonal festivals, families can pay for their children to ride tethered ponies, play on an inflatable Bouncing Castle or have their faces painted. It's a difficult balance: to maintain Kortright's reputation as an educational facility while at the same time

Alex points out. Like any natural area, Kortright has a maximum carrying capacity that must be respected in order to maintain its ecological integrity. It's just another paradox the outdoor education centre has to negotiate in order to survive. However, it is this willingness to consider contradictions that may be the secret to its success—daring to accept funding from private donors, to engage in edutainment, to boost enrolment yet maintain the property's integrity, to redefine outdoor education . . . . If Kortright is any example, it seems walking the thin green line between these contradictions may be the only way forward if Ontario's outdoor education centres are to survive as well.

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*Freelance writer and editor Christine Beevis is a graduate of the Master of Environmental Studies program at York University, and lives in Toronto. Her writing has previously been published in journals and magazines such as Pathways, UnderCurrents, Seasons and ON Nature.*

## Living Machines: Reimagining Learning Spaces

by Ali Solaja and Lesley Curthoys

*A teacher who is willing to maintain the tenor of an outdoor space in his or her classroom can help students to live out connectedness in the strongest sense.*  
(Pivnick, 1997, p. 62)

Many times, we view outdoor and indoor education as opposites. By reimagining indoor learning spaces in ways that honour our interconnectedness with all life, we can move toward the tenor of which Pivnick speaks. Living machines offer one way to bring the marvellous work of ecosystems into everyday proximity and practical relevance.

First of all, what is a living machine? Creator of the living machine, Canadian biologist John Todd called it a machine because it comprises “interrelated parts that function together in the performance of some type of work” (1994, p.167). However, as the name suggests, the interrelated parts are living organisms: plants, fish, snails, and bacteria. The work being done is that of producing food, decomposing wastes (including human by-products) and purifying air. The living machine is an example of an intelligent design idea that works with, rather than against, nature.

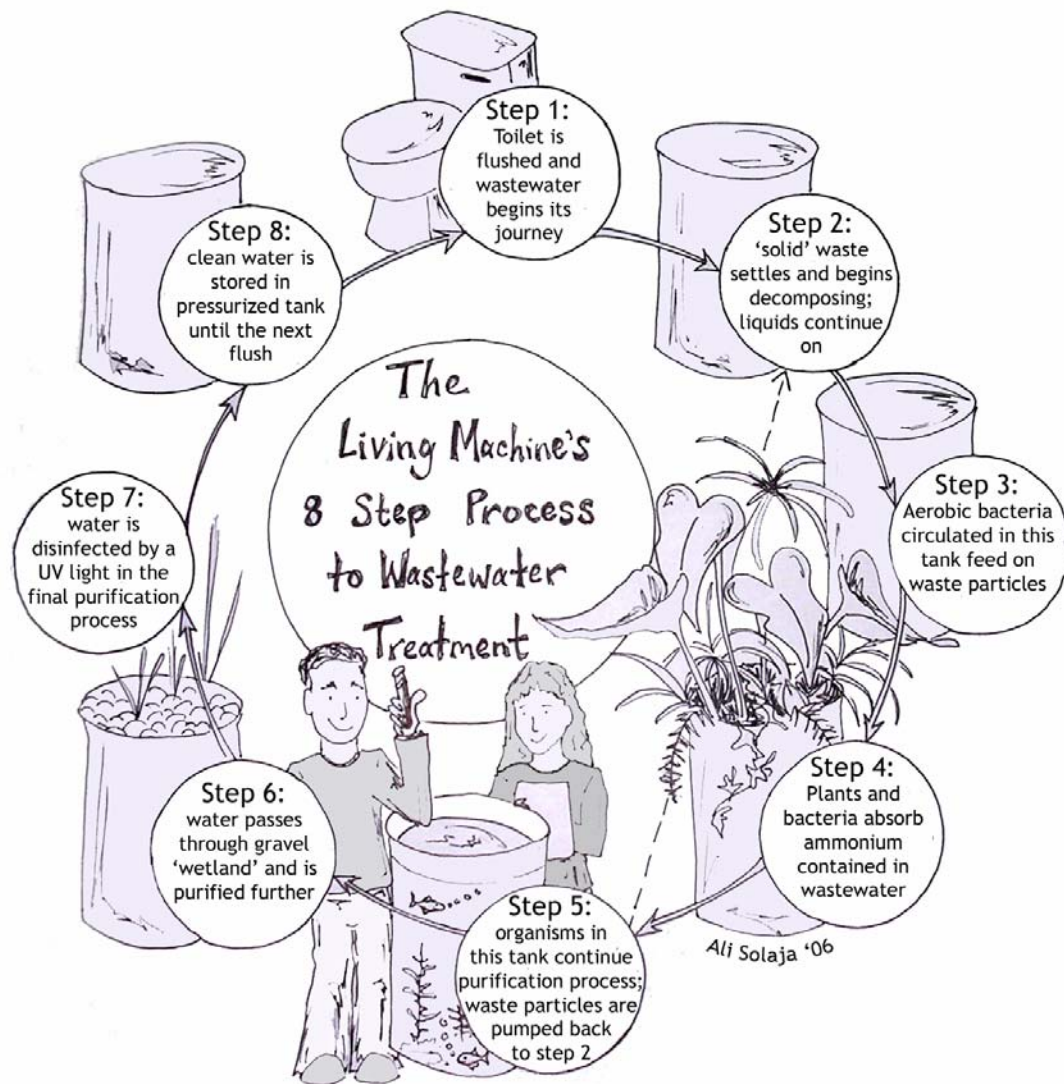
In properly functioning ecosystems there is no such thing as waste; rather, all natural by-products are continually recycled as usable nutrients for other life forms. Harnessing the power and efficiency of natural processes rather than using harsh chemicals means that wastewater can be continually circulated without harming the living components of the waste treatment system. It also means less demand on the local watershed with reduced water consumption and toxic input. Students and staff enjoy the advantage of cleaner air, lush greenery, and more natural light. Thus by employing natural biological waste processes, living machines enable students and staff alike

to strengthen connections with local watersheds.

These benefits are currently being enjoyed by three Ontario educational facilities: the Toronto Waldorf School, the Kortright Centre for Conservation, and the YMCA Outdoor Centre. This article presents their stories and reviews the potential of living machines as an educational tool aimed at enabling citizens of all ages to care for their local watersheds through awareness and action.

### Toronto Waldorf School

Waldorf education is founded on a belief that outdoor experiences are an essential component of educating a student’s mind, body, and spirit. In addition to the vibrant outdoor learning opportunities offered, the Toronto Waldorf School located in Richmond Hill, Ontario also houses a living machine. When faced with the need to repair a failed septic system, the school saw an opportunity to act on its philosophy of modeling sustainable living practices. The manager Paul Sheardown commented, “It’s simple and it works . . . You don’t just turn it on . . . it’s very alive! It’s beautiful!” Since its construction, the living machine has reduced Toronto Waldorf School’s water consumption by over 90 percent. The living machine is walled by glass, creating a warm atmosphere in the hallway, while within the living classroom the invigorating fragrance, sight of plants, and sound of flowing water delight the senses. Classes take tours through the living machine to learn how it breaks down wastewater into useable nutrients. Senior science classes participate in hands-on learning experiences involving the living machine, such as conducting water quality tests to ensure its proper functioning.



## Kortright Centre for Conservation

Nearby, at the Kortright Centre for Conservation, flushing the toilet has become an enlightening educational adventure. A creative interpretative self-guided tour raises awareness about water consumption and conservation strategies. Anyone who uses the bathroom facilities at the centre is introduced to the first stop of the tour. Here visitors are presented with colourful reading material that introduces the tour guides: "Clumpy" and "Effie." These comical cartoon characters representing waste narrate the journey through

Kortright's biological wastewater treatment system: the living machine.

When visitors flush the toilet, they become an active part of the waste treatment process and Clumpy and Effie inform them that their waste actually helps keep the system healthy and functional. The next stop on the waste management tour is located outside the visitor centre; it describes the first stages of anaerobic treatment and invites visitors to enter the "sustainable living building," which houses the living machine. Here, Clumpy and Effie appear on a variety of displays highlighting

key messages at each stage of the treatment process. This light-hearted approach to waste management exposes the many children and adults that visit the Kortright Conservation Centre to an alternative way to take care of their “business.”

### YMCA Outdoor Centre

The YMCA Outdoor Centre in St. Clements, Ontario is an educational and recreational facility that welcomes a variety of clientele including school groups and corporate teams. This centre was designed as a model for environmental sustainability and its living machine is the main attraction, treating wastewater on site since 1996. Low maintenance is a key factor in this living machine’s success. As noted by John Todd, “Like natural ecosystems, living machines are capable of repairing themselves, replacing their components as they wear out, and of responding creatively to change by ‘evolutionary’ self-design” (1995, p.164).

For the most part, the YMCA Outdoor Centre’s system works independently of human energy. Easy care of this wastewater treatment system can be attributed to a manual flow design that ensures a regular flow of nutrients regardless of visitor numbers. Given that living machines are designed to treat certain volumes of waste, it is important to maintain these levels. When designing a living machine, this manual flow design feature can be very useful to ensure its vitality. In addition to low maintenance and reducing the site’s water requirements, the living machine has also created a pleasant working environment.

Reimagining how we handle waste in learning facilities is not without its challenges. The following are four important considerations to ensure the success of a living machine: First, a promotional campaign addressing the living machine’s ecological, economic and social benefits can build necessary support from administration, staff, and community

members. Second, although a living machine is low maintenance, one trained individual is required to attend to it on a regular basis. Third, living machines should not be built using a universal design. It is important to consider what waste will be travelling through the machine, its volume and the local climate. Finally, to maximize its educational potential, aspects of the living machine should be integrated across the curriculum with connections to related outdoor learning.

One of the greatest challenges facing educators is to facilitate strengthened connections to the Earth—our home. Living machines are doing just that! They make wastewater treatment observable, while demonstrating the beauty and efficiency of thinking and living according to nature’s laws. Living machines create “a tenor of outdoor space,” providing a daily positive reminder of the possibilities of designing educational facilities with nature in mind.

For further information:

Ecowerks Technologies Corporation  
100 Arbors Lane, Unit A  
Woodbridge, Ontario  
L4L 7G4  
(905) 856-5225  
E-mail: [living@globalcon.com](mailto:living@globalcon.com)

Ocean Arks International  
(founded by John Todd)  
1-176 Battery St.  
Burlington VT 05401  
(802) 860-0011  
[www.oceanarks.org](http://www.oceanarks.org)

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**“The Living Machine” at the Toronto Waldorf School. This sketch is a flow form basin used at the Toronto Waldorf School for their grey water filtration.**

Todd, J., & Todd, N. (1995). Living machines, 163–177, In F. Capra & G. Pauli (Eds.), *Steering business towards sustainability*. Tokyo: UN University Press.

*Ali Solaja is a graduate student at Lakehead University in the Master of Education program. Lesley Curthoys is an associate professor at Lakehead University with an interest in ecological literacy and heritage interpretation.*

## Program Evaluation: Leave the Accountants Out of It!

by Jackie Dawson

### Introduction

In my experience as an outdoor educator at camps, centres, and schools, program evaluation is often a routine motion we go through, or in some cases a year-end afterthought. Many organizations hand out survey or feedback forms to their clients just before they leave. The surveys are glanced over briefly by staff before tight timeframes force them to move onto other tasks. Even if useful feedback is present, it rarely gets incorporated into future programs in a meaningful way.

Year-end evaluations often focus on budget appraisals, but I would argue that a valid indication of success or failure can not be found in the finances. After all, unlike a private company or business, profit is not the essential goal—program quality and delivery are. Because most organizations are required to keep high-quality financial records, making an evaluation of these is simple. In contrast, program evaluation is costly and time consuming, and therefore easy to put on the back burner. We need to recognize the

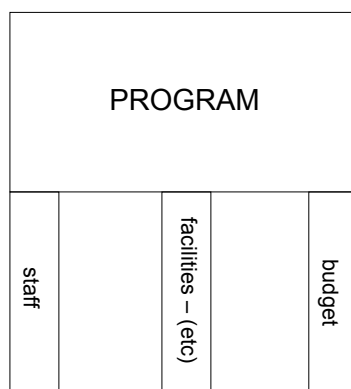
importance of program evaluation as separate from finances and begin to value programming as the most important element of what we do. Finances are clearly important but are essentially a supportive pillar for program—similar to other supporting structures such as staff and facilities (see Figure 1).

### Outward Bound Canada: EcoVenture Program

Outward Bound Canada was recently the first Outward Bound school to develop programming for young people under the age of 14. The program began in the summer of 2003 in partnership with Earth Rangers. The EcoVenture program blends the philosophies of these two organizations: its focus is on facilitating environmental awareness and personal growth. Participants move through the traditional Outward Bound progression from emersion (introduction), to expedition (one- to four-night canoe trip), to solo (15 minutes–1 hour) to final (movement towards less dependence on staff).

In the summer of 2005 we at Outward Bound Canada and Earth Rangers implemented an intensive evaluative research program targeting the EcoVenture program. What we discovered went far beyond what shows up on the bank statements months later. The research was a comprehensive evaluation of the entire program that focused on the effectiveness of two main programming goals: environmental education and personal growth.

**Figure 1: The role of program and budget in evaluation.**



## Methodology

The research undertaken in 2005 consisted of three sets of surveys. The first and second sets were administered to participants on their first and last days of course. This process allowed us to conduct a gap analysis to determine any change as a direct result of the program. The third survey was administered to the parents of participants approximately two months after the program. The information gathered in parent surveys helped determine what ongoing impact the program had on participants (i.e., transference).

## Environmental Education

The results of our survey suggested that over 80% of participants learned something new about the environment and over 90% wanted to do something to help the environment. While these positive results were encouraging, a gap analysis of participants' knowledge before and after the program indicated limited change. This suggests that children may be receiving effective environmental education at their schools or we did not provide an appropriate level of environmental information (i.e., not advanced enough). On a positive note, we received encouraging anecdotal feedback from participants: "If you are quiet, you can see animals" and "The more time you spend in the environment, the more you like it" and, my personal favourite, "Everything is equal—animals and humans and wood." While the value of enhancing young people's relationship to and attitude toward the environment may not have been captured by this survey, exposure to the natural environment in a positive way is valuable over a lifetime.

## Personal Growth

The gap analysis indicating personal growth was drawn from the parent survey. The results were very encouraging indicating significant improvements in areas of self-confidence, teamwork, leadership, conflict management,

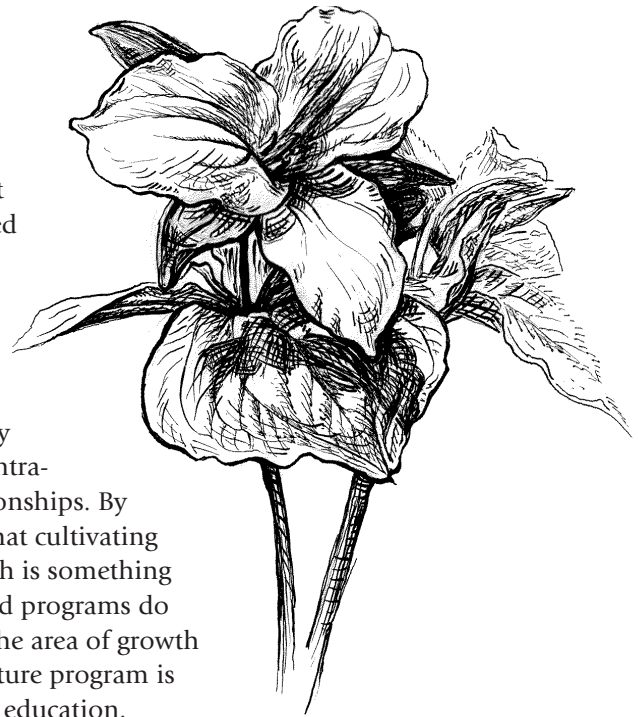
and care and respect for others. The positive findings are likely the result of a deep-rooted and historical Outward Bound culture, which focuses strongly on inter- and intra-personal relationships. By this I suggest that cultivating personal growth is something Outward Bound programs do very well and the area of growth for the EcoVenture program is environmental education.

## Conclusion

The value of this survey is significant. The results indicated both broad and specific areas for improvement and areas of success, not to mention the important deep ecological learning, so eloquently pointed out by a ten-year-old boy, that humans are equal to wood! This program evaluation has given us clear direction for the development of future programming content and methodology. While finances are important, they are not the "raison d'être" for environmental education. Evaluation of programs from a programming perspective provides a powerful sign post for future program development and direction. We need to remember that, while we are constrained by the structures of business (i.e., finances), we do not have to be business-like by placing profit and budget as our main priorities. Program is number one!

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*Jackie Dawson is working on a PhD in Environmental Studies at the University of Waterloo and is a long-time Outward Bound instructor and Camp Director.*



## Readings on the Trail: A Student's Perspective

by Megan Keilty

While all my canoe-tripping experiences have earned a place in my memory, my experience with McMaster's Outdoor Education program has proved to be the most memorable. What stood out most about this particular trip was the amount of time allotted for reflection and contemplation in the form of readings.

The McMaster tripping staff of 4D03 Outdoor Education encourage use of historical and philosophical readings to "pepper" the trip with short vignettes from travel history and literature. Such readings add an intellectual component to a highly physical experience. By including readings, the trip becomes a true exploration of nature, body, mind and spirit.

Readings are incorporated in the trip at the end of a tough portage, during a lunch or gorp break, at a site of historical significance, or at the end of a hard day while sitting by the fire. Despite the nature and timing of the reading, the result is the same: relaxation and enjoyment of listening to a story. This brings everyone together as a group. Reading can be done by one or many members of the group. Having everyone read a section of the story makes for an inclusive activity and adds to evening campfire magic.

Hearing others' accounts of their trip experiences proves beneficial, as it helps to put feelings you might be experiencing into words. For those that decide to keep a personal journal of their trip, readings become a good resource to inspire thoughts and feelings about particular aspects of the trip. Perhaps most importantly, the readings that have been chosen are successful at connecting the group's experiences to the land being traveled.

Readings chosen by McMaster staff are from historical, cultural, philosophical, comical and inspirational backgrounds.

I would like to share some of the readings used on the McMaster trips in an effort to encourage others to consider areas that are important to them and to explore these while on trip.

First of all, to add a historical element to the trip, we use passages from authors from across Canada, including Mary Schaffer, George Nelson, and H.H. Prichard. It is appropriate to read these articles well into your trip while sitting around the fire or at a portage. These passages allow us to not only think about, but also put ourselves into, the lives of early voyageurs who traveled in the same fashion we are. It is a good exercise to consider how their experience of the land differed from (or was similar to) our own.

To add a cultural aspect to the trip, we include such readings as the Ojibway legend *Star Brides* and an excerpt from *Sleeping Island* by P.G. Downes. The reading of *Star Brides* can accompany an evening under the stars (which makes for a special experience as stars are normally masked by city lights). This reading explores an interpretation of the meaning and nature of stars from the perspective of one Native culture:

As [the sister] looked up at the sky from which she had lately come, the elder sister saw a star falling through the gray of the early morning and knew that star falling through the gray of the early morning was in fact her sister who had uncovered her eyes too soon and was doomed to fall toward the earth.

The P.G. Downes *Sleeping Island* excerpt can be read during a gorp break at the site of a rock cliff. This reading allows participants to explore another culture's understanding of the relationship between humanity and nature through discussion of the mimigwesso, a

people of the rocks. While our North American culture often sees nature as something to control and exploit, this reading reflects a belief that nature controls our destiny:

There are many tales of the mimigwesso, but this account is the one actually identified with the peculiar humped island at the Reindeer Lake outlet. It is an excellent lesson for anyone's comportment, and a check on rash impertinence to the odd and strange when one travels.

A chapter from *Einstein's Dreams* by Alan Warner is included in our readings as a philosophical addition. While deep into the trip, our group read this during a cold and wet lunch break. It served as a good distraction to take our minds off the uncomfortable state we were in and focus them on the transition we had made from the "mechanical time" of our routine lives and into "body time":

In this world, there are two times. There is mechanical time and there is body time. The first is as rigid and metallic as a massive pendulum of iron that swings back and forth. . . . the second squirms and wriggles like a bluefish in a bay. The first is unyielding, predetermined. The second makes up its mind as it goes along.

Nearing the end of a long day of portaging, with sore muscles and tired minds, the inclusion of *Portage Passage* by P.G. Downes inspired us to get through the last portage of the day with a newfound drive to face the inevitable pain of portaging:

Instead of a desire to rest, a furious impatience begins to fire you with dull sullen rage. The crushing weight, after a while, sets up a rhythm with the pounding of the blood in your ears, and to break this oppressive thundering you alter your pace to a faster shuffle. The struggle between you and the load becomes a

murderous and vengeful obsession and you hear your mind saying: 'I'll show you, you bastard. I won't stop and let you down on the ground. I'll lug you over if it's twenty miles.'

Perhaps my favourite reading of the trip came before we had even set out. Before pushing the canoes off the shore, our trip leader read "Au Large," an account of the life of Esther Keyser in *Paddle My Own Canoe*. The reading not only inspired us, but also gave us a motto to use in our journey:

Au large! When I hear that word, I hear also the crisp waves breaking on pebbly beaches, and the big wind rushing through innumerable trees and the roar of headlong rivers leaping down the rocks . . . .

This sample illustrates the variety of reading material that can be included when creating a reading package of your own.

When choosing readings, a couple of things should be considered:

- Group dynamics — Will the individuals in the group, and the group as a whole, be up for longer, deeper meaning readings? Or are they more active, requiring shorter readings?
- Time of day — Shorter readings are more appropriate for gorp breaks and lunch breaks, while longer readings are better for the fire.
- Nature of day — Hard, long day? Try brief, inspirational readings. Short, easy day? Consider longer, educational readings.
- Length of time into trip — Those readings that focus on letting go of your normal routine might be better for the beginning of trip, while readings about experiences in nature might be better to save for the middle of the trip.

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Megan Keilty is a senior honours student in Psychology at McMaster University.

## Moise Amphitheatre

by Karen McMullen

Light reflects on fool's gold,  
glimmers and winks back at me:  
"Welcome to this place, I have been waiting  
for you."

Mist hangs over glassy waters,  
cloaks the trees and hills in majestic white  
robes:  
"Come rest in me, I will envelop you."

Moon rises over silhouettes.  
A golden yolk in the mist.  
Whole. Crisp. Calm.  
"Come. Come. I belong within you."

Walls surround me,  
rock and tree.  
Amphitheatre.  
Cliffs carved by glacial Gods.  
"Behold me, I am here to take your breath  
away."

Breeze comes through,  
sweet and warm.  
Dances on my skin:  
"Inhale. Inhale. I was made to imbue your  
every cell."

"Welcome to this place.  
Come rest in me.  
I have been waiting,  
to take your breath away,  
to give it back  
and to expand you from the inside out."

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*Karen McMullen has been called a "warrior-love-adventurer." In her quest for a rich and full life, this Outward Bound Instructor savours quiet mornings on trail, painting and soaking in the scene.*



## High-flying Adventure at Fortune Aerial Experience

by Yanna Moncion

I had never heard of an “aerial park” before but I was excited! Zip lines, suspended walkways, net gangways and a Tarzan rope could only mean one thing: a thrilling adventure in the treetops. And that is exactly what people can expect when they come into Fortune Aerial Experience—a unique activity perfect for the entire family.

Fortune Aerial Experience is also a great fit for schools and the perfect activity to promote outdoor education. Being an outdoor recreation facility in the heart of the Gatineau Park, Camp Fortune offers activities such as downhill skiing and mountain biking, attracting many schools and outdoor educational groups from across the country. During the winter months, Camp Fortune’s Skiing in Schools programs hosts an average 1,500 kids a day from local elementary and high schools who take lessons and stay active on the slopes. The quick realization was that students and teachers of all ages and abilities could also benefit from Camp Fortune’s newest activity: Fortune Aerial Experience.

School children are the perfect candidates to challenge Fortune Aerial Experience for a number of reasons. To begin, they have the natural ability to be successful due to their curiosity and sense of adventure. They are nimble and motivated to succeed in an activity that does not carry with it a known measure of success. Fortune Aerial Experience positions everyone on a level playing field. This diminishes the possibility of children not wanting to participate in the activity for fear of being embarrassed by other children who are super-athletes. The treetop adventure evokes self-confidence in *all* participants, including non-athletes. There is no winning or losing, just fun for everyone!

Fortune Aerial Experience demands a respect for safety and encourages active listening and communication, patience and teamwork—skills that are important to learn at all ages. Older children and teenagers discover new ways of communicating, strategizing, and problem solving, while developing their leading and team-working abilities. Younger children build self-esteem and learn decision making and responsibility towards self and others. The youngest of children become familiar with unique movement skills while being introduced to the basics of climbing, communication and safety.

To conclude, outdoor education opportunities, such as Fortune Aerial Experience, offer meaningful learning situations, which are an important part of every child’s education. They provide direct learning experiences in Canada’s beautiful natural setting, enhancing the school curriculum in all subject areas. Children discover the excitement and fulfillment of learning out-of-doors, which will in turn help them better understand themselves, their teachers and their entire education.



*Yanna Moncion is the Marketing and Sales Representative at Fortune Aerial Experience in Chelsea, QC. For information on Camp Fortune and Fortune Aerial Experience, please visit the website at [www.campfortune.com](http://www.campfortune.com) or contact Yanna directly at [ymoncion@campfortune.com](mailto:ymoncion@campfortune.com).*



## Ontario Recreational Canoeing Association

*... promoting the development  
of safe, competent and  
knowledgeable recreational  
canoeists for 25 years*

1185 Eglinton Avenue East  
Suite 411  
Toronto, Ontario M3C 3C6  
Phone: (416) 426-7016  
Fax: (416) 426-7363  
Email: [info@orca.on.ca](mailto:info@orca.on.ca)  
Website: [www.orca.on.ca](http://www.orca.on.ca)

### An Introduction to the Ontario Recreational Canoeing Association For the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario

**The Mission** of this Association is to Promote Safe, Competent and Knowledgeable Paddlers in Ontario. There are 186 Organizational Members and 999 certified ORCA Canoeing and Kayaking Instructors in all parts of Ontario.

To introduce the members of the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario to the Ontario Recreational Canoeing Association and its programs, we present this outline in the hopes that many more outdoor educators in Ontario will consider using these standards of official certification to enhance their own programs. ORCA certification is the only recognized certification program in Ontario and also nationwide by Paddle Canada (formerly Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association).

The paddling skills programs and Instructor programs in three canoeing disciplines, Flatwater Kayaking and Sea Kayaking have been highly successful for 25 years for all ages—in use by outdoor clubs, schools, outfitters and camps. This page outlines the skills programs that are offered by Organizational Members across Ontario using certified Instructors. Each of the skills disciplines is taught by a certified Instructor in that discipline.

**Canoeing programs** begin with Flatwater Canoeing certification for novices or relatively inexperienced canoeists and continue with certification in three disciplines: Lakewater, Moving Water and Canoe Tripping. Level 1 is an introduction to the skills and the Level 2 teaches the highest skill level in the discipline.

**The Canoe Trip Leader** is a graduate of the Canoe Tripping Level 2 course, experienced and qualified to lead extended wilderness trips. Certified Leaders are much in demand by camps, school boards and other outdoor organizations.

**Canoeing Instructor Certification** is the natural progression for those who excel in one of the disciplines and have Level 2 skills. Senior Instructors can certify all the skills courses. The Flatwater Canoeing Instructor is the most in demand to teach the Flatwater Canoeing course.

**Kayaking Programs** follow a similar progression beginning with Flatwater Kayaking to introduce paddlers to safe procedures and basic skills. Several **Sea Kayaking** courses build on the basics in more challenging conditions on small and large lakes.

**Kayaking Instructor Certification** at several levels is available for competent paddlers. Instructors at different levels certify specific skills. The Flatwater Kayaking Instructor is the most in demand to teach Flatwater Kayaking.

**Camp Canoeing Instructor** is a new instructor program for camp staff for use only in camps to certify camper paddlers at the waterfront.

Add to your outdoor education program and check the Ontario Recreational Canoeing Association website or contact the ORCA office for more information.

## Last Child in the Woods

Louv, Richard. (2005.) *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books. ISBN 1-56512-391-3

Review by Grant Linney

How's this for a provocative book title? A sad and disturbing image of the *last* child in a natural setting, along with the urgency of a call to save *our* children from a malady that is both new and, at the same time, startlingly recognizable to COEO members: *nature-deficit disorder*. Let me say here that the rest of the book is equal to the task of addressing these opening images. My overall impression is that it is an insightful and compelling read for anyone concerned about our children's lack of contact with nature and what this means for them as well as for our future on this planet. While the author repeatedly calls for more research, he does an impressive job of fleshing out many of his points, offering wide ranging references as well as a comprehensive reading list.

According to his website ([www.thefuturesedge.com](http://www.thefuturesedge.com)), Richard Louv is an American journalist and futurist who focuses on family, nature and community. He is also an advisor to several non-profit organizations, a visiting scholar, and an active child advocate. He spends much of this book detailing the great and lasting benefits of providing children with hands-on experiences in nature. (He defines nature as any piece of "natural wildness" (p. 8) containing some biodiversity and abundance, from an untended backyard to a remote wilderness setting.) These experiences can be on one's own, in the company of friends, family or classmates, structured or unstructured. Among their impressive array of positive impacts, natural places

- act as infinite reservoirs of information that one can interact with through hands-on experience; they thus stimulate healthy development of the senses, a key to both learning and to the stimulation of imagination and creativity

- promote and stimulate healthy physical activity
- improve concentration
- answer children's fundamental (perhaps even cellular) "need to explore, to get their hands dirty and their feet wet" (p. 146)
- are essential to the development of Howard Gardner's *naturalist intelligence* (his eighth and most recent intelligence)
- promote self-confidence and thus one's awareness of personal and outdoors safety, what Louv refers to as "nature smart" (p. 180)
- act as a powerful healing balm to many emotional hardships
- allow children to find freedom and privacy, a place separate from the adult world
- provoke humility, a realization that there is more to the world than oneself, and a sense of wonder
- amplify time rather than stealing it (TV and video games commit the latter)
- foster positive social interaction and related group skills
- provide powerful affirming and transcendent experiences and bonds that one stores and later calls upon.

According to Louv, "To take nature and natural play away from children may be tantamount to withholding oxygen" (p. 108). The modern society and "the new landscape of childhood" (p. 11) have both intentionally and unwittingly committed this deed, resulting in what Louv compellingly calls "nature-deficit disorder" (p. 34). While this is not a medically recognized term, Louv feels that it is an apt name for the widespread "human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and high rates of physical and

emotional illness" (p. 34). As one can see from this definition, Louv focuses on the far-reaching costs of this disconnection upon a child's healthy development and, by implication, an adult's lifestyle and role played as a citizen.

As for the causes of this disorder, Louv includes the following:

- Modern Western culture is characterized by "the rapid slide from the real to the virtual, from the mountains to the Matrix" (p. 4). Air conditioning draws us indoors and technology beguiles us with its infinite array of information. We discount primary experience and we come to believe, "That which cannot be Googled does not count" (p. 67). Children can tell us about the Amazon rainforest or a coral reef, but not about their last time being in the woods. We become addicted to the many and alluring forms of impersonal electronic interaction.
- In a chapter titled "The Criminalization of Natural Play" (p. 27f), Louv describes how various regulatory bodies (e.g., government, community associations) have made "child's play" illegal for various environmental, legal and other reasons. This is not only due to the threat of lawsuits; it's also because of our "growing obsession with order" (p. 28).
- The author describes fear as the single most potent force preventing parents from allowing their children to play outdoors as they themselves once did. We worry about traffic, crime, stranger-danger, and nature itself. We shrink away from our perceived "bogeyman" risks (which our media feeds) and we fail to consider the great and lasting values of offering safe and unstructured as well as structured time in natural settings.
- In its quest to cover mandated curricula and to demonstrate outcomes through testing, education marginalizes outdoor and experiential learning.

When it comes to treatment for this disorder, Louv urges a nationwide review of liability of

laws as well as greater recognition for the value of risk. He speaks of the value of many hours spent in natural settings as a child and adolescent, and he acknowledges the power of adults who model their enthusiasm for nature. As for the education system, he criticizes schools for an overly abstract and reductionist science curriculum and for their "myopic focus on technology as salvation" (p. 136). He recognizes the need for "experiential, environment-based, or place-based education" (p. 137–8), he discusses the need for what he calls "natural school reform" (p. 201f), and he advocates for camps that are more focussed on environmental education, that become what he calls "childlife preserves" (p. 227).

Louv also speaks of the need for us to perceive time spent in nature as more for our health and less for our leisure. This point leads me to suggest that the author expand his definition of nature-deficit disorder. It should include the *environmental* as well as human costs of our alienation from nature. In so doing, he would align himself with the recent works of authors Jared Diamond (*Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*) and Ronald Wright (*A Short History of Progress*) who persuasively point to humankind's historic tendency to foul its own nest through overpopulation and overexploitation of resources. While Louv does in places relate nature-deficit disorder to the health of the entire planet, I believe that an expanded use of this compelling term would better convey the much-needed urgency of his message for both human and environmental health. After all, we cannot have the former without the latter.

Having offered this perspective, I will close by saying that this is a very timely and thought-provoking "must-read." Unlike a trailer that often gives away the highlights of a forthcoming movie, my few comments in no way do justice to the value of this book.

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*Grant Linney is Past President of COEO and a teacher at the Upper Canada College Norval Outdoor School.*

## Exploring the Power of Solo, Silence, and Solitude

Knapp, Clifford E., & Smith, Thomas E. (2005). *Exploring the Power of Solo, Silence, and Solitude*. Boulder, CO: Association for Experiential Education. ISBN 0-929361-23-7

*Review by Scott Caspell*

To understand true self—which knows who we are in our inwardness and who we are in the larger world—we need both the interior intimacy that comes with solitude and the otherness that comes from community (Palmer, 2004, p. 54).

Released in November 2005 by the Association for Experiential Education, *Exploring the Power of Solo, Silence, and Solitude* is an intellectually stimulating book composed by a diverse range of authors who share their personal and professional experience with solitude. But it's much more than that too: it provides numerous activities and debriefing techniques for facilitators of solo experiences; it reviews several research studies that focus on the practice of solo in an educational context; and, it urges readers to contemplate how solitude can help us become more in tune with our true self and the world around us. Ranging from deeply theoretical to highly practical, this text will be a welcome addition to the resource collection of educators, outdoor centres, and those interested in facilitating meaningful educational experiences with the use of solitude.

The text is divided into four sections: Theoretical Frameworks, Research Results, Leadership in Action, and Personal Perspectives. Several of the chapters are written by well-known voices in outdoor education literature, such as William Hammond and David Sobel. Tom Potter and Tim O'Connell write an article that highlights their research on the use of solos in six post-secondary Outdoor Education/Recreation programs in Canada. Their chapter includes a case study of the Outdoor Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Program at Lakehead University, where they are both on faculty. *Pathways'* very own Bob

Henderson pens a provocative piece that shares some of his professional experiences facilitating solos with students from McMaster University, as well as insight gained through his personal relationship with solitude.

Like many of the authors, Bob delves deep into the meaning and essence of solitude. For instance, drawing on the writing of Sigurd Olson, Bob expresses that solitude can occur in the company of special others; yet he also conveys the notion that people can experience loneliness while being surrounded by people and the busyness of the modern lifestyle. Bob's chapter also discusses the importance of integrating solitude into our daily lives to help reflect and to centre ourselves. In this way, the chapter explores philosophical conceptions of solitude, and couples these ideas with practical approaches to cultivating the richness that is attainable through solitude. Bob's chapter, like numerous others in this volume, struck a chord deep within me; one that resonates with my approach to life-long learning, as well as my belief in the value of balancing the enjoyment of community with knowing when and how to meaningfully embrace solitude.

I must admit, however, that I picked up this book with a preconceived belief in the intrinsic value of making time for personal solitude, as well as the potentially powerful effect of facilitating solos with others. Nevertheless, it was pleasing to find that several of the authors questioned the notion that the use of solitude is inherently beneficial. Informed through his research on programs that conduct solos with youth in New Zealand, John Maxted notes that the facilitator plays an instrumental role in students' safety and their interpretation of the experience. The quality of the facilitator's

training, the structure (or lack thereof) of the educational program, and other similar topics are examined in Maxted's chapter. Through the integration of a range of viewpoints on coordinating and experiencing solos, the editors provide a fairly thorough perspective on the potential joys and challenges of facilitating solos.

While providing definitive answers and guidelines is not the purpose of this book, here are some questions to which this book does provide responses:

- How does the setting of the solo influence the experience?
- What influence does the duration of solitude have on the interpretation of the experience?
- How much information should be conveyed to participants prior to the solo?
- What are some time-tested solo activities that can enhance the experience?
- How structured should a solo experience be?
- What is the role of debriefing a student's solo experience?

*Exploring the Power of Solo, Silence, and Solitude* is peppered with these and many other essential elements of facilitating educational experiences that involve solitude. In Knapp's chapter, "The Mountains Can't Always Speak for Themselves," he explores the educator's role in debriefing a participant's solo experience. As the title of this chapter infers, he believes that a structured closure—one that involves ritual, reflection, and guidance from human and non-human actors—can enhance the experience of solitude.

In Hammond's chapter, "Growing and Deepening the Solo with a Creative-Reflective Journal," he draws on cognitive research and his personal experience to advocate that journaling can be an effective educational tool. He also lists the criteria he uses to enlighten his personal journaling as well as techniques that educators can use to strengthen their own practices. Two chapters focus on facilitating solo experiences in Outward Bound courses, although they differ

substantially in content. Bodkin and Sartor describe their nine-day Rites of Passage Vision Quest program that entails numerous days fasting and time alone in remote areas. Evans highlights the details involved in utilizing solos in a residential summer camp. The chapters found in the Personal Perspectives section—such as Knapp's experience with a traditional Lakota vision quest—may be of less practical relevance for educators, but are interesting nonetheless.

There are dozens of user-friendly activities as well as suggestions for solo debriefing scattered throughout the text. There is also an appendix that lists a number of solo activities. Although the text lacks a strong visual component, such as diagrams, illustrations or photos, it is very well put together in an approachable, easy-to-read format.

This is a thoughtful, practical book that will especially appeal to educators interested in integrating solos into their programs or strengthening their approach to facilitating solos. I believe this book will also be of interest to those keen to explore, as Smith writes in the first chapter, both the "wilderness beyond and the wilderness within" (p. 4). *Exploring the Power of Solo, Silence, and Solitude* promises to stimulate curious minds (and souls) that yearn for the rejuvenating—and possibly life-changing—experiences that can result when engaged in personal reflection and solitude.

### Reference

Palmer, P. (2004). *A hidden wholeness: The journey towards an undivided life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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*Scott Caspell is completing his forth year in the Bachelor of Environmental Studies Program at York University. Through his work with the Toronto Region Conservation Authority, Outward Bound Canada, and various canoe tripping organizations, Scott has enjoyed facilitating solos with a diversity of groups and individuals.*

## The Cabin: A Search for Personal Sanctuary

Wilson, Hap. (2005). *The Cabin: A Search for Personal Sanctuary*. Toronto: Natural Heritage. ISBN 1-897045-05-0

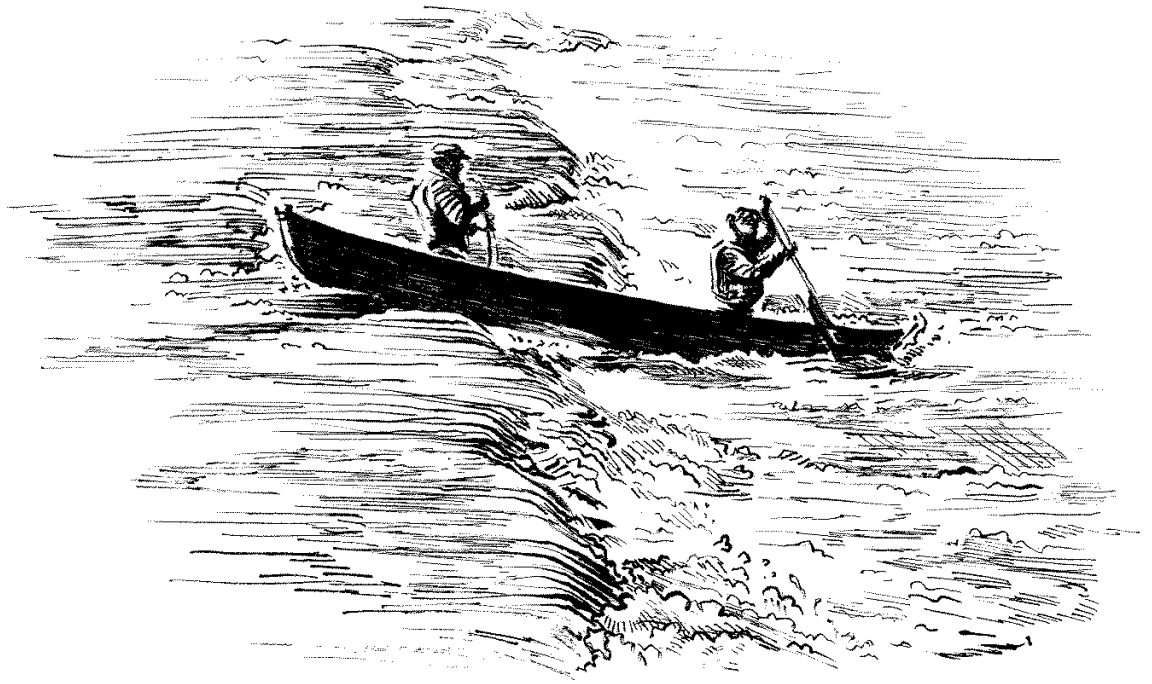
*Review by Bob Henderson*

At first, I didn't think I'd warm up to a biographical treatment of Hap Wilson and "the" cabin on the Trout Stream, Lady Evelyn River. I know Hap, and a general trip tik of his life. I've been to the cabin to sit out a big rain before Hap was centrally involved, and I've visited Hap and friends during recent reconstruction. In short, I thought, "I know this story. Is there enough story to tell?"

I couldn't have been more wrong. Hap weaves so effortlessly into one story the struggles to preserve Temagami's canoe routes in some semblance of pristine, the ways of the time

(for example his description of high school in the late 1960s) and his personal search for a life of sanctuary in the bush. Hap is and has been a canoe tripper pushing the seasons, canoe guide, ranger, artist, author and assertive player in Temagami conservation initiatives. He has been mostly a builder of cabins and seeker of a "reasonable" life in an unreasonable world, out-of-step with nature and a personal sense of peace. He is and has been a hard working man. All this fits together to tell an informative tale less about Hap, but more generally about sorting out a life, carving a niche for oneself, and making sense of our times. Hap can do this because his writing is rich in passion and compellingly honest. I





found the writing refreshing. Here is an example:

Religion was for those needing a quick fix to salvation from earthly drudgery. Heaven was paradise for the do-gooders; to me, paradise was untrammelled wilderness that was quickly being destroyed by the righteous. Yet, a deeper meaning to my life eluded me. Beyond the pragmatic, physical life of homesteading, there was a great spiritual presence somewhere just beyond reach.

Honestly, I'm not interested in Hap's religious views, or so I thought. By the book's end, I was interested in everything Hap Wilson.

Details are also present where needed. Hap records Chief Gary Potts' view that the initial Maple Mountain resort plan was a million dollar "hot dog stand." We learn details of the Teme-Augama Anishnabeg land claim, the Sudbury super stack at INCO and its "fall out," and some of the inner workings of the

"resource-management" game in Temagami through the 1970s to 2000. For those who know Temagami, we go inside the Busy Bee or, at least, get Hap's version of the inner working of life in a conflict-ridden northern town. I found Hap's sense of detail added not only credibility (not that Hap needed credibility), but allowed the book to feel like an historical statement as well.

Finally, the sketches—41 to be precise—help make the text come alive and, as stated above, provide a feel of passion and detail.

If you've ever used the word sanctuary and wondered surprisingly "What do I mean by that?" and if you have felt the lure of wild places (particularly Temagami), then Hap Wilson's *The Cabin* will add fuel to your beckoning wood stove and help you warm up to a search for a more meaningful, genuine life.

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*Bob Henderson teaches outdoor education at McMaster University, Hamilton, ON.*

## Jacksons Point Outdoor Education Centre

by Maggie Baerg

In the spring of 2005, we at Jacksons Point Outdoor Education Centre opened our doors to our first school groups.

Jacksons Point Outdoor Education Centre is a facility located on the south shores of Lake Simcoe in the village of Jacksons Point, slightly north and on the western edge of the town of Sutton. Founded 90 years ago as a children's camp, it is run by the Salvation Army, Ontario Central Division. The extension from summer camp to outdoor education centre was a logical step to take, particularly when the need for access to such centres is so great and so many centres are closing their doors permanently.

The centre encompasses 180 acres of predominantly cedar forest, field and stream. We offer fully winterized accommodation for groups ranging from a single class to an entire year (20 to 150 students plus teachers/supervisors). There is a fully appointed dining hall, large (and small) group teaching areas and many acres of area for outdoor programs, including canoeing and kayaking on Franklin Bay of Lake Simcoe, low ropes challenge and climbing, archery, orienteering, snowshoeing and hiking, limited mountain biking, basketball, beach volleyball, soccer and baseball, and broomball in the winter. From Victoria Day in May to Thanksgiving in October we have available upon request a 25-metre, full-sized heated swimming pool. The swimming pool on site allows swim tests to be completed with groups wanting to canoe or kayak. All swim tests conform to the prevailing policies and procedures of the sponsoring board of education.

Program formats at Jacksons Point Outdoor Education Centre range from day visits to overnight residential stays of one to four nights. Day programs include optional catered meals, and residential visits are fully catered, including evening snacks. All groups coming to the centre can arrange the details of their own transportation, or can leave the bussing

arrangements to us and we will simply inform the group of their pick-up times.

Day visits can be programmed from bus arrival to 15 minutes before bus departure with a half-hour for lunch (either box lunch brought by the students or catered at our kitchen) with individual program lengths of between one and three hours. Overnight visits include a daily three-hour morning and three-hour afternoon session (one or two different programs) and a two-hour evening session, all led by our experienced and qualified staff.

Climbing wall, low ropes and group challenges courses, canoeing and the swimming pool are all supervised by certified and experienced staff. All other staff are trained and competent in their fields.

Program offerings range from curriculum-based science (Habitats and Communities, Environmental Group Games, Astronomy and Space, Web of Life, Thresholds of Extinction, Biodiversity Transect) through math, English, geography (Treasure Trails, Cartography, Map or Compass Orienteering) to group and individual social development (Group Dynamics, Low Ropes Challenges, Climbing Wall); and from skills and fitness programs (Wilderness Survival Skills, Snowshoeing, Mountain Biking, Canoeing, Kayaking, Archery) to recreational evening programs including scavenger hunts, campfires, team games and night hikes. Just about any interest can be explored at the Jacksons Point Outdoor Education Centre during a class visit.

For more information and to book your stay, please contact Maggie Baerg or Bruce Aitken at 905-722-3455 or [mebaerg@ilovecamp.ca](mailto:mebaerg@ilovecamp.ca), [Bruce\\_Aitken@can.salvationarmy.org](mailto:Bruce_Aitken@can.salvationarmy.org).

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*Maggie Baerg is Program Director of the Jacksons Point Outdoor Education Centre.*

## Backcountry Learning Theme

Every season numerous schools, educational organizations, camps, and outdoor clubs take to the backcountry, each with their own objectives, teaching approaches and population demographics. How can educators improve their programs or teaching approaches when traveling “off the beaten track”? Who is offering exceptional programs/experiences that bring participants into the woods, traveling along rivers, and into the great outdoors? Interpreting “backcountry learning” in a broad sense, these are the types of questions and issues that will be focus of a backcountry learning theme running through future issues of *Pathways*.

Please submit articles and artwork that focus on one of the following areas of educational thought and practice, or other ideas of relevance to the theme of backcountry learning:

- Backcountry curricular ideas: activities, lesson plans, teaching ideas, etc.
- News about an outdoor education program/school providing exceptional backcountry learning experiences in Ontario, in Canada or abroad.
- Recent research pertaining to backcountry/outdoor learning.
- An update regarding risk management strategies or safety-related issues for programs accessing the backcountry (canoe expeditions, etc.).
- Perspectives on the benefits, challenges and teaching approaches for programs accessing the backcountry with specific populations: youth, people with mental health or physical disabilities, etc.

- Strategies for transferring backcountry learning experiences to home communities.
- Reflections on what backcountry learning experiences mean to participants, guides/leaders, educators, etc.
- Thoughts on what the future holds for backcountry learning in Canada, North America, and other areas of the world.

Contributions are welcome by all, including students, practitioners, teachers, and professors. Please send electronic copies to the addresses listed below. Please use APA formatting in either WordPerfect or Word. As page lengths for *Pathways* are about 600 words, the recommended lengths for manuscript submissions are approximately 600, 1200, 1800 or 2400 words. Manuscripts must be typed and double-spaced. Please include your name and a one- to two-sentence biography.

Please be aware of the *Pathways* audience. Most readers are teachers of some kind, although some are students. They work largely in schools (public and private, elementary and secondary) and outdoor centres, but also at colleges, universities and organizations such as Outward Bound, Evergreen, and the Metropolitan Zoo.

Scott Caspell  
905-857-0871  
scottcaspell@hotmail.com

Bryan Grimwood  
705-489-2419  
oec@kandalore.com

## Backcountry Learning in Outdoor Education

by Bryan Grimwood

A friend recently shared with me his ideas on the most important aspect outdoor education. This knowledgeable and experienced chap, a role model for thinkers in outdoor education, was critical of those individuals (including myself to some degree) who focus too much energy on semantics for instance, or differentiating, say, between education and recreation. My pal suggested that, in an effort to keep the larger picture in check, constant effort needs to centre on what outdoor education is really all about: Namely, how do we deepen peoples' connection to and feelings for the natural world?

Now, in no way will I argue this point. I will, however, offer that questioning and analyzing the language we use in outdoor education can help us understand and learn about our relationship to the Earth. The words we use and the phrases we create with these words mean something. While in the bush, how many times have you heard someone refer to "being in the middle of nowhere"? A comment such as this delegates pristine landscapes, river corridors, mountain vistas, and the flora and fauna that inhabit these areas as void of anything important.

I can certainly relate to the feeling that discussing semantics or the evolution of terminology is at times tiresome, hyper-academic, and ineffective. But knowing and understanding the history and meaning of our language and terminology has relevance (Fennell, 2000) and can provide a foundation for encouraging ethical discussion (see Jickling, 2004). As well, thinking about the meaning of our language can be inquisitively entertaining and inspire creative consideration for the shape and scope of our relationship to nature and the meanings attached to that relationship.

Below are a couple of playful examples, the latter of which is aimed at encouraging your contributions to an upcoming *Pathways* issue.

### Outdoor Education

Although I appreciate their playful thoughts, I take absolutely no credit for the following consideration and would like to pass it on to AJ and Eric, two Brock University students and friends with whom I worked, skied, and winter camped. In a seminar setting, these two intelligent and comical fellows suggested that, without doors, outdoor education would not exist. Doors, they argued, are the gateways between the walls that shelter us from nature, keep us safe and secure from the threats "out there," and box us inside. Inside. Indoors. Outside. Outdoors. Out-of-doors. By identifying our field of practice and study as *outdoor* education, we attach a label to it that embodies the exact meaning of what it is not. In other words, we associate our efforts in learning about, relating to and feeling the Earth with being surrounded by structures that keep us closed off from sensing nature. This seems silly, filled with irony, and is certainly paradoxical. Perhaps we can do better than the *outdoor* label. What would you suggest?

### Backcountry Learning

An upcoming issue of *Pathways* will carry the theme of backcountry learning, incorporating a wide array of paper topics within this theme (see Call for Papers, p. 34 of this issue). When I heard of this backcountry learning premise, my first wonder was what the word "backcountry" meant. If *Pathways* is to support such a theme, perhaps we need to frontload the issue with ideas on what backcountry means. Does backcountry mean wilderness or natural environments, both of which are arguably relative and subjective? Does

backcountry mean mountain peaks, distant lakes, remote rivers, or un-inhabited islands along a coastline? Perhaps backcountry is the Coppermine River or the Lower Madawaska River or the Highland Trail in Algonquin Park? Should these all be considered backcountry, what is the “thing” that unites these backcountry places?

To entertain myself during a solo drive along Highway 403 (I was inspired by, but bored of waving to, the passing motorists in the High Occupancy Vehicle lane), I considered the meaning of backcountry from a different angle. In using the word backcountry in our language, we can assume that an opposite of backcountry exists; let’s call this frontcountry. At this point I realized that I doubled my trouble and set myself up with a search for the meaning of frontcountry. Hmm. If backcountry is “out there” (Haluza-Delay, 1999) as wilderness or pastures of nature, then frontcountry is near, close, and familiar. For most people, then, I suppose we can welcome to the frontcountry of concrete-land, urban centres, and human-made developments.

My mind wandering, wondering: perhaps we could associate the difference between frontcountry and backcountry with another common component of our language. An easy example, say front-row and back-row seating at a Bruce Springsteen concert. Immediately images and meanings of front-row versus back-row seating nestle in. Front-row is better, more prestigious, expensive, and desired. People have a better time in the front-row and pay big cash for a chance at the Boss’ gaze during “Born to Run.” On the other hand, back-row seating is somehow less, not as desired, inexpensive, and on the periphery. They are the cheap seats. If we align frontcountry with front-row and backcountry with back-row, we entertain ideas of what assumptions our language places on meanings. For me, enjoying the splendours of nature and encouraging others to immerse themselves in experiences with natural places

does not match the images of back-row seating. In this world fixed in urban centres, I may be on the periphery but I am certainly not in a lesser, undesirable place. The meaning of backcountry is more than that for me, and a question of values (i.e., mine, yours, societal) emerges.

### Conclusion

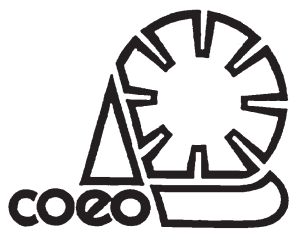
People have shared ideas for the meanings of outdoor education and backcountry so I am certainly not advocating for a change in terminology—just yet. But I am supportive of the playful curiosity that inspires questions of meaning attached to the labels and terms we use, the things we say, and our regular everyday language. Should such action inspire reflection or learning, result in healthy changes to our labels and constructs, open avenues for discussing values and ethics, or support improved connections to natural places, outcomes are worthy. At the very least, this playful consideration is brewed with creativity, an essential quality for those motivated to effect change in today’s social–environmental landscape.

### References

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Bryan Grimwood is Outdoor Education Director at Camp Kandalore.



# The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario

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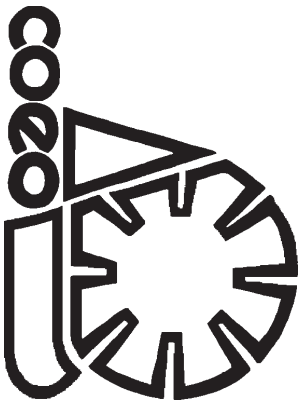
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