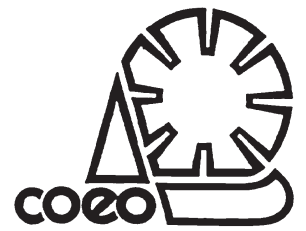


# Pathways

THE ONTARIO JOURNAL OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Spring 2007, 19(3)



# Pathways

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## 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 website, 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 Kathy Haras, 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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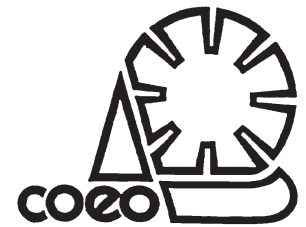
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## Features

- Outward Bound Giwaykiwin: Connecting to Land and Culture through Indigenous Outdoor Education ..... 4  
Greg Lowan
- Back to Basics: Meditations on Quality vs. Quantity in Outdoor Education ..... 7  
Andrew McMartin
- Response to *Back to Basics* ..... 13  
Doug Jacques
- Headwaters: The Next Stage in High School Integrated Programming ..... 14  
Michael Elrick
- Exploring the Influence of the ROC Integrated High School Program ..... 20  
Scott Caspell
- Response to *Exploring the Influence of the ROC Integrated High School Program* ..... 28  
Michael Elrick
- Free Life: A Report from the "Outdoor Life for Women" Program in Sweden ..... 29  
Kerstin Stenberg

## Columns

- Editors' Log Book ..... 2  
Bryan Grimwood and Scott Caspell
- President's View ..... 3  
Shane Kramer
- In the Field ..... 34  
Melanie Argiros
- Prospect Point ..... 36  
Ilan Alleson and Rachel Birenbaum

*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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With great pleasure and enthusiasm we offer to the *Pathways'* audience this collection of articles, lodged within the vast roofs and expansive walls that frame the theme for this issue: *backcountry learning*. As the guest editors for this issue, we would like to thank all contributors for their committed efforts and tip our hat — once again — to Bob Henderson for being the steady pillar that supports *Pathways'* editorial structure.

Among the contributions in this issue, readers will notice a variety of perspectives and passions that surround backcountry learning. Included within the following pages we have research reports on and program details about integrated curriculum courses; reviews from Indigenous outdoor education practices at Outward Bound Canada; a meditative push for a greater focus on quality educational experiences in the backcountry; a descriptive reflection from a youth's experience on an extended canoe trip; and a report from Sweden on an outdoor life program for women. The realm of the backcountry learning theme is remarkable and incorporates a diverse range of topics. And within this issue, we only brush the surface of the backcountry learning waters! So, please, use this issue as a basis to move forward with documenting more about the values of backcountry learning and the merit of safe outdoor education practices.

We are also delighted to have two long-standing COEO members contribute responses to articles in this issue. Doug Jacques and Mike Elrick lend their insightful talents and assist us in continuing our aim of inspiring thoughtful dialogue and reflection within *Pathways'* pages. With these responses, we at *Pathways* hope to initiate conversations

and discussions that readers can extend deeper into their home and work communities and use to broaden their own learning and practices. After reading both article and response, perhaps you will feel more capably armed!

With warm weather and sunnier skies approaching, we hope that this timely issue provides inspiration for discovering more about the value of backcountry learning experiences for you and your students. And, with certainty, this issue complements the recent release of COEO's landmark publication *Reconnecting Children through Outdoor Education*. Perhaps these readings will energize you to head outside with your class, plan an autumn hiking trip with friends or family, sit quietly alone with your back resting against an old cedar, or write and share your own reflections on how backcountry learning is important and relevant to Ontario's educational landscape. Regardless of the mode, enjoy, be safe and, along the way, tell more people about how privileged we are to live in a place that provides access to such magically wild treasures — right in our own backyards.

*Bryan Grimwood and Scott Caspell*

*In the last decade, Bryan Grimwood has been a camp counselor, section director, canoe trip leader, and the Director of Outdoor Education at Kandalore. He begins PhD studies in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Carleton University in September 2007.*

*Scott Caspell is currently finishing up his BEd with the Outdoor, Experiential and Ecological Education (OE3) specialization at Lakehead University. Scott is looking forward to spring paddling and another summer working with Outward Bound Canada.*

**Sketch Pad** — Art for this issue of *Pathways* was generously provided by Katie Schlegel (pages 17, 28, 32 and 34) and Leslie Luxemburger (cover). Katie supply teaches with the Lambton Kent District School Board where she is passing on her love of the outdoors and art to the many minions of students she comes across. Leslie is a Toronto-based artist pursuing his Master in Environmental Studies degree at York University.

As the final days of our Trillium grant wane, there is a great deal of anticipation regarding the COEO research summary. The summary will be published by the time you are reading this article and, if you haven't already ordered yourself a copy, I highly recommend that you do. The COEO research summary is tool that practitioners and academics alike can utilize to support outdoor education in general, and the mission of COEO in particular. It can be used to educate others about the importance of outdoor education as a method not only to deliver curriculum, but also to help create healthier, more environmentally conscious citizens who are contributing members of our communities. I'm sure you will agree once you have a chance to view it. I would like to offer a congratulatory note and a big thanks to Grant Linney and Andrea Foster for their hard work and dedication to this project.

We also updated COEO's strategic plan with the help of the Trillium grant. This past February, a mix of COEO members got together to look at the "big picture" and to determine where we want to go as an organization. Our organization's strengths and weaknesses were analysed in order to determine how we can move forward from here. A sub-committee was established to continue transferring the big picture ideas into a workable plan for the future. We will continue developing this plan and bring it forward to the membership in the next short while.

To carry out the work of our organization, COEO relies on the efforts and commitment of volunteers. At times it has been difficult to attract people to step forward to act on the goals of the organization; yet, there is also a flip side to this equation that has often been overlooked. There have been people who have

inquired, "What can I do to help COEO?" and we have not always been able to respond to these inquires effectively. In the past, we did not have a plan in place to direct volunteer contributions, other than the Board of Directors, *Pathways* and the annual conferences. To those who have felt frustrated when they asked what they could do and were not given a satisfactory reply, I apologize. We are acting to remedy this situation with a written Volunteer Strategy. The purpose of the strategy document will be to lay out the blueprint of where we need people to help COEO function throughout the whole organization. The document will outline opportunities for those whose interests may lie outside the "traditional" volunteer positions. For example, it will outline a range of opportunities for those who might have an hour or two a month to contribute, those who are interested in more short-term projects, and so on. When the Volunteer Strategy is implemented, it is our goal that it will help create a stronger, more vibrant organization. We also believe this strategy will enable a more cohesive, organized effort that can help us achieve our organizational objectives.

As I wrap up this column, I would like to welcome Kathy Haras to the position of Chair of the *Pathways* Editorial Board. Due to some unforeseen changes, Christine Beevis' time as Chair of the *Pathways* Editorial Board was cut short; we wish Christine all the best in her future endeavours. As for Kathy, as a practicing outdoor educator with a substantial understanding of outdoor education, I am sure she will be able to maintain the standards of *Pathways* and carry it to new successes. Welcome aboard, Kathy!

Shane Kramer

DATE	TIME	LOCATION
June 2, 2007	9:30 am – 4:00 pm	TBD
September 15, 2007	9:30 am – 4:00 pm	TBD

## Outward Bound Giwaykiwin: Connecting to Land and Culture through Indigenous Outdoor Education

by Greg Lowan

This past July I had the opportunity to work as an instructor with Outward Bound Canada's (OBC) Giwaykiwin Program. Along with a co-instructor, a peer-support staff member, and six high-school-aged students from Indigenous communities across Canada, we completed a 21-day course. Our focus was a 15-day flat-water canoe expedition following the Shining Tree route on the west Montreal River in northern Temagami, Ontario. The course was punctuated by a rock climbing day, a community service day at base camp, and participation in a sweat lodge ceremony.

According to OBC (2006), the Giwaykiwin Program was founded in 1985 in response to a recognized need for programming specific to students from Indigenous backgrounds. The Giwaykiwin program aims to integrate Outward Bound (OB) and Indigenous philosophies and traditions. Giwaykiwin means "coming home" in Ojibwa and signifies the program's philosophy of creating an opportunity for students to reconnect with their Indigenous cultures and the land. This concept would be supported by Armstrong (1987) who describes the importance of learning experientially on the land in traditional Indigenous education.

Giwaykiwin participants come to OB from a variety of backgrounds. Some are referred by social service organizations, while others enroll with the support of their families or communities. Communities or organizations may also request exclusive contract courses. On our course we had a wonderfully diverse mix of students from the west coast of Canada to Northern Quebec. Being of Miq Maq ancestry myself (New Brunswick), we represented Indigenous peoples from coast to coast!

The multiculturalism within our group created a unique learning environment. We had some students with extensive experience in the traditional teachings of their Nation and others with none at all. Some of our students were also raised in the Christian tradition. Ceremonies were a routine, but optional, component of our course. Some students participated daily in smudging (a purification ceremony) and the offering of tobacco, while others did so periodically or not at all.

For me, one of the most powerful moments of the course occurred at our takeout on the final day. A ritual that we had maintained throughout our journey was the singing of a drum song. The song is in Cree and English and speaks of leaving loved ones for an important journey. It is sung in four verses with each verse led by a different singer. This song resonated with students and staff alike as we had all left family and friends behind to embark on our three-week journey. We introduced the song on our first night and then sang it each night before bed and at the beginning and end of important portions of the course. On our final morning, we rose at five a.m. On the students' suggestion, we sang our song, and then paddled the final kilometres in silence. Upon reaching the takeout we broke the silence by singing one final time in unison. It brought me to tears. We had gone through an intense experience together, overcoming significant physical, social and emotional challenges. Our growth as a group and as individuals became clear to me at that moment. I was so touched to hear everyone singing together. Students, who three weeks earlier were too shy to speak in talking circles, were proudly singing our group's anthem in full voice.

## A Rite of Passage

Drawing on anthropological research, Andrews (1999) examines the similarities between wilderness expeditions and rites of passage. On an expedition, participants are separated from their regular lives and are often able to connect in new ways with themselves, their group and the land through which they are traveling. Upon returning from an expedition, participants have often undergone personal transformations, similar to those found in people who have completed formal rites of passage. Andrews observes that the stages of separation, transformation, and reincorporation common in rites of passage are often part of wilderness expeditions.

Upon examining the structure of a typical OB long course as described by OBC (2006), the three stages of a rite of passage can be found. The beginning, middle and conclusion of each course are carefully structured and include rituals. Separation occurs on the first day of each course with the raising of a flag, the Blue Peter, which signifies the departure of a group from base camp. Transformation includes Immersion, Expedition, and Final when students are introduced to a specific mode of wilderness travel and eventually take responsibility for the expedition themselves. Courses conclude with reincorporation activities such as the ceremonial granting of commemorative pins and a banquet (OBC, 2006). Andrews (1999) suggests that both students and instructors often emerge from courses with a newly acquired sense of connection to themselves, their community and the land. On our Giwaykiwin course in July, some students also expressed a renewed connection to their culture.

## Solo Learnings

Solitary wilderness experiences are an important rite of passage in many cultures. OB courses greater than five days in length typically include a 24- or 48-hour solo (OBC, 2006). While on solo, students are isolated

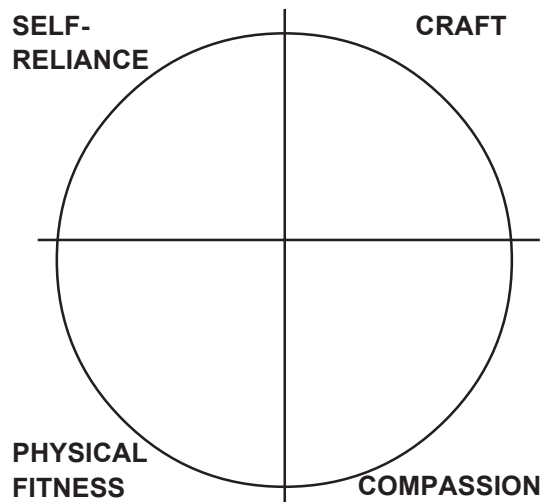
from each other and provided with sufficient food and shelter to survive. Instructors check in with each student at regular intervals to ensure their safety.

Prior to our Giwaykiwin course in July, I had the opportunity to go on solo myself at the conclusion of a staff trip. I wanted to experience an OB-style overnight solo for myself so that I could relate to my students' experiences. It was more challenging than I expected. Leaving my circle of friends with whom I had traveled for ten days to spend a night out in the company of black flies was tough! I had not realized how strong our groups' bond — our sense of community — had become and, initially, I felt very lonely and isolated.

However, I soon overcame my loneliness and took advantage of the opportunity for solitary reflection. Through journaling and fireside meditation, I worked through significant learnings and experiences that I had had on the trip. I also experienced an epiphany. While thinking about my upcoming Giwaykiwin course in July, I realized that OB's four pillars — physical fitness, self-reliance, compassion, and craft (OBC, 2006) — would fit well into a discussion of the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel is common to many of North America's Indigenous cultures. As described by Bopp, Bopp, Brown and Lane Jr. (1984), it is divided into four sections and represents, among other things, the connectedness of the four seasons, the four directions, the four elements, the four races of people, and the four aspects of balanced health (i.e., emotional, mental, physical and spiritual).

Examining OB's four pillars using the Medicine Wheel (Figure 1) provides an opportunity to discuss their interconnectedness. From the perspective of the Medicine Wheel, if you are very strong in one pillar, but ignore another, your wheel will be lopsided and out of balance. I used this concept to discuss the four pillars and the Medicine Wheel with our Giwaykiwin students in July. As previously

**Figure 1. Medicine Wheel with Outward Bound's Four Pillars.**



stated, this sort of integration of OB and Indigenous philosophies is a goal of the Giwaykiwin program. As Giwaykiwin instructors, we are charged with the significant challenge of balancing our own cultural experiences and teachings while recognizing the diversity of our Indigenous students, as well as incorporating the philosophies of OB.

### Final Thoughts

Simpson (2002) and Takano (2005) have both expressed that, despite the existence of many wilderness-based Indigenous educational programs, there is a lack of examination of this important educational trend in the literature. My experiences with OBC's Giwaykiwin program and other Indigenous outdoor education programs have been transformational personally and professionally. I have also witnessed profound transformations in my students. Despite these successes, however, I am left with questions that I feel require further reflection. Some of the areas that I am interested in studying further include the successful inclusion of non-Indigenous instructors, recognizing and

balancing Indigenous multiculturalism in our programs, and the co-existence and integration of OB and Indigenous philosophies. I am currently exploring these topics, among others, through the course of my Master of Education degree at Lakehead University. In July 2007, I will be conducting action research as a participant-observer on a Giwaykiwin course on the Horton River, NWT. My hope is that this reflexivity in research will result in enhanced instructional practice and programming and also add to the body of literature on this dynamic form of education. See you on the water!

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*Greg Lowan is a four directions man. He is proud to be of Miq Maq, Scottish, Norwegian and Austro-Jewish ancestry. Between paddling trips and visits home to Western Canada, he is pursuing a Master of Education degree at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario.*



## Back to Basics: Meditations on Quality vs. Quantity in Outdoor Education

by Andrew McMartin

How well do you know the environment around you? Do you know where your water comes from? Where is the closest stream, seep or vernal pool in relation to your home? Do you know what lives there and relies on that source? How about the closest plant to your front door? Do you know the different plants growing in the nearest lawn or patch of grass? Are any edible or medicinal? How are they prepared? Do you know which way the wind was blowing today? How many times did it change direction? What does this indicate about upcoming weather? (For more examples of these challenging questions, visit [www.wildernessawareness.org/PDFs/TouristTest.pdf](http://www.wildernessawareness.org/PDFs/TouristTest.pdf).)

There was a time when all of our ancestors knew the answers to these questions. This was basic awareness, and knowledge of place was an integral part of life. Today, few people in Western culture are *aware* of the environment that surrounds them, and fewer still understand the importance of it to the balance of life on this planet. Modern lifestyles and culture have led us away from our connection to the Earth. The majority of Western populations rely on food and water sources they do not know. People buy what they want from a supermarket and spend their extra time lost in reality TV shows, rather than reality itself. The more dependent we grow on technology, the less we use our senses, bodies and minds, to the point that they are showing signs of atrophy. Westerners are less healthy and less active than they were 50 years ago. And, according to Louv (2005), children today have a more profound relationship with technology than with the environment around them.

As outdoor educators, the cards seem stacked against us. Possibly the only elements in our favour are instinct, youth and the

environment itself. Kids are closer to their natural instincts than are adults; they have unlearned less (Brown Jr., 1989). The wonder that a small child demonstrates with her hands sunk in the mud of a backyard puddle is not as distant a memory for a teen as for an adult. Often, when youth get back into wilderness they rediscover the wonder and curiosity that filled them as toddlers. I believe that one of the most powerful things an educator can do is provide the opportunity for students to spend time outside, living lessons rather than just reading about them. Yet, as facilitators we can do more than provide time outside. I see a need for increased experience-based education *about* the out of doors, rather than just education *in* the out of doors.

Through this we can help students develop a closer connection to their place, perhaps leading to a generation that values natural places for their inherent value, rather than their monetary value (Evernden, 1993). Unfortunately, outdoor education and, in particular, backcountry experiences often fail to facilitate a quality of experience, instead opting for a quantity of them.

Throughout this paper, I use my own personal experiences to illustrate how many backcountry expeditions emphasize quantity rather than quality of experience. I discuss why this is counter-productive to the goals of outdoor education in many settings, and how this leads to the gap that I often encounter between what is practiced and what is preached. From there, I suggest questions for the reader to reflect upon and different ways of knowing that have helped my own expedition experiences with students. I provide a "day in the life" itinerary to better illustrate some of my points. Concluding this paper are some final reflective thoughts about the potential consequences of continuing to

teach and lead expedition experiences based on quantity rather than quality.

### What is Quality in Outdoor Education?

I should begin by defining “quality” of experience as I have encountered it. To me, quality experiences show a depth and range of sensory experience. They involve many different ways of knowing an experience, and promote knowledge of place in the way that you know your home. Think of your last expedition: How well did you know each place you stayed? With whom did you share these places? What plants, animals, trees or insects did you encounter?

In modern outdoor expeditions, facilitation by instructors and guides leans toward leadership, activity-based skill and group dynamics. These are positive aspects of expedition experiences, but they tend to be emphasized at the expense of everything else. Are these really the reasons that people return to the wilderness? From my perspective, most of us return to the wilderness because we love the challenges and adventure it often presents, and we love the physical, mental and spiritual calm that it provides. So why is it that we know so little of what we profess to love?

Unfortunately, when people head out into the backcountry it is very difficult for them to leave their cultural norms at home. Our routines and daily schedules, for example, as Tom Brown Jr. (1989) suggests, are difficult things to escape — especially within the confines of Western society. Although backcountry expeditions grant us this opportunity, it is rarely taken advantage of. After years of canoe tripping, I began to recognize that my days in the wilderness were very much a mirror of my days in the city. Routines were formed, and everyone on the trip fell in line. Wake up, pack, eat, travel, travel, eat, travel, travel, unpack, eat, sit around the fire, go to sleep, REPEAT! Replace “travel” with “school/work,” and “sit around a fire” with “sports” or “TV,” and this becomes a

good representation of my days in the city. There are some very real similarities to these two types of days. They are ruled by schedule and, because of this, I missed most of what I was really there for. Think back to the experiences you remember vividly, to the moments in your life that you tell others about. Were these moments scheduled? Were they even planned? Was time or destination a part of the equation (Brown Jr., 1989)? My most vivid memories are the ones that just happened. They were the times where I was completely lost in the moment, concentrating fully on the “now.” These are the moments when we are most aware, the moments uninterrupted by the past or the future, allowed to exist as such because of a severe lack of things to do or places to be (Hartmann, 2004). What are we teaching students if our days all look the same?

In my first years leading expeditions, the landscape was given little say in how we lived our days. We had a predetermined schedule, and we stuck to it. All our days were similar, seeing a variety of landscapes and knowing little about any of them. In later experiences, allowing the wilderness to dictate parts of or entire days provided an opportunity to develop a relationship with our surroundings. Rather than exerting my will upon the land, I learned to try to allow the landscape to present activities, adventures and a depth of experience for everyone involved.

### Do You Practice What You Preach?

The journey is the destination, right? This has become a mantra for backcountry learning and adventure education in recent years. As I continued to run into this cliché, I started to question whether anyone understood it. I wondered how we could preach this, yet spend our days applying schedules and routines to the places where we were supposed to be leaving it all behind. These things seem to be at odds with one another. I began to realize (and continue to do so frequently) how hard it is to escape my cultural perspectives

and biases. The only method I have discovered to help me do this is to continually face some hard questions, and be open to the idea that I might not like the answers. (I was once told that one of the greatest failures in life is the failure to ask questions and I had been failing to ask meaningful questions of myself.)

Below I offer you some of those questions, asked of me and which have helped me to see more clearly what I feel is important:

- What do you believe in?
- What is your purpose?
- Do your actions fit your beliefs?
- Are you achieving your goals?
- Do you live the lessons you teach? How?
- What is it that makes you truly happy?

I would like to think that most people teach and work in the outdoors because they love and believe in what they do. If that is true, then we owe it to our students and our purpose to integrate meaningful introspection and self-analysis into our daily lives. Do not be afraid to ask similar questions of students. Children have their lives laid out for them earlier and in more detail than ever before (Louv, 2006). They are rarely encouraged to ask difficult questions of themselves or think with any depth about the world around them and how they can positively influence it. So how do we change? Asking these questions helped me to understand the chasm between what I wanted to achieve and what I was achieving with students. Yet I still had no idea how to develop more meaningful experiences.

Approximately five years after I started leading canoe trips with kids, I had the pleasure of co-leading with a true student of life. He had a passionate interest in all things wilderness and had a vast *native* knowledge of the land. By native, I mean that his knowledge was a kind that made the wilderness his home. He had a passionate interest in traditional skills and was a student of a wilderness survival school in New Jersey called the Tracker School, run by Tom Brown Jr. ([www.trackerschool.com](http://www.trackerschool.com)). As I began to learn more, my eyes were opened to some very different ways of leading, teaching

and existing in the wilderness. I began to see tremendous value in the teaching styles of traditional cultures living close to the Earth and found ways to integrate some of them into my expedition experiences. Many of these styles are illustrated in the pages that follow.

### Different Ways of Knowing

I certainly cannot provide a formula of how to develop more meaningful experiences for students, but I can recommend some general themes, taken mostly from the lessons of Tom Brown Jr. (1989), that have helped me immeasurably:

- Reduce quantity and increase quality. Whether this takes form in reducing expedition traveling distances or creating time to explore the world around you in depth, a focus on quality can create wonderful and powerful learning experiences. Throw away watches and let the land dictate a little more. Eat when you are hungry, sleep when you are tired, and play to exhaustion. In essence, kill routine. Some of the best canoe trips I have been a part of averaged one kilometre per day. We lived by the sun and the days were always full. Whether students were out on a nature sit, making traditional shelters for the night, writing, collecting wild edibles or materials for baskets or fishing lures, or just out adventuring in unstructured space and time, they were learning through direct experience with different aspects of the natural world.
- Slow down! In fact, sit down! Find a place to stop and let the rush of the day leave you. Start to look around you and lose yourself in the world that you normally walk by every day. This can be a natural environment or an urban jungle. Concentrate only on your senses and on the present moment. Try to leave thoughts of the past and the future behind and challenge yourself to get to know the area directly around you. Awareness of place will be exponentially increased if teachers

and students have a single sit spot to visit daily throughout the year. It can be anywhere! Every place has much to teach (Brown Jr., 1989).

- Incorporate multi-sensory experiences. To simply read about making cedar tea does not mean you know a cedar tree or the tea itself. By coming into contact with this tree, feeling its bark and roots as you make baskets and cordage, seeing and smelling its greens, sitting and listening to the way it moves in the wind and the wildlife that inhabit it throughout the year, and finally, tasting the delicious tea that it produces, you begin to know this tree. Challenge senses daily with blindfold exercises, tasting, touching and smelling a variety of different natural materials to see how sensitive you can become. Sensory experience and repetition are ways we learn the lessons that do not get forgotten (Brown Jr., 1989).
- Lose your inhibitions and become a child again! Teach the value of mystery and through this empower the wonder and awe that small children experience daily. Think back to when you were a kid and what it was that drew you outside. You didn't have to go far to find wonder back then. Why is it that we feel we have to now? Recreate those things with children, for them and for yourself! Get muddy again, build forts or shelters, eat plants and collect your own food. Stop letting your ideas (positive or negative) of what an experience will be like keep you from *actually* experiencing it. You'll never know what it's like until you try it (Brown Jr., 1989).
- Change yourself! Learn to live the things you say and believe. Often this change in itself becomes the teaching (Hartmann, 2004). As Tom Brown Jr. regularly states to his students: "I could pick my boy's face out of a thousand while blindfolded." How well do you know the things you say you love? Be interested in life, passionate about the places that are meaningful to you, and give these places the time and attention that they deserve.

### A Day in the Life

Based upon the preceding ideas in this paper, I consider it necessary to illustrate how I have used them to increase quality and depth in my own expeditions. Primarily, I try to live these teachings through the use of traditional and primitive skills, and use these to facilitate more sensory experiences for students. Traditional skills and philosophies are just one method — of many — to incorporate different ways of knowing. They are how I have experienced success. For success to be achieved, considerable experience on the part of the instructor is required. If you can not demonstrate or teach skills that work, your efforts will be less than effective; so, spend time learning, researching and experimenting with these skills.

Note that the sample day described below is packed with activities in an effort to illustrate a variety of lessons that could contribute to a backcountry trip, rather than to encourage anyone to attempt to fit this many activities into a single day. Using friction for fire making, for example, can be a multi-day lesson that includes fire structure, plant and material studies for tinder and parts, as well as assembly and technique for methods like the bow drill, hand drill, fire saw, flint and steel, or even just matches! Remember, the point is to spend quality time doing a few things and, thus, knowing them well.

Try these out:

- Wake up with first light and go to an individual "sit spot" to catch the busiest time in the forest — the hour surrounding sunrise.
- Come back from a sit, get a fire going with a bow drill (friction fire) and cook breakfast and brew some pine needle tea.
- Gather together to give thanks for the meal. This does not have to have any specific religious connotation but simply acknowledges the sacrifices made for us so that we can live another day. Eat.
- Go for a short walk to find a spot to build a primitive shelter. On the way collect

materials for basketry and for coal-burning bowls, cups and spoons. Build the shelter.

- Come back and make lunch. Share a short story about thanksgiving and respect for the Earth. Eat.
- Take a siesta!
- Go for a walk and look at various plants and trees using field guides to identify and learn about edible and medicinal properties. Talk about proper harvesting techniques and good *caretaking* (i.e., taking care of the land, and leaving a place better than it was found), and reiterate messages of thanksgiving as we take life to nourish ourselves.
- Track wildlife and learn about the interconnected lives that inhabit the area while you gain insight into wildlife patterns and behaviours.
- During the middle part of the walk, introduce animal stalking and movement techniques, and continue with a silent hike out along a lowland swamp. Compare and discuss the difference in your awareness between the first and second half of the walk.
- Go for a swamp crawl . . . a chance to play around in the mud and get up close with some of the wildlife that inhabits this ecosystem. Discuss aspects of traditional camouflage and play hiding games with students on the way back to the campsite.
- Get another fire going with the use of a bow drill and prepare dinner and tea. Give thanks and eat!
- Hang out around the fire; work on coal-burning bowls, spoons or baskets from the day's collection of cedar bark, birch bark and various rootlets.
- Tell stories.
- Fall into bed exhausted, while one adventurous student crawls into the shelter for the night.

Keep in mind that, throughout this sample day, little distance is traveled. Most activities involve nothing more than short wanderings from the campsite. There should be plenty of

time for relaxing and spending time in and with the environment. While staying busy all day, never rush and always allow time to check out interesting spots as they present themselves. The environment should dictate what is learned by providing certain materials and allowing students to start projects that engage them in sensory experience. This sample day is packed with different activities that illustrate a variety of learning opportunities presented by the natural surroundings. Not every day will look like this, nor should you expect that it should. Crucial emphasis must be placed on including unstructured time, allowing the natural surroundings to stimulate fun and imagination.

#### **Summary: Reflective Thoughts on Quantity over Quality**

A planetary crisis embraces everything from the personal and social to worldwide, but in spite of an occasional flurry of lip service and 'let's pretend' concerning the avalanche of disasters we are perpetrating, most of our gestures (a bit of recycling, a bit less driving, turning down the heat or AC, sending a check to the Sierra Club) seem to serve only to relieve our guilty conscience or mask our growing feeling of impotence. Nothing much is happening, at any rate, to halt our downward plunge. (Pearce, 2004, p. xv)

Few people can say that they have experienced a day where they did more good for the Earth than bad. Western culture relies on short-lived technologies that cause the environment immense stress through manufacturing and use. Hyperactive lifestyles spent in climate-controlled environments are the norm, leading to a culture that has no connection to or understanding of the world on which its existence relies. Backcountry expeditions are a rare chance for students to experience wilderness and the wonders associated with it,

and to leave modern society's schedule behind. Yet it seems that too often outdoor experiences are based on a large quantity of experiences, rather than fewer, quality ones. No time for exploring, no time for playing, and no time immersed in lessons of place based on direct sensory experience. Often by trying to fit in too much, we end up rushing past many of the reasons why we love these experiences and places so much, failing to facilitate meaningful connections. As educators, leaders, guides and role models, we must evaluate what it is that we want to accomplish, identify what we are accomplishing, and continue to set loftier goals (though in some ways this may actually mean doing less).

Encouraging children to get outside and have positive experiences is great, but we can do more. Teaching in the outdoors is worthy, but we can do more. Group dynamics, activity based skills, and leadership development are very important outcomes of outdoor education, but we must do more. Children of all ages need opportunities to let their imaginations work, to play and to rediscover their senses. Lessons need to incorporate direct experiences with many aspects of the environment, utilize a wide range of senses, and be free from the cultural routines that shape most of our days. And, back at school, lessons must refocus on naturalist studies and reintroduce natural history as a part of everyday experience, rather than allow those subjects to linger near extinction.

According to Walsch (2005), wisdom is knowledge applied. As I learn more about the world around me through traditional skills and philosophies, I have begun to understand this statement. Traditional cultures are based upon lessons learned over thousands of generations. There is wisdom in this. Modern cultures are based upon lessons learned over a much shorter time span, knowledge that has yet to withstand the test of time. Newer often does not mean better or more successful. My

expedition experiences suggest to me that being open to ancient wisdom and finding ways to integrate it within a modern context can lead to profound connections between students and the life that surrounds them. The more we can learn from and blend ancient teachings and philosophies in ways that fit our lives, the better able we will be to live (and teach others to live) with the Earth, rather than just on it.

### Many Thanks

To the Earth, my teachers, and to you for your work and your passion, past, present and future, thank you.

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## Response to *Back to Basics*

by Doug Jacques

My initial response to Andrew McMartin's article (see page 7 of this issue) was recollecting a period in my life more than 30 years ago when I ventured into the woods with little to survive. During one venture by myself, I had a short period of time where I felt perfectly at home in the wilderness. Although years of immersion and wise leadership at a summer camp led up to this moment, it was the time to just be in nature that evoked the connection. As I was well nourished by a life working outdoors, this sense of place is permanent. During the past 17 years of teaching an integrated course (The Bronte Creek Project), it has also been my experience that such a relationship with wilderness can be facilitated. McMartin makes an important point in suggesting spending quality time doing a few things, and thus knowing them well.

Taking the time to encourage being childlike is one of the benefits of slowing down that resonated with me. Emerson (1954) pointed out that "the lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other, who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood" (p. 4). Although some might not find the topics connected, I found myself wanting to add perspectives of self growth and belonging to a community as integral components of discovering one's place in the natural world. Long captivated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's exploration of humans as noble in their natural state, it seems that in a vastly complex society removed almost entirely from nature, education in the outdoors offers an opportunity for participants to be introspective and rediscover what is noble and inspiring about themselves.

In considering quality vs. quantity in outdoor education it is still important from my perspective to be conscious of one's viewpoint. I have taught and run trips from a survival perspective, an Earth Education Perspective,

and a Native Rediscovery perspective.

Although being passionate and walking the walk inspires involvement, it is also critical thinking skills, reflection, and involvement in the design and leadership of the experiences that ensure participants develop their own connections, relationships and learnings. Quality experiences well taught should reflect the complexity and diversity of the human experience.

In expressing the thought that few people can say that they have experienced a day where they did more good for the Earth than bad, McMartin highlights what has become the primary focus of environmental and outdoor education. From my perspective of encouraging students to develop a relationship with themselves, other people and the planet, doing more good for the Earth is a way of deepening those relationships. Developing a personal environmental ethic is perhaps the modern day basic for all outdoor educators.

As a practitioner I found McMartin's article on quality vs. quantity in outdoor education both reaffirming and thought provoking. Although at first the complexity of what we might, can and should do as outdoor educators can be daunting, my experience and intuition is that it is not. If we can encourage happy and unexpected discovery (i.e., serendipity) by being prepared, knowledgeable, and applying our best judgement and wisdom, students will continue their learning on their own.

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## Headwaters: The Next Stage in High School Integrated Programming

by Michael Elrick

### Background

For 12 years, Centennial High School in Guelph has run an integrated program called the Community Environmental Leadership Program (CELP). In 1995 the program was offered at the grade 11 level and involved the following courses: Environmental Science, Environmental Geography, Outdoor Education (Physical Education) and Personal Life Management (Guidance). The program ran successfully in the second semester for seven years. In 2001, with the high school system being modified to fit into a four-year model, and the elimination of the environmental science and geography credits, a decision was made to move CELP to the grade 10 level. The following four courses were chosen to make up the package: Academic English, Careers and Civics, Outdoor Activities and Interdisciplinary Studies. The program was also expanded to run during both semesters and officially began to draw students from four Guelph-area high schools.

As part of the curriculum of CELP, high school students teach the three-day Earth Education Program "EARTHKEEPERS™"<sup>1</sup> to grade five students from our school board. This was modeled for us by the Bronte Creek Integrated Project of the Halton board. In 2006, the grade 12 program "Headwaters"<sup>2</sup> was initiated and offered the following four courses: Environment and Resource Management, Canadian Literature, Outdoor Activities and Interdisciplinary Studies. In 2007 the credit of grade 12 university English replaced the Canadian Literature credit but the latter is still offered to those students who wish to take it. Headwaters runs concurrently with CELP and both programs take place at the same off-site campus, 15 minutes from town. One teacher is designated for the three credits in CELP, one

teacher is designated for the three credits in Headwaters, and one teacher is designated for the two credits for the English courses of both programs.

### Introduction

My intention with this paper is to share the origins of the grade 12 Headwaters program and provide a brief outline of the program's curriculum and methodologies. I will argue that integrated courses offer a sustainable solution for keeping outdoor and environmental education alive in our school boards and will provide reasons for this.

### The Beginnings

The first water molecules of the Headwaters program were created by a student of mine in 2001. He was enrolled in a two-credit senior co-op placement with the grade 10 CELP program. One day he casually suggested that I should offer another program, but at a higher level. He then proceeded to rhyme off four courses that he thought would be a good fit and started organizing how it would work. I brushed it off at first, but like all good ideas that spill, I had trouble wiping it off. I, too, started assembling different course packages and imagining the possibilities. I believe I was interested for a couple of different reasons. One, the maturity of students at the grade 12 level would allow for a greater depth of experience, inquiry into issues, and level of community building. Second, I felt more than ever that this type of education, guided by themes of environmental sustainability and community, was of utmost importance in our world today. One afternoon I casually mentioned the idea to my colleague Janet Dalziel who teaches the English course in CELP. It was at this point that we eddied out



into the main current and the idea really started to flow. Every moment the two of us would meet, the discussions were always of imagining the possibilities. "If we had this credit, we could do this!" or "Logistically, how would this work with two simultaneous programs at the same site?" But the discussions kept going, and one day I said to Janet, "Even if this never gets off the ground, it's still been fun thinking about it." But by the fall of 2004, when the calendar was being designed at our school for the next year's course selection, we floated our Headwaters proposal to our principal. She was initially supportive, and said that we would have to get it passed by the department head group. As I had experienced this process before, I knew I had to approach all the specific departments involved as well as spread the word to others for support. There are two challenges that constantly face our integrated programs: 1) Getting others to accept that these courses can be taught outside the existing conventional classroom format, and 2) Teaching the courses to the standards necessary to launch these students to the next level, whether that be grade 11, university or college. In our favour was the reputation and standard that we had worked hard at achieving in our grade 10 program. Woven in, as is typical in a community, was the fact that several of the department head's children had participated in CELP. At the meeting, the proposal met with support and concern, but in the end it was agreed that the Headwaters integrated program would enter the course calendar. The next challenge would be to sign up enough students. By the end of March 2005 we achieved that goal and with that, the principal allocated the staffing units toward the program. The first Headwaters program was launched.

### Some Program Specifics

I have always described our program as simply "school." We teach curriculum courses outlined by the Ministry of Education. We are certified teachers hired by the public school

system, and we support students to continue to play sports or music with their home schools. Our integrated programs are not intended to exist in isolation, but rather to support and enhance the educational possibilities for those in our community. The skills and lessons we impart are meant to be "taken back" and used in each student's home school, university or college.

The overall theme of the Headwaters program is *A Journey to the Source*. We attempt, metaphorically, to journey farther upstream, to the source of environmental and community problems, and to the source of solutions for a sustainable future.

Food is a topic that is explored in depth and used as a vehicle to accomplish much of the curriculum for several courses. Every Friday the students are responsible for designing a meal for the entire class using the principles of locavores.<sup>3</sup> Using a local online delivery service<sup>4</sup> that specializes in locally grown and organic foods, the students order their ingredients on Monday, delivery takes place Thursday, and lunch is made for Friday. The delivery company lists beside each of its ingredients whether the product is organic and/or locally grown, and where the product comes from. My assignment allows them to order only locally grown products (mostly from Southern Ontario) and asks them to calculate their food mileage for each meal. This is calculated as a basic estimate by averaging the food mileage of each item, excluding spices. (There are more complex formulas available for doing this that account for the type of transportation used to deliver the food item for sale.) Our first meal in February, for example, was maple parsnip soup and sweet potato quesadillas. This assignment also encourages students to start their own connections locally. For example, one student knows an egg farmer; another knows a beekeeper who produces honey. The main purpose is to reduce one's ecological footprint by lowering food mileage and to make the connections to healthy agricultural lands, local farmers and good tasting food!

In March we make maple syrup with a small 50-bucket operation. It is the first “harvest” from the land with our own hands. In conjunction with this we are piloting this year a grade one education program called “MapleKeys,” which will be taught by the grade 12 students and will meet four main objectives of the grade one Science and Technology curriculum.

At the end of March we start, in a small, makeshift greenhouse, seeding a vegetable garden where we will grow our food to use weekly, and to share with our parents at a closing celebration meal in late June. As well, fall crops will be sown in order that the following year’s class can utilize the bounty for their locavore meals in the winter and spring. This involves digging, double digging, planting, weeding, fertilizing and harvesting. In mid-May we transfer the plants from the greenhouse to the garden and also help some plants along with cold frames. This year we hope to have a few chickens to obtain eggs from, and more importantly, to demonstrate the soil cycle by making compost from their manure. We have some perennial rhubarb plants and often our first tastes of spring come in the form of rhubarb pie sweetened by maple syrup. Soon there is salad and spring squash. Living locally is an overriding principle of the Headwaters program and food is our entry point to the curriculum objectives.

Three overnight experiences take place in Headwaters. Initially there is a six-night winter camping trip in Algonquin Park. This trip uses traditional travel methods of snowshoes and toboggans, and the students sleep in large canvas tents with portable woodstoves. In early May there is a one-night solo on the property. At the end of the course there is a three-night canoe trip that takes place on a local river and celebrates our bioregion. For each experience, the students are involved in a craft that prepares them for the wilderness journey. For the winter trip, they sew snowshoe moccasins using elk hide purchased from a local farmer. For the solo, they build

their own shelters using traditional wigwam-building techniques. And for the canoe trip, they carve their own paddles from wood that we have milled from the property. This year we are piloting the making of wooden toboggans for the winter trip.

The university-level English course takes place on a daily basis in a classroom setting. The curriculum initially involves reading essays by authors such as Sigurd Olson, Henry David Thoreau and Sharon Butala. Students read a novel and write an essay through an independent study unit. We read the book *True North* by Elliot Merrick, which ties into themes of traditional winter travel. A third of the book is actually read in tents during the evenings in Algonquin Park. The play *King Lear* by William Shakespeare and the novel *No Great Mischief* by Alistair MacLeod are studied in depth. On a weekly basis, the students give seminars that we have titled “Voices.” For example, we have three seminars titled “Voices of Algonquin Park” prior to our first overnight trip. In late May we move our classroom to the City of Guelph and interview local citizens who are making a difference in our community. These interviews are written up and published in a small book, similar to a cultural journalism project. The students also keep journals and attempt to capture their own voice as we journey through the course.

The concept of “peak oil” is a main theme for much of our lectures delivered as part of the Environment and Resource Management course. We look at the history of the use of energy by humans, and the transitions from wood to coal and from coal to oil. We define the theories of Hubbert’s Peak, and the world peak of oil. We look at the impacts of our carbon-based energy uses such as the enhanced greenhouse effect and global warming. We envision what society will look like in a post-peak oil world and experiment with solutions of renewable energy, conservation of energy and living locally. We read from essays from James Howard Kunstler, author of *The Long Emergency*, and Paul Roberts, author of *The End of Oil*.



### The Hero's Journey

Running in series with our Headwaters journey is a framework of the hero's journey as described by Campbell (1973) and summarized by Vogler (1998). According to Campbell, the hero's journey is an archetype of experience that resonates with the inner being of all humans. It is a journey with defined stages that ultimately leads a person home. For the Headwaters students, the *call to adventure* stage has already occurred, just by their signing up for the program. The *crossing of the first threshold* stage is the initial winter camp wilderness trip. This is a journey to the "special world" that Campbell writes about, and our hope is that the students sense the special-ness of the world in a setting of natural integrity. Several stages later, the *journey to the innermost cave* is the solo experience when ultimately students must face their own fears and thoughts at night time. After the solo comes the *seizing of the sword* stage; at this time

students are given a blank piece of cedar wood that, using a spoke shave, they will fashion into a paddle allowing them to journey "home" in the final stages. The *return with the elixir* stage is an upstream paddle and hike to a spring-fed pond that is the source of the small creek that flows through our off-site school property. The water literally can be seen bubbling right out of the ground through the disturbance made to the mud and debris at the pond bottom. We fill a glass jar of this pure spring water and toss it on a woodstove that evening in a self-made sauna in order to cleanse us before returning to our communities. The next day we literally paddle home by canoe via Blue Springs Creek and the Eramosa River to Guelph. We have been to "the source" and now it is time to go back. The key part in the hero's journey, and one that Loynes (2004) argues is missing in many educational journeys today, is this final stage of returning home in order to contribute positively to one's community. We finish with

a final locavore meal and slide presentation with our families in the City of Guelph.

### **A Sustainable Model for Delivering Outdoor and Environmental Education**

It has been a difficult time for many of us in the outdoor and environmental field for the last 15 years: outdoor centres, one after another, have closed down; outdoor education teachers have been eliminated or replaced with those in lower paid positions; environmental courses and content have been cut from the curriculum. Over the same time period, however, we have seen the growth of integrated programs with outdoor and environmental focuses. And many of these involve the teaching of elementary environmental programs by the high school students. Is this perhaps a model for “keeping the message alive” within our school system? Is this a sustainable model for years to come?

I believe that integrated programs have two significant factors in their favour: The first is that integrated programs do not lie outside the main staffing formula. In other words, the teacher’s salary is paid because these courses are simply high school credits. If the teacher was not teaching them in the integrated program, they would be teaching them back at their home school. When budget crunches come, school boards always look for what they can cut outside of the main formula. With integrated programs, there is no double staffing, there is nothing to cut, there is no “outside.” As well, many integrated programs have worked hard at not asking anyone for too much money. In our programs, we try to raise 80% of our own funds. We receive a regular school course budget and a small amount from an environmental committee of the board, but most comes through student fees and revenue generated from the elementary programs. Again, when people ask me, “Haven’t they cut your program yet?” my response is, “What is there to cut?” I never thought that I would admit this, but the Mike Harris government taught me how to survive

through the toughest of educational tyrants. It is also the reason why I am careful to accept funds that would replace any of our funding sources, because as quickly as I have seen money granted, I have seen money cut. Our integrated program has been running steadily for 13 years and to date we have put through over 500 high school and 5,000 elementary students. Today, teachers in our school board have initiated three more grade 10 CELP programs, each teaching EARTHKEEPERS. There are times at our off-school site that we have 45 high school students, 80 elementary students, 10 parents and 6 teachers. No one is double staffed and it all takes place within the main funding formula.

An argument might be made, though, that to some extent, this model is a user-pay system. I agree and do not have a simple answer. I wish it could all be fully funded from core sources but I have been in the business of educational survival in chaotic times. Somehow, this is where I have ended up. In an attempt to deal with the user-pay issue, our school board has a policy that no student will be denied this program due to financial reasons and I make my best attempts to advertise this.

The second major factor in keeping integrated programs sustainable is to ensure that they dig themselves into mainstream curriculum and enable educators to develop longer-term contacts with their students. Integrated programs, by their nature, make a statement that environmental and outdoor education is woven into every course. It is not separate from, or on the fringes. It is right in the core. In this way, students recognize it as a part of their education. I also believe that having compulsory credits has helped solidify the sustainability of our integrated programs. This is the reason we include the English credits, the Careers and Civics and the Environment and Resource Management courses. Students today are under tremendous pressure to graduate in four years and are not able to take a semester of full electives easily. To date, I have had students who have completed the

grade five EARTHKEEPER program, returned as grade 10 CELP students, and then returned two years later for Headwaters. They still graduate high school in four or four-and-a-half years. I have journeyed alongside many students during their high school tenure. Some, I have also coached on the school volleyball team. And because I live in the same city as I teach, I run into my students all the time. There is much research today discussing the benefits of long-term facilitation between teacher and students (Beames, 2006). As well, the concepts of place-based education and frilufsliv (Faarlund, 2002) have been gaining momentum. I believe integrated programs follow these above principles well.

### Final Thoughts

While integrated programs have been around in Ontario for many years, to date I have not come across any other two-stage high school program. I have offered a summary of Headwaters in the hopes of inspiring others to follow their own imaginations when it comes to educational possibilities. I have also offered some arguments for the place that integrated programs offer our education system when it comes to keeping the focus on outdoor and environmental issues. Finally, I sense a shift in the thinking of our human population when it comes to issues of environmental sustainability — a shift towards healing. In whatever shape or form it takes, I feel it is imperative that we educators do our part.

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### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> EARTHKEEPERS™ is a registered trademark and program of the Institute for Earth Education, Greenville, West Virginia, USA.
- <sup>2</sup> The name "Headwaters" is widely known in the outdoor field as the business name for Hugh Stewart's canoe manufacturing business in Quebec. The name Headwaters was first suggested by the CELP English teacher Janet Dalziel. Michael Elrick felt it was necessary to gain permission from Hugh Stewart to use this name, thus, a letter of permission was sent. Hugh Stewart responded that he has no legal authority over the use of the name, though he was grateful for being asked and sanctioned its use for our program.
- <sup>3</sup> According to the website [www.locavores.com](http://www.locavores.com), locavores' principles are as follows:
  - 1) If not locally produced, then organic.
  - 2) If not organic then family farm.
  - 3) If not family farm then local business.
  - 4) If not local business then Terroir (foods known from the region).
- <sup>4</sup> Homefield Organics is food delivery service that operates in the Guelph area. They have an online ordering system that lists whether a product is local and/or organic, and also where it comes from. For more information, visit [www.homefieldorganics.com](http://www.homefieldorganics.com).

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*Michael Elrick has been teaching integrated programs for 13 years. He presently teaches the grade 10 Community Environmental Leadership Program (CELP) and the grade 12 Headwaters program in Guelph, Ontario.*

## Exploring the Influence of the ROC Integrated High School Program

by Scott Caspell

I could see ignited in the eyes of my students the fire burning in me. I could see that the changing of hearts and minds had begun. . . . [Integrated] Programs . . . are vehicles to give kids back their own sense of power, their ability to connect, to feel compassion for others and the planet. They re-inspire kids to love learning, to think critically and to connect with the Earth that is their home — their home that is in dire need of their compassionate touch. (Hood, 2002, p. 34)

### Introduction

Stemming from my personal experience, numerous conversations with other educators, and information from relevant literature (Horwood, 2002), it is apparent that the majority of students in Ontario have limited access to outdoor, experiential learning through the formal education system. I believe that investigating the effects of existing outdoor, experiential programs can be instrumental in promoting more opportunities for holistic, outdoor, community-oriented learning. As such, my senior honour's work investigated the influence of the Roots of Courage, Roots of Change (ROC) Integrated Curriculum Program (ICP) on participants' lives. More specifically, I interviewed 13 students who participated in the ROC Program between 1994 and 1997 to help determine what influence, if any, their involvement in the program had on their lives. This research project contributes to the call for longitudinal research to support ICPs (Horwood, 2002; Russell & Burton, 2001). The research was qualitative in nature, consisting of semi-structured, non-formal phone interviews.

### Integrated Curriculum Programs

The ROC ICP was founded in 1994 at the Mayfield High School in the Town of Caledon, Ontario. In the ROC Program, students work towards a pre-established curriculum package during one high school semester. In the 1990s, the ROC students had the opportunity to earn credits in English (journalism), Environmental Science, Physical Education and Geography. The different subject areas were blended together throughout the day, thereby working to eliminate the fragmentation between the curriculum and students' learning that is often produced by discipline-specific courses.

Numerous ICPs incorporate experiential, project-oriented learning that involves the school's local ecological and social communities. This teaching approach serves to create "real life" experiences by integrating structured learning with the students' lives outside of school. Many people, myself included, learn best when the subject matter is relevant to their lives, as well as when the learning involves the whole person — mind, body and spirit, or the cognitive, affective and physical learning domains (Priest & Gass, 1997). In this way, ICPs — like a great deal of experiential education — provide students with the opportunity to more readily grasp concepts and skills being taught, which can lead to a sense of enjoyment and success throughout the learning process.

### Findings and Discussion

Interview respondents were randomly assigned a number of 1 through 13 to maintain their anonymity. In the interest of concealing the identity of the research participants, all respondents are referred to in the female

gender. Text appearing in italics preceded by a “Q” indicates the question that the respondent is answering.

### **An Overview of the Respondents’ Impressions of the ROC Program**

The following passages (from respondents number seven and three) are representative of a number of responses to the interview question, “What do you feel the overall influence of the ROC Program has been on your life?”

R7) “It was, to a very large degree, very close to a life-changing experience — partially due to the teachers, the classmates and the curriculum, but also due to the length [of the program]. . . . I feel I came out a different person . . . [and] a lot of it had to do with how I thought. I think differently [about] my impact on the world, and how I interact with people.”

R3) “I loved ROC! It changed my life. You know those . . . important turning points? ROC was one of those; I think all children and people should experience something like ROC. . . . ROC helped me become more engaged in my life, but also in the broader Earth community. I feel that because of ROC . . . I’ve been more adventurous [and] I’m not as afraid of making my own decisions. All because of these experiences that stemmed from ROC . . . I’m more willing to step outside my ‘comfort zone’.”

The last sentence from respondent number three is interesting in that she acknowledges that it was not only the experiences in the ROC Program that influenced her life, but also the “experiences that stemmed from” her time in the program.

While the above responses present positive feedback about the overall influence of the ROC Program, the following two responses offer interesting developmental perspectives:

R5) “[The ROC Program] occurred at a time of life when I was formulating my self-identity, and I definitely think this experience helped me find my sense of self, and it definitely gave me more confidence in lots of ways.”

R9) “[It’s] hard to say, since there have been other large influences since. It’s very difficult to figure out fully. [The ROC Program] has affected the way I think, and the way I spend my time and resources. In that way it was the tip of iceberg, whetting the appetite. And that goes a long way with people when they’re 15–18 years old.”

These two respondents indicate that they were in the ROC Program at a time in their lives when adolescents are “formulating their self-identity” and are highly impressionable. Another interesting point that the ninth respondent raises is that it is hard to discern the influence of the ROC Program in particular since there have been so many other significant experiences throughout her lifetime. This indicates, as was to be expected, that respondents’ perceived correlation between their time in the ROC Program and any outcome needs to be considered in relation to their other experiences.

When respondent number one was asked what she felt the overall influence of the ROC Program had been on her life, she gave the following response, which contrasts with the positive responses cited above:

R1) “Uh, I hadn’t really thought about it very much. The ROC Program provided a larger environmental awareness overall. . . . I’m not sure what else.”

For clarification, I interpreted respondent number one’s comment that “she hadn’t really thought very much” about her time in the program as an indication that the ROC Program had a small influence on her life; however, it may be that this respondent found it difficult to express her thoughts about the ROC Program in a verbal manner. As such,

this respondent may have been able to provide a more detailed response if she could have expressed herself in another communication medium, such as poetry or story.

### **Links to Post-secondary Environmental or Outdoor Programs**

Post-secondary program selection is one of the largest tangible influences that participants attributed to their time in the ROC Program. I cannot, of course, infer that the ROC Program was the only reason that these individuals took an environmental or outdoor-focused post secondary program, since some of the respondents entered the ROC Program with pre-existing outdoor experience and an interest in the environment. Yet, as the following responses indicate, a number of respondents correlate their experiences in the ROC Program with their post-secondary program selection.

R4) "I ended up taking Environmental Science at university, which I can directly relate to my time in the ROC Program."

R10) "[The ROC Program] definitely steered me more towards what I took in university. I wasn't too sure before [the program] what I was interested in. . . . I went and did a degree in Environmental Science . . . ."

R8) "I don't think I would have gone to university if I hadn't gone to the ROC Program. I was more interested in technical skills and probably would have gone into the trades . . . had it not been for the ROC Program."

R5) "I went to . . . university for outdoor recreation . . . ."

(Q) *Do you relate going to that program to your time in the ROC program?*

(A) "One hundred percent."

While influencing students in their selection of a post-secondary degree is not necessarily the goal of the ROC Program, these cases demonstrate that the program did just that.

### **Links to Current Professions**

Respondents number 12 and 2 indicated a direct correlation between their time in the ROC Program and their current profession in the environmental field. Respondent number four indicated that she works for an environmentally focused non-governmental organization, yet she did not correlate this with her time in the ROC Program. Respondent number six indicated that, although she had already selected her post-secondary academic path before entering the ROC Program, the interpersonal skills and technical outdoor competencies developed in the program are quite useful in her current career. In another case, when asked if she was able to identify any life decisions that she now relates to her time in the ROC Program, the 11th respondent stated: "Well, the irony is that I am now in a job in the environmental field that actually builds on everything we learned in ROC, although there was not a conscious decision to do so."

Worth mentioning is the fact that the interviews did not specifically inquire about the respondents' career choices. Consequently, it is unclear what several of the respondents do for a living. Therefore, out of 13 interviews, four people indicated that they are working in the environmental field, although only two directly related their career choice to their time in the ROC Program. Another respondent (R13) replied that she was now teaching at the elementary level and that the ROC Program cultivated or strengthened her interest in teaching.

While these respondents are not necessarily an accurate representation of the entire ROC alumni, I believe that their responses can be interpreted as a strong indication of the influential nature of the ROC Program. Not only do these individuals working in the environmental sector indicate the influence of the ROC Program on their lives, but I would suggest that their work also has beneficial ecological and social implications as well.



### **Environmental Influences of the ROC Program**

Wiersma (1997) asserts that “most practitioners within the current educational system have created boundaries between school communities and ecological communities” (p. 11). The interview responses suggest that the ROC Program offered a unique educational approach that blurred the boundaries between ecological and human communities. As a result, the ROC Program not only integrated the subject areas, but also the more-than-human world into the program’s assignments and teaching strategies (Wiersma 1997). Nine respondents indicated that the ROC Program cultivated in them a stronger environmental awareness. The following passage from the third respondent is representative of many of the responses about environmental awareness.

R3) (Q) *What was the overall influence of the ROC Program on your life?*

(A) Awareness. And it helped me become more interested in learning, being engaged in my life, and the interconnection of everything.

Many of the responses do not, however, indicate whether the individuals have adapted their lives and behaviours to live in accordance with such an environmental awareness.

The interviews were also structured to inquire about specific skills, interests or life decisions that the respondents relate to their time in the ROC Program. Still, only a few respondents correlated their experience in the ROC Program with tangible examples of what could be deemed environmentally responsible behaviours. Respondents R9, R2 and R3 indicated that they had altered their consumption habits and a number of other daily habits to be more environmentally friendly, either completely or partially due to their experiences in the ROC Program. I now believe that I should have structured the interview questions to include questions that

more specifically inquired about environmental action and environmentally responsible behaviours.

A number of respondents commented that the program helped them develop a stronger connection with the natural world. Orr (1992) notes that firsthand experiences in the outdoors are influential in fostering connections with the Earth, which he further relates to environmentally responsible behaviour.

### **Other Life Decisions Influenced by the ROC Program**

When asked if they could identify any skills or interests that the ROC Program cultivated or strengthened in their lives, R8 and R12 responded with the promotion of healthy, active, outdoor lifestyles. R10 noted that the ROC Program inspired her to travel more, which she reported she has done since her time in the program.

### **Personal Growth: Intra/Interpersonal Development**

#### *Intrapersonal growth*

Priest and Gass (1997) propose that intrapersonal skill development includes the following components: “new confidence in oneself, increased willingness to take risks, improved self-concept, enhanced leadership skills, increased logical reasoning skills, and greater reflective thinking skills” (p. 20). Similar to the ICP that Russell and Burton (2001) investigated, I found that respondents consistently indicated that there was a significant opportunity for personal growth in the ROC Program. The following excerpts detail what respondents had to say when they were asked if they felt there was an opportunity for personal growth within the ROC Program.

R11) “Oh yeah, totally! It was different for everyone. The atmosphere was conducive towards helping you get to know and understand yourself better. . . . I learned

basically who I was, what is important to me, how I want to treat and respect other people.”

- R9) “I do — quite a bit of opportunity; personal journaling . . . was very conducive to personal growth.”
- R6) “Definitely. I think that’s one of the big things that I did in the program. I was not a social person; it was difficult for me to interact in a group setting. It was a good experience for me; it helped me grow as an individual. I learned about handling myself in a group.... I learned a lot about myself....”

Even the individual who offered the least amount of support for the program still had the following to say when asked if she felt there was an opportunity for personal growth in the ROC Program: “Yup, definitely in terms of the team building stuff I was mentioning; not only with that but with the journals and other assignments made us step outside of your usual shell and try new things.”

Four respondents (R11, R2, R9 and R1) indicated that their personal journaling through the ROC Program fostered personal growth. Journaling was likely important to this many respondents because the act of reflecting on their experiences and recording their thoughts helped them internalize and learn from their experiences.

I believe that the elements of intrapersonal growth, noted above, are beneficial and desirable for all people to develop and strengthen. In this research, increased self-confidence, an increased willingness to take risks, and enhanced leadership skills were cited by respondents as benefits of their time in the ROC Program. I will venture to suggest that well-developed intrapersonal abilities can significantly contribute to an individual’s sense of contentment with their situation in life (i.e., feeling of success or happiness) as well as their emotional, physical and mental well-being.

### *Interpersonal skill development*

One of the main influences that respondents attributed to the ROC Program involved interpersonal skill development. Priest and Gass (1997) note that interpersonal abilities involve the following areas of skill development: “Enhanced cooperation, more effective communication skills, greater trust in others, increased sharing of decision making, new ways to resolve conflicts, improved problem-solving skills, and enhanced leadership skills” (p. 20). This section will draw from respondents’ comments that fit into these skill sets.

- R6) “So the thing I’ve used most [from the program] is learning about myself, how I function in a group, and how to deal with others in a group — to realize peoples’ strengths and weaknesses, and how to use different leadership skills to bring out the best in people.”

The following respondent articulates a number of interpersonal characteristics that were part of her experience in the ROC Program.

- R11) “The thing about the ROC Program is . . . [you are] with a community of people that you may or may not like, and you need to maintain a personal level of functioning; yet you also need to interact and be part of a larger community, more like the real world. In programs like ROC, students need to live cooperatively with people through conflict and celebration.”

In his book *Ecological Identity: Becoming a Reflective Environmentalist*, Mitchell Thomashow (2001) refers to interpersonal skills as “process knowledge,” which he asserts can help people effectively share information, solve problems and help resolve conflicts. Thomashow (2001) postulates that the skills associated with process knowledge are necessary for people of all career paths, including those working in the environmental field and what he refers to as “ecologically

responsible citizens” (p. 173). Following Thomashow’s line of thought, if an individual’s interpersonal skills are underdeveloped, that person will be unable to effectively relate with her family, peers and colleagues; thus she will unlikely be successful and content in her personal and professional relationships. In this sense, well-developed interpersonal and intrapersonal skills can be thought of as the foundation that can then support healthy and respectful relationships as well as, potentially, meaningful and socially and environmentally conscious life work.

### ***Specialties of the ROC Program?***

One of the objectives of this research was to gain an understanding of those aspects of the program that helped create the opportunity for meaningful experiences or personal growth. The respondents listed a number of elements that contributed to their enhanced learning and enjoyment of the program: (1) authentic, “real world” learning; (2) the experiential teaching approach; (3) and, the role of the teacher.

### ***Authentic learning***

A number of respondents talked about how the learning in the program was much more relevant to their daily lives than normal classroom learning. In many instances, this was a result of the activities, assignments or field trips involving their local community. The following excerpt highlights the importance that a number of respondents attributed to authentic learning experiences.

R3) “The learning was relevant. When we visited the water treatment plant we learned this is how our water is cleaned . . . or these are relevant things happening in our community, or . . . [this is] how our life impacts these things. This type of learning made it really tangible — not in a text book or in far away places. . . . It was a powerful experience!”

The previous respondent’s reply supports Sobel’s (2004) assertion that locally focused, experiential learning contributes to the participants’ perception of its authenticity. The following statement by Sterling (2001) also relates to a number of participant responses: “If we want people to have the capacity and will to contribute to civil society, then they have to feel ownership of their learning — it has to be meaningful, engaging and participative, rather than functional, passive and prescriptive” (p. 26–27).

Sterling’s thought implies that once individuals are engaged in their learning and their local community, then they can begin to think of themselves as part of something larger than themselves, including the social and ecological aspects of the Earth community. Judging from the comments of the last several reported interview respondents, it appears that the ROC Program was fairly effective at engaging students and making the learning process more meaningful.

### ***The experiential teaching approach***

Although there were no questions in the interviews that specifically addressed experiential learning, there were a number of responses in this area to warrant its own section in the analysis. In addition to personal growth and interpersonal skill development, experiential learning was the third theme that Russell and Burton (2001) interpreted as being important to the students in their study. The poignant response from the ninth respondent indicates why she felt the ROC Program offered beneficial learning opportunities.

R9) “The whole approach to learning and testing [in the ROC Program] seems to me to be much more beneficial [than in regular courses]. We all learn in multifaceted ways, and it’s arrogant of the education system to utilize one way of learning and assume that all students can learn that way. . . . [The ROC Program] sets students up to win once they leave

program, setting them up for a new approach in the typical classroom learning.”

The ninth respondent speaks to several important facets of a holistic, experiential education program, including how the teaching approach was more conducive to reaching people with different learning styles. A number of respondents indicated that learning in an experiential manner was one of the most meaningful elements of the program. Many respondents mentioned that the experiential approach to learning was enjoyable, and a much easier way to learn; however, respondents were often unable to articulate why this was the case. Ellsworth (2005) shares her thoughts on experiential learning, and why we may find it so difficult to think about it intellectually:

No one, no “I,” can access this place of [learning] because what we experience as “I” emerges from it. This is why we cannot explain “how” we have come to knowing. This is why pedagogy teaches but does not know how it teaches. We come to a knowing only as we emerge from a realm of sensation/movement that is ontologically prior to cognition. (p. 167)

Ellsworth’s passage expresses the importance of teaching strategies and pedagogy. This research supports Ellsworth’s assertion that it is not only the knowledge being taught, but also the learning experience — including the learning environment and involvement with co-learners — that has influenced these respondents’ personal growth and development.

### *The educator*

A third factor that influenced the learning and personal growth of the respondents was their teacher. The following highlights what one respondent thought of her teacher’s style and philosophy:

R9) I really liked [our teacher’s] style and approach, and this program in general. It honed the skills that people have and encouraged them to further develop these skills. This kind of program enabled truer testing and learning that encourages growth.

I interpret this response to suggest that the philosophy and abilities of the educator also play a major role in the influence of ICPs. The experiences of the ROC Program were apparently rooted in an “eco-centric” approach that encouraged students to examine their personal beliefs, their relationship with other humans, and their influence on the world around them.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The findings of this research indicate that the ROC Program had a varied yet relatively influential effect on the participants’ lives. It is not surprising that this research supports the findings presented in Russell and Burton’s (2001) study: that experiential learning as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal skill development were consistently cited by participants to be a major influence in their perceived success and enjoyment of the program. This research indicates that the ROC Program facilitated meaningful — and in some cases measurable — benefits and influences, as described by its participants 9–12 years after their experience in the program.

While the excerpts from the interviews are a strong indication of some of the tangible (e.g., university selection) and intangible (e.g., interpersonal skill development) ways this program influenced students, the fact remains that ICPs compose only a small proportion of students’ lives. Although in ICPs the quality, rather than the amount, of time spent is of primary importance, increasing the duration that students spend in such programs appears necessary. Even though there is a growing body of literature citing evidence as to why students should have the option to learn in an integrated, experiential manner (Horwood, 2002; Russell & Burton, 2001), there is no

indication that a movement in this direction is occurring. As Horwood (2002) notes, integrated, holistic, environmentally focused learning is simply not currently an option for most students in the Ontario public school system.

Academics and practitioners need to support the continued evaluation and adaptation of our research methods, as well as our educational theories and practices, in order to reflect research findings and the dynamic nature of the learning environment and our students' needs. For those who support the learning outcomes attainable through ICPs, we need to continue to promote, fund and otherwise ensure that similar learning opportunities are available to as many people as possible.

What is needed is a desire from educators to provide such learning experiences, to find the necessary resources to do so, and to work through the details and challenges of operating such programs. As Kittle and Sharpe's (2005) case study of three ICPs that have been running for 10 or more years indicates, there is hope that ICPs can "overcome, and navigate through this changing educational climate" (p. 12). The findings of this research support previous efforts that demonstrate the benefits of ICPs with the hope that, as Horwood (2002) articulates, "Whatever the future for holistic education . . . I have confidence that we are among the guardians of a good idea that, even if it fades for a while, will resurface and persist, like a fertile seed" (p. 4).

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## Response to *Exploring the Influence of the ROC Integrated High School Program*

by Michael Elrick

Scott Caspell has initiated a long overdue piece of research regarding integrated programs with environmental themes (see page 20 of this issue). He asked questions all integrated teachers should: What are the long-term educational impacts that integrated programs provide? Did we make a difference in the lives of young people? Did we inspire them to further engage in environmental issues and become more aware of the consequences of their lifestyles? The juicy questions, so to speak.

Scott picked an excellent time frame to interview former students as they had participated in the integrated program between 10 and 13 years ago. Ideally, then, participants would have completed some form of post-secondary education and now be in the work force. Some participants may be married, may have children, and certainly have had significant life experience. With their involvement in the study the participants were able to reflect back and ask: "Did the ROC program influence me in any way?" And, with some clarity, the respondents seem to confirm that, yes, it did.

One theme I noticed running through many student responses was that the integrated program acted as a "wake up call" to community and environmental issues for them. Visually I imagine students generally traveling through our educational system without many wake up calls to our ecological impacts. One student captured this when she stated, "ROC affected the way I think, and the way I spend my time and my resources."

Scott clearly captures another important concept: Integrated programs occur at a critical time in young peoples' lives and the opportunity to help "formulate self-identity" is present. One student also noted that a significant positive factor is the length of time of integrated programs. With these two ideas, I can not help but make an analogy of integrated programs acting as rites of passage. These programs occur at a time when students are transitioning from childhood to adulthood; they challenge students, mentally and physically, in a unique educational setting; and in such programs students are guided by adult figures other than their parents.

My final comment has to do with a phrase that Scott used and also quoted from Wiersma (1997). He concluded from the interviews that the ROC program "blurred the boundaries between ecological and human communities." I simply love that image of blurring and agree wholeheartedly that this is a direction environmental education must go for gaining ideas of sustainability. When the lines between the human and non-human world are fuzzy, the right decisions become clear.

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*Michael Elrick has been teaching integrated programs for 13 years. He presently teaches the grade 10 Community Environmental Leadership Program (CELP) and the grade 12 Headwaters program in Guelph, Ontario.*



## Free Life: A Report from the “Outdoor Life for Women” Program in Sweden

by Kerstin Stenberg

The Swedish national curriculum, in its aims for sport and health, places specific emphasis on outdoor life both for recreation and as the basis of good health. Since it is often women that work in preschool, infant and junior schools, I felt it important that these teachers be given the opportunity to develop their skills, competence and personal insight in order to be more willing and capable of leading outdoor life activities. On this basis, in 2000 I started “Outdoor Life for Women” — a free-standing course to be given by the Department of Educational Sciences at Luleå University of Technology. The course offers female teaching professionals the opportunity to increase their personal competence in the skills required to develop and lead outdoor life pursuits in their places of work and to see such activities as natural pedagogic tools to help individuals develop, irrespective of age or physical capability. The course also aims to give insight into how outdoor life can, throughout the year, be used to foster cooperation, trust and enjoyment. Finally, the course aims to increase the delegates’ self-confidence and self-awareness and to give them insight into their own personal leadership style.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the nature of the Outdoor Life for Women program, including empirical research that analyses the participants’ experiences and outcomes of the course. The paper begins with details pertaining to the structure and aims of the Outdoor Life for Women course. Participant experiences and outcomes are described next, and outcomes for participants such as increased self-awareness, self-confidence, and insight into personal leadership style are highlighted. From there, I describe the Continuation Course that was designed to build on the outcomes of the

initial foundational course and offer some early participant reflections on these experiences. The reader will note throughout this paper that comments and reflections given by the participants of Outdoor Life for Women indicate that the course has contributed to a more active life and a continued interest in outdoor life in both their professional and private lives.

### Course Structure and Aims

The course Outdoor Life for Women has been offered by the Department of Educational Sciences at Luleå University of Technology since the autumn of 2000. Students taking the course study over a full academic year on a part-time basis in the form of nine weekend meetings, complemented by self-study. Upon successful completion of the course, 10 academic points (equivalent to 25% of an academic year) are awarded. Although the course is aimed specifically at female educational professionals who work with young children, individuals with other backgrounds and interests can also take the course if there are openings.

The nine weekend sessions are spread over a full year allowing the course to have a seasonal flavour. The course covers theory, methodology, and technique and safety aspects of outdoor life. The course has a strong practical basis with activities taking place in locations around Luleå and also in more mountainous terrain. These activities include summer and winter hill walking, rock climbing, swimming, skiing, ice skating, canoeing and first aid including Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR). As well, overnight stops in tents and mountain shelters are complemented by sessions concerning the history of outdoor life, education practices in

Sweden, and gender-related considerations. While the course aims to provide broad-based skills and knowledge, there is ample opportunity for individuals to further develop their personal skills.

Students taking the course must be motivated in order to get the most from the opportunities it presents. The course uses problem-based learning (PBL) with ongoing group discussions, reflection and individual presentations. Written reports are also required following the autumn meeting in Abisko, the winter ski weekend in Luleå, and the winter mountain course in Björkliden. These written reports are of a reflective nature and are structured by the students so that they cover students' own personal learning and development. This style of formal reporting is used because it lends to greater challenges for the students, all of whom live in close proximity to one another.

In addition to the outdoor activities and oral and written reporting, two other assignments are used to assess students' performance. First, by incorporating the course literature, students are required to choose a particular area to study in more depth. This work requires that they find and use additional reference material; it also requires the inclusion of personal observations and reflections. The second assignment asks the students to describe how they would approach introducing or developing outdoor life in an existing or proposed group from the point of view of methodology, pedagogy and didacticism. These formal assignments are presented during the final student sessions so that the rest of the group can gain additional knowledge through the presentations and discussions. As is typical in university settings, formal and informal evaluation of the course by the students takes place at the end of the course.

### **Formal Analysis of Participants' Experiences and Outcomes of the Course**

The course Outdoor Life for Women has, at the time of writing, operated five times. The participants' written reflections from the academic year 2002/2003 form the empirical basis of my degree thesis, *A Free Life! — An Analysis of Women's Reflections from the Course Outdoor Life for Women*. This particular group was chosen because they were the first that submitted personal reflections in a written form.

The aim of my thesis was to investigate and interpret the thoughts and reflections of a group of female teachers regarding their own self-confidence, self-image and leadership style in the context of the outdoor life course. The research further investigated how well these thoughts reflected the aims formally described in national curricula and, more specifically, for sport and health teaching in preschool, junior and secondary schools. The research participants consisted of 14 individuals ranging in age from 22 to 45 years. The group predominantly comprised teaching professionals but also included physiotherapists, ergonomists and engineers; most participants were from the north of Sweden, with only one delegate from the south.

Recurring themes in the writings of all the delegates included self-confidence, lack of confidence expressed as fear or worry, awareness of the body, and insight into personal leadership styles and taking responsibility for others.

The majority of the delegates' reflections indicated some level of fear or worry; frequently the fear was expressed by an individual that she might not be capable of completing a given (physical) exercise. These feelings of concern were related to doing something new or unfamiliar and arose when the outcomes were uncertain. Most delegates initially saw the exercises as something that should be done as well as possible, and that a



certain level of performance was expected, rather than as opportunities to learn and improve within the time that was available and where it was quite acceptable to fail. To some extent this reflected their lack of self-confidence and lack of knowledge of their own abilities and potential, and resulted in a lot of unnecessary “negative energy.” Common to all the reflections was the fact that, when the women had completed the exercises, they had done extremely well and had often exceeded their own expectations.

As far as the awareness of their own bodies is concerned, my research highlighted many common themes. Many of the women delegates had not fully understood or appreciated the link between their bodies and their will power, thinking instead that their bodies and physical performance should be the same irrespective of the situation. By putting themselves through new physical challenges in the outdoors most developed a new understanding and appreciation of their bodies. A common reflection was of high expectations at the start of the course and the concern that their bodies were not up to the challenge. I noticed in many of the writings produced towards the end of the course that there was an increasing acceptance of their bodies and of themselves for what they are. Reading between the lines I see this as a sign that, over the duration of the course, the women gained an understanding and confidence in their fellow group members and a better insight into outdoor life and what can be gained from these experiences.

Many of the women’s comments also describe the expectations placed on women generally by society. In addition, their reflections indicate that many of the women now appreciate the challenges involved in leading a group. Rather than being concerned only about themselves, a few of the women described how they started to observe the group, becoming aware of what was happening in the group and of how the group was feeling and behaving. Another common development

that I observed was that the course delegates became more and more aware that they were there to learn. This may in part have been a reflection of the fact that it takes time to find one’s role in a group, or style as a leader, and that it also takes time and experience to be able to see the positive in situations that, at first, may appear replete with failure. All the delegates saw that their experiences from the course increased their knowledge about themselves and of outdoor life in general. Many commented positively that they intended to continue or further develop an active interest in the kind of outdoor activities experienced during the course.

The greatest differences in the women’s comments concerned their views of their own role as a leader in the context of outdoor life. This is not surprising given the wide range of backgrounds represented in the group and their experiences of outdoor life and leadership.

The comments made during oral discussions during this and other courses indicate that many women would not have been as keen to try all the activities, nor willing to push themselves as they did, if the course had had delegates of both genders. For many women, it was liberating to have a single-sex course, thereby eliminating the (potential) focus on competition and performance. Based on their own experiences of outdoor life, many women commented that in mixed groups it is all too common, and all too easy, for the men to take responsibility for those activities that culture and tradition see as gender specific. Outdoor Life for Women forced the delegates to do everything, irrespective of what accepted norms dictate, leading to new personal insights.

In the final discussion in my thesis I suggested that this course and outdoor life in general are excellent tools that help women improve their self-image. Having read all of the delegate’s reflections, which focus on increased self-insight, knowledge of their own body, and insight into leadership, I gained the clear

impression that the activities themselves took a lesser, but none the less important, role.

### Outdoor Life for Women: Continuation Course

During the 2002/2003 course a desire grew amongst the delegates for a follow-up course. This was started the following year and was of similar duration. The aim of this continuation course was to give the delegates an opportunity to gain greater knowledge and experience of some of the activities from the foundation course. The course also had a slightly different structure, with fewer but longer outdoor sessions where greater physical demands were placed on the delegates in order to see how this affected their capacity to lead and what insight this would give them. Eight students from the foundation course expressed an interest when offered a place and seven completed the course.

The continuation course included hill walking in the autumn, long-distance ice skating, a ski tour of the northern Swedish mountains and a sea kayak tour around the archipelago near Luleå. All these activities involved carrying equipment and food, often for several days, in both winter and summer conditions. A total of seven sessions were arranged, ranging from four to seven days. The main focus of the course was leadership in outdoor life and the course used PBL as the main form of teaching with written reports required after each session. Reflective discussions were a natural part of all the outdoor sessions. Compared to the main program, the instructional content of this course was less, with a literature-based seminar, presentations of student reports, and a written assignment being the main non-practical evaluation components. The written assignment was an essay concerning the use of outdoor life to achieve

specific aims and was based on the course delegates' own working environment.

### Participants' Reflections Concerning the Continuation Course

The continuation course has been offered only once. The empirical material, both written and oral, collected during the course delivery will be used as the basis of my master's thesis with the aims expressed for the course serving as its main themes. My thesis will again be based on the course delegates' comments and how well these reflect the course aims.

The aims of the continuation course are for the students

- to have gained greater understanding of the role and importance of the leader in developing quality outdoor experiences and education
- to be able to see the potential and limitations of outdoor life from a



- geographic and cultural perspective
- to appreciate the importance of self-reflection in personal development
- to understand the role that outdoor life can play when creating learning environments that encourage each individual to develop based on their own situation and potential
- to be aware of the role of outdoor activities in developing trust and cooperation.

The written reflections submitted by the delegates during the course were complemented by further written reflections obtained approximately eight months after the completion of the course. In these final reflections, I asked the delegates to describe the benefits that they felt they had gained from the course and to indicate how they had used the specific skills and knowledge gained in their everyday work.

The purpose of my master's thesis is to develop knowledge about the didactic nature of outdoor life and the role of the continuation course (the source of the empirical data for my research) in developing self-reflection.

Before the start of the course I informed the delegates that it would be a tough challenge and that they should be prepared both mentally and physically. It is interesting to note from their reflections, and also from my own observations, that those that were better prepared also made better decisions during the activities. Those that were better able to cope with the challenges presented were generally more focused and maintained a self-critical view in their reflections. As in the foundation course, I tried to limit my influence on the delegates by giving them considerable freedom as to how they structured and presented their written personal reflections after each outdoor session. It was only in the final submission, some eight months after the end of the course, that I asked a specific question (i.e., to describe what the course had meant to them and how they could use this knowledge at their places of work).

I would like to finish by presenting some of the comments from this last reflection. All the delegates commented on the personal insight that the course had given them. Most commented that, in one way or another, the course had led to a change in attitude as far as trying new things, in both work situations and privately. This change in attitude was not limited to physical outdoor activities. The delegates' earlier reflections were often characterised by feelings of joy, disappointment, anger, hope and frustration when they tried new things and did not always succeed. These feelings were replaced by a more reasoned calm in their final reflections, as if the delegates had found their place in the group and course and were happy with the experiences, knowledge and insight that the course provided. Several of the delegates commented that, following the completion of the course, they had continued to meet regularly and that outdoor life activities was the thing that they have in common and do together. Many delegates commented on how satisfying it was to be able to cope with being in the mountains or out on the sea using the skills and knowledge that the course offered, and how the course helped them develop a better understanding of their own abilities. As a result of the course, one delegate commented that she had begun trying other new activities and revisiting activities that she had not done for many years. This woman felt that her life had improved. Another woman commented that she was able to forget those things that were difficult during the course and, more importantly, that she felt that she was taken seriously when leading activities. All the comments and reflections given by the delegates indicate that the course had contributed to a more active life and a continued interest in outdoor life both professionally and privately.

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## The Trip of a Lifetime

by Melanie Argiros

Portaging a canoe on a long beaten path, bugs flying all around, sweat dripping down your face, your back aching like never before. These struggles encourage you to question why you voluntarily put yourself into this position and experience these hardships. The answer is because, deep down inside, you absolutely love it! In July 2006, I participated in a 25-day canoe trip on the Moisie River with Camp Kandalore and it was by far the most amazing experience of my life. From the first to the twenty-fifth, each day was completely different and filled with new experiences that seemed to get better by the minute.

My Explorer trip group was composed of five girls, four boys and three trip leaders, most of whom were strangers to me on the first day. By the end of the trip, my travel mates had become my family, the river was our home, and my worst fear was leaving the trip. On our trip, we had a two-day drive to our put-in spot in Labrador City. Sitting squished in a van next to a boy I had just met was definitely not the most comfortable feeling on the first day, but 48 hours, eight stops, and six meals later, we had become friends. Our group was already bonding and I knew that close friendships would develop over the course of the trip. Not only were we living with the same people for 25 days, but we did not see another person

outside our group until day 17! Similar to most co-ed groups of teenagers, the girls first became friends with other girls, while the boys became friends with other boys. But after a couple of days the whole group had become very close. Whether it was sharing a meal, paddling together or completing a portage, strong friendships were developing. Through our friendships, we developed a strong sense of trust, which was especially

important when paddling rapids.

The Moisie River has fast-moving white water with class I-III rapids. Before paddling down these rapids, we had to understand how to "read" the set of rapids and use the proper techniques for paddling white water. Trust was very important as the bow and stern paddlers had to work together in order to successfully complete each set of rapids. In our case, all of the rapids were completed very well and all participants had a safe and rewarding experience.

Teamwork was one of the most essential components of our trip. Our group fit together like the pieces of a puzzle, and everyone was very positive and worked well together. Starting first thing in the morning, two people prepared breakfast while others packed up the tents and most of the packs. Portages



were part of the trip that always required strength, determination and teamwork. On the Moisie, we had many portages and, to effectively complete the portages, we all had to work together. We carried canoes first, then the packs, followed by the paddles, water jugs, and helmets. On this trip I learned to solo portage a canoe, and there was no better feeling for me than hearing the words “you’re doing amazing, you’re so strong!” and finally putting down the canoe after soloing it up the steepest hill I had ever seen. Teamwork also included helping out our trip mates even when they did not ask us to. Someone offering to go fill up the water jug with you late at night or someone who’s not on dinner duty offering to help you make the meal are a couple of examples. It was doing small genuine things like these that counted most.

One of the other skills that I developed over the course of the trip was my personal leadership skills. I learned that taking the initiative to do daily chores without the trip leaders asking you to can be a sign of true leadership. At the beginning of the trip, the leaders would wake us up in the morning, encourage us to gather firewood, and show us how to pack the packs. But, by the middle of the trip, we were waking up, collecting firewood, and packing packs on our own. The dynamics of the trip changed; the campers shared leadership duties and lead the trip, while the trip leaders were there to watch us and to make sure we were doing things safely and properly. One day, I had the role of being in charge of the maps and acting as leader of the day. In many ways, this canoe trip gave me a chance to find my true self and my true potential. Without common distractions such as the computer or television, the canoe trip was just about us, our group, and nature . . . and that’s all that mattered.

In addition to learning many personal skills on the canoe trip, I also had a chance to develop and practice many skills related to

surviving and living in the wilderness. One of the new skills I developed that I am most proud of is cooking. I never realized all the different types of food you could make on trip and how delicious they could be. From cheesecake to spicy curry, I had some of the most amazing food on trip and the best thing about it is that I learned how to make all of it (I did, however, come to the conclusion that the food you make on trip never tastes the same when you try to make it at home!). Other memorable skills that I learned while on trip included how to collect a good pile of firewood and how to start a fire. I learned what type of wood is best for burning and how important fire starting skills are to being comfortable in the wilderness — especially in the mornings to make a warm breakfast. There were so many important and helpful skills developed on trip that added to the success of my journey.

Besides learning new skills on trip, unforgettable moments consisted of laughter and excitement. For me, it felt like a month-long sleepover with my closest friends. I laughed so much I cried, and all that mattered was the group and the river. Incredible experiences that we had on trip, such as having porcupines eat away at the duct tape on our water jugs or lying outside at night looking up at the beautiful nighttime sky, inspired memories that will last forever. After 425 kilometres, 75 meals, 25 days, 12 portages and 11 friendships, my canoe trip was over, but the memories and friendships made will last forever.

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*Melanie Argiros is a grade 11 student at Branksome Hall in Toronto and has been attending Camp Kandalore for the past four summers. She has canoed the Moisie, Missinaibi, and Magnetewan rivers and will be returning to Kandalore for the two-month Leader in Training Program.*

## Participatory Learning Approaches

by Ilan Alleson and Rachel Birenbaum

Anyone who has had the privilege (and challenge) of coordinating overseas service-learning programs for youth knows that such work entails intensive multitasking. As group leaders in such a summer program in Central America, we were constantly juggling our participants' physical and emotional needs, assessing the safety of the work environment, gauging the group dynamics and trying to foster a safe learning environment. One approach that greatly engaged many of the participants stemmed from incorporating participatory learning processes into the program.

In participatory learning processes, critical analytical skills can be fostered and learning processes must be co-directed (Friere, 1974). Everyone becomes a participant and is allowed to take an active role in establishing and directing the learning agenda. A group leader becomes both a facilitator and a participant in fostering the group's learning. While a group facilitator can utilize many strategies to foster a participatory learning environment, we used one central (and simple) tool: a collective learning list. Questions were posed to the group from the start of the program, such as, What do we need to know about this situation? What are our learning objectives? What are our guiding questions? How can we begin to address these questions and objectives? We emphasized that the overarching goal was *not* to answer all the questions; rather, the objective was to identify and articulate questions, seek the appropriate channels to answer them, and then generate new questions. In other words, we attempted to foster an emergent learning process.

Responses to these questions were documented on the group list. We collectively reviewed the points raised in previous discussions, eliminated fulfilled objectives, and listed new ones. The learning agenda was thus largely established by the participants and directed by the most pertinent questions raised. A central indicator that demonstrated the efficacy of this process occurred when the participants would refer to the list outside of

our set meetings. To us, such instances indicated that self-directed participatory learning was occurring. Furthermore, in the concluding anonymous program evaluations, participants indicated a partiality to this type of learning. Additionally, utilizing this approach contributed to participant safety. By enabling the group to direct their learning process, we (the group leaders) had more time to focus on the group's overall health and safety.

This learning process, however, posed a unique challenge: the boundary between group leader and participant regarding disciplinary issues became blurred. As the group consisted of teens, they were expected to adhere to rules prohibiting alcohol consumption, unsupervised swimming and so forth. In order to enhance the safety of the program, these rules were established in a top-down manner. When these rules were tested and reinforced through the removal of a participant from the program, the group confronted us with anger at not having been part of the decision-making process. As such, when integrating participatory approaches, group leaders would be wise to openly note those points where decision making will be conducted in a non-participatory manner, such as participant safety.

Overall, blurring the line between educator and participant challenged each one of us to take ownership of our learning, and fostered a dynamic learning environment.

### Reference

Friere, P. (1974). *Education for critical consciousness*. New York, NY: Seabury Press.

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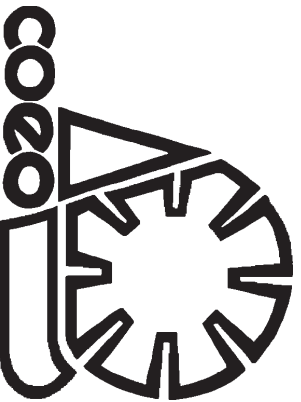
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