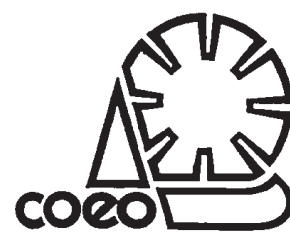


Pathways

THE ONTARIO JOURNAL OF
Spring 2009, 21(3)

OUTDOOR EDUCATION



Pathways

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. We achieve this by publishing the *Pathways* journal, running an annual conference and regional workshops, maintaining a website, and working with kindred organizations as well as government agencies. Members of COEO receive a subscription to *Pathways*, as well as admittance to workshops, courses and conferences. A membership application form is included on the inside back cover of this issue of *Pathways*.

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Pathways

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Pathways is always looking for contributions. Please refer to page 36 for submission guidelines.

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Information for Authors and Artists

Spring is full of surprises — sometimes we get a heat wave in March that allows us to wear shorts, sometimes it snows in May, and sometimes wild flowers come up in areas where they haven't been seen in years. So it seems fitting that this spring issue is a bit of a surprise too.

At first glance, it may seem that nothing is out of the ordinary. Inside, you will find much of what you've come to expect: Scott Caspell describes a schoolyard outdoor education initiative that weaves into multiple curriculum areas; Amanda Grassick reviews *Organic Play*; faculty at Brock University share their ideas about the meaning of place-based education; and Jeff Jackson focuses on the ins and outs of risk management for water-based activities. There is information not only about the COEO conference being held at the end of September but also about the International Association for Experiential Education (AEE) conference being held in Montreal at the end of October. The artwork should also seem familiar as it comes courtesy of Josh Gordon who was responsible for last year's conference graphic and any number of drawings in previous issues of *Pathways*.

The surprise comes in on the rest of the pages. Through no particular advance planning, the majority of this issue addresses journaling or reflection. As a result, the format of regular columns you are used to seeing has, just for now, taken a break (a spring break, if you will). Here instead, Bob Henderson, Deb Schrader and Erica Roebbelen share what they have learned from reading (and writing) trip journals. Journal entries from three students complement this feature article. Rounding out the focus on journaling, Brianna Sharpe has provided several ideas to encourage and nurture written reflection.

If you thought that outdoor education was just for students, then you must read Linda Leckie's piece about a novel approach to professional development for outdoor educators that she personally experienced. Linda was eager to share her thoughts immediately after this experience but summer holidays, teaching, report cards, power outages, and life in general kept interfering. Linda will no doubt be thrilled that I will now stop hounding her for her submission, and you will be equally thrilled to find that the Ontario College of Teachers now funds professional development experiences like the one she had. Ever the consummate trail guide, Linda has shared all the relevant and most up-to-date details. Thank you.

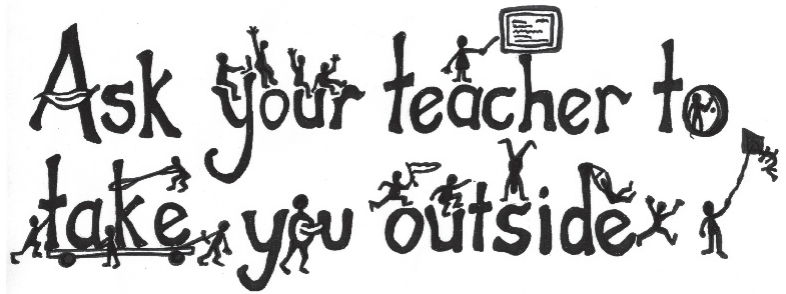
Finally, included in this issue is a volunteer job posting. COEO is looking for a special someone or team of individuals to chair the *Pathways* editorial board. The ideal candidate should have a deep understanding of the field of outdoor education, a broad range of professional contacts and colleagues, and a passion for writing as evidenced by the ability to reference according to APA style (5th edition) and ownership of a well-thumbed copy of Lynn Truss's *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*. In return, the selected individual will work with wonderful contributors, supportive board members and a diligent editing and layout team. The chair will also inherit a nearly complete collection of *Pathways* issues that extends back to the 1977 newsletters that pre-date the current journal format of the publication. Mentoring is available through next winter. Please contact me by e-mail (kathy@adventureworks.org) if you are interested in this rewarding position or have questions.

Kathy Haras

Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow is the name of the Ministry of Education's Policy Framework for Environmental Education in Ontario Schools. I, along with a handful of other COEO members and school board teams from across the province, attended a symposium in late February when this document was launched. The document serves as a good beginning for the long awaited formal effort of the ministry to green itself. Unfortunately, like many documents, it also falls short in a few areas, most notably by an absence of any clear strong language and direct guidance relating to change. But, then again, I may be biased and likely would only be satisfied by a rewriting of the Old Testament's Ten Commandments: Thou shalt take your students outside to learn. . . . Thou shalt play and work in nature each day. . . .

During the two-day symposium I felt hopeful upon hearing Minister Kathleen Wynne's remark about the changes that these new environmental education practices will bring about. According to Wynne, the ministry's aim is to make decisions for the environment as prevalent as the "air we breathe." Her sincerity seemed to be on the right track as I seldom hear a politician so clearly state the degree of change that needs to occur. The minister also referred to the sincerity of government change as evidenced by the new Green Energy Act that was launched the same week.

Both Kathleen Wynne and Roberta Bondar were given t-shirts sporting the COEO logo, and I believe they will actually wear them. As organizations were not allowed to have booths at the symposium, COEO made its presence known by way of its members wearing these t-shirts. Given that I don't really like shopping, I felt bombarded by consumerism as numerous people asked me how they could go about purchasing a t-shirt for themselves. (Information on buying these t-shirts will be included in upcoming newsletters and on the COEO web page.)



I am pleased to report that COEO's board members recently "met" by way of a relatively successful first-time wired conference call. Our recent activities include seeking a means to improve our web page, and networking with the Ontario Camping Association to form a group of kindred spirits (like the integrated program teacher's network) for camps that provide or are interested in providing outdoor education programs during their shoulder seasons for school groups. We are also researching a range of topics that COEO could offer as workshops to various education groups. Suggestions include ways to establish integrated programs, guidance on addressing risk management concerns for principals reluctant to let students wander beyond the schoolyard, and ways to approach diversity in outdoor education. The fall conference is also being organized and I am looking forward to it already.

Meanwhile my new "signing off" expression is now a take-off of the message on the front of the t-shirts COEO members wore — "Ask your teacher to take you outside."

Zabe MacEachren

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2009). *Acting today, shaping tomorrow: A policy framework for environmental education in Ontario schools*. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved 7 March 2009 from www.edu.gov.on.ca/curriculumcouncil/ShapeTomorrow.pdf

The art for this issue of *Pathways* was generously provided by Josh Gordon.



Hello! My name is Josh Gordon and I run a small creative business in Hamilton, Ontario. I design and illustrate for a variety of passionate clients. Nature, music, books, houses, vintage print, antiques and the people I meet are all things that give me inspiration. You can see my work on brochures, business cards, greeting cards, websites, activity books, mugs, t-shirts and journals such as COEO's Pathways.

When I'm not being creative with my projects, I am being creative with kids. I often teach school kids about our environment and the great outdoors!

Please feel free to contact me and visit my website:
www.joshgordoncreative.com

Passion Is No Ordinary Word

by Bob Henderson, Deb Schrader and Erica Roebbelen

The magic came from certain situations. It was in the sound of the guitar around the fire. It was in the sound of the waterfall hitting my body. It was the beach in the middle of nowhere. It was in the singing in the canoe and in paddling silently. It was the blueberries on the island. It was in the times I spent by myself reflecting on my life and what I wanted. It was the individual challenge of carrying a canoe or double wannigan backpacking or the times you just did not think you could do it anymore. It was in the group challenge including the day we did nine portages instead of seven or when our campsite was taken and we had to pull ourselves together as a group to pull through the exhausting day. It was working together as a group of nine instead of a group of one. It was in not wanting to come home yet.

Through guiding a summer canoe trip for undergraduate students for over 25 years and reading over 800 student journals, we've learned about passion — the passion wrapped up in the experience of a small group traveling for a week in a canoe with the common purpose of dwelling well in the landscape. It is a simple act of being.

Reviewing long-kept favourite journal excerpts is more than nostalgic; it is instructive. Preserving meaningful passages from travel experiences, generally consistent in location, staff, duration and intentions, now seems more than anecdotal; it could constitute further research data. Yet that approach feels wrong, as there was no defined purpose, no research hypothesis. However, when students write regularly about handling a tough portage solo or coping with a headwind or an awkward situation within the group, we need to acknowledge that much can be learned through such experiences and reflections.

Clearly, overcoming adversity on the trail and within the group is omnipresent.

Where our attention is sparked, however, mostly concerns moments of student disorientation — when forces of nature shock their being with beauty and power, when a mechanical time orientation shifts to dwelling in body time, or when a student is overcome with the spiritual epiphany of belonging. Comments on such unfamiliar events denote changes in knowing and being, even if only for fleeting moments. The passion is there for us as teachers as well as for the students as writers.

There is an urban-schooled way of being that can readily be brought to the bush. But there is also a nature-experiential way of being that suits the person well, both in and out of the bush. Theodore Roszak calls our sympathetic bond with the natural world our “ecological unconscious” (2002, p. 42). In the overflowing file of disorienting journal entry “favourites” is a passion that supports Roszak’s claim of an ecological unconscious as an important understanding to our practice.

In this article we will sift through these journal excerpts, share the collective passion of student and educator/guide for outdoor travel and life with nature, and discuss our learning along the way. We will briefly describe the undergraduate course from which these journal entries emerge, give a sample of background theory that guides the course, discuss three themes that emerge from the “favourites” — time, community and self-awareness — and explore two specific curricular directions directly informed by the journals. As this article exists only because of those journal excerpts, exemplary and typical entries from a variety of students have been included in italics to support our findings.

The Course

Kinesiology 4D03 (Outdoor Education) is a single-term course entrenched in experiential learning. We refer to the course simply as “Summer Camp.” The format is unusual in that it begins at the end of August with a nine-day field component in Northern Ontario and returns to campus the Sunday before classes begin. Within this field component, four days are spent at a camp outpost and five days are spent on a canoe trip.

There are 30–40 students in the class and while four days are spent as the large group getting to know each other, acquiring basic travel skills and taking in the glories of the Canadian Shield, the actual canoe trip operates in groups of fewer than ten. It is a flat-water trip (lake, creek and marsh) and challenges lie in the physicality of

portages, camp life and the weather. The shift in dynamics that occurs as the program transitions from large group to small is often not entirely realized by students until the last evening. At that time the smaller canoe tripping groups reunite with the whole class and students often experience a feeling of disequilibrium and confusion. These feelings are lessened, however, through intentional celebrations such as skits, savouring great food and a final campfire.

We return from the field component and move into the realm of the classroom. Students embrace this portion of the course as a sort of weekly reunion of the travel group. Time and energy in class are put towards an early fieldtrip to a local conservation area, a basic overview of outdoor education literature and student projects. Each student submits three journal entries from their trip, a final



reflection, a book review, a group project and an individual project.

Theoretical Background

We could travel in many directions to provide a theoretical context for our collections of student journal entries and their subsequent curricular impact. A complex environment is created when modern people meet nature and others to form small communities with common purposes. We will share three theoretical directions.

James Neill (2008) has created a useful systematic framework for considering the realms of outdoor education. These realms are individual, environmental, activity, program, group, instructor and cultural. All realms are represented to varying degrees of intensity in programs while each realm represents a possible program focus. Through journal excerpts, we have found Neill's *cultural* realm to be a central focus for many students. The cultural realm concerns gains in self-awareness within a culture that is pervasive but changeable. Outdoor education can readily expose students to their culture, helping them to explore likes and dislikes. We, as course instructors, share this focus and have consciously advanced it.

Duenkel and Scott (1994) provide two aspects of summer camp that educators/guides can work towards and to which students are open:

1. A spiritual awareness-in-becoming that humans are a part of, not apart from, the natural world, and that the world does not revolve around humanity. Such a shift carries significant life implications.

It is not the feeling that you have conquered nature and that you are stronger than she. . . . The lightning storm was a great final reminder of that. It is not that you have outsmarted nature and through banding together you have

managed to cross her vast expanse. The tail and headwinds remind us that she is both on our side, granting us mercy, and challenging us, teaching us wisdom. I believe it is the sense of accomplishment of stepping out of our lives in the city where we try to live despite nature. I think it is the realization that we, as a race, can live with nature and that over these last few days, we have.

2. Everyday constructed reality encourages life qualities that can and should be challenged so one can be self-determined and not determined. The resultant liberating euphoria can be cherished as a memory to be revitalized with regular outings or can be firmly addressed as an ever-present reshaping of life qualities (bringing the wilderness reality into the everyday reality).

When I returned from this trip I felt as though I could do anything. I felt stronger, I felt more confident and I was ready to continue on with my "new-normal" life (as I now call it), as canoeing gave me the burst of strength I needed. To me, tripping was about leaving a busy, hectic life that I can often lose myself in and stepping into a world of reflection, accomplishment and strength that helped to bring back peace to my inner-self.

Anthropologist Pamela Cushing's work in outdoor experiences also helps us to understand our rich collection of journal entries. Cushing (1997) suggests that the disorientation and liberation students experience — with attention to the cultural realm shifting to a "wilderness realm of reality" — should be most readily understood as personal, themed and partial. That is, students have a "positioned background" as a basis for choosing to focus on specific themes in their lives. They enter an experience with a sense of what they want to get out of it and address that specifically. Hence transformation is personal, themed and

partial rather than concerning one's overall identity. The experience can be guided so that students can get what they are most looking for and also get some surprises along the way.

Something had drawn me to this course. I didn't know of anyone who was planning to take it, I had never tripped before, and I had never even been a Girl Guide! So maybe it was partly the challenge that attracted me, or the opportunity to meet new people. Or maybe it was that part of me deep inside that longed to be a part of something different, something that had the potential to connect me to the earth and all of her raw beauty. I was craving something real.

Three Themes: Time, Community, Self-awareness

In collecting student journal entries focused on the cultural realm, we found certain dominant themes. These reflections feature three main topics: time, a celebration of community found, and the overall acknowledgement of gained self-awareness. Each theme encourages variance in regards to dominant cultural paradigms.

Time truly is a mechanical construct. The 24-hour clock is a useful tool but has very little relation to the natural world. Summer camp is a period that encourages awareness to the idea that mechanical time ought to serve us and not the other way around. Removing this time construct, by way of leaving watches behind and completing an on-the-trail reading on mechanical and body time for example (Lightman, 1993), heightens awareness of the present. Mostly though, we consciously practice body time, which is much celebrated in journal entries.

I began to see my wristwatch as a handcuff chaining me to mechanical time. I began to appreciate the luxury of the opportunity I had in Temagami to live a natural time existence. To wake up when

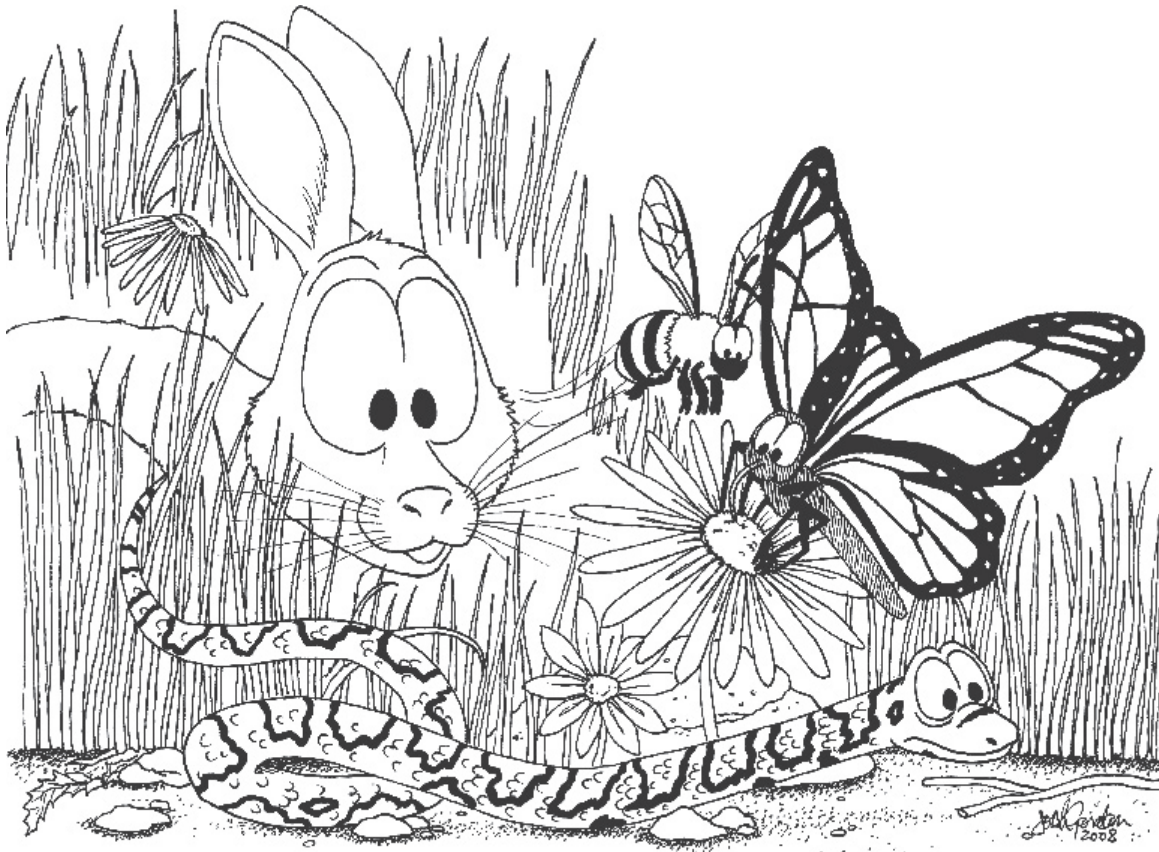
the sun touched my face, to eat whenever my stomach told me I was hungry, and not having to worry about time restrictions.

A different sense of time emerges – rather than minutes and hours, time becomes portages, kilometres, points and islands, the span between breakfast and lunch . . .

We ate when we were hungry, stopped tripping when we got to our final destination for the day and went to sleep when we could no longer stay awake. A calming effect took over me when I truly let my "body" time take over. I was completely relaxed.

The second common theme revolves around a sense of community. Western society values and encourages highly independent, autonomous individuals. A shift in reality occurs on a canoe trip when a group of disciplined people are required to work together towards purposefully meeting everyday needs (food, warmth and shelter). The myth of independence is revealed and foundational values of community, such as trust, honesty, compassion, interdependence, and communication, shine in the safe, nurturing setting of this small trip group. Some students write of being overcome by joy when living in community.

The last night out there, our groups had our last time together. As we are all sitting underneath the sky, there is no denying it; I love the people around me. I looked around and realized that against odds of different personality clashes we have done it, and done it together at that. Underneath a billion burning, dancing stars I can understand that a group put together to survive but even more so to share and experience something so breathtaking and big and wonderful will stand together in awe of something greater than themselves. . . . Having



experienced this together, we are better back than sent.

I remember specifically looking around at my team preparing dinner one night and being overcome with gratitude and awe at being surrounded by such wonderful people all working together and looking out for one another.

We were for the most part merely acquaintances. So how did so much fun and laughter and trust and friendship evolve from traveling around in a canoe?

We appreciate that the theme of self-awareness is really a catch-all category. Yet students often communicate a vague sense of something special and enlightening brought to their personal being through the outdoor experience.

There's something else perhaps even more subtle — the change in self. Maybe it's only discernable by you or those close to you, but nevertheless there is something different. I have never felt as in tune with my own body as I did while on this trip. . . . I felt truly alive and I felt truly connected to the earth, the sun, the sky, the water, the people around me, and to myself.

The simplicity opens the mind and soul to face themselves and their existence. And for those who are not comfortable in these dimensions of being, the wilderness forces a clearing of the tangled webs and a braving of new paths. Deeper questions come to mind demanding attention, and yet the challenge and excitement of reaching within prepare one for the journey into themselves. It is a time of discovery and growth. And with each step taken, a greater sense of aliveness ensues.

Lessons Learned

Apart from these dominant general themes, which we have learned to consciously address in the course in subtle and sometimes indirect ways, student journals inform our curriculum and practice in specific ways. The following are but two examples of this:

Readings are an important component of summer camp. Each trip leader is given a reading kit and advised to share specific entries and to sample from the remainder. We sometimes experience the distracted/bored look of students during readings, enough to consider giving them up all together. However, we have learned from student journals that this would be a mistake. We stop in our canoes to float alongside a pictograph site and share our enthusiasm and a native rock art-related reading. Though sometimes students appear to be disinterested, post-trip journal readings have shocked us with inspired and moving reflections of this site. Our lesson is that one cannot always “read” the group. Experience tells us to bring both forces together: try to read the group but remember the lessons from journals. We continue to pepper relevant readings into our travel experience.

We paddled by some ancient pictographs done by natives hundreds of years ago. . . . I was wonderfully put in my place while looking at the artwork. It's easy to forget how many people have traveled the same route as you over the past hundreds of years. It also gave me strength to think that if many people had done this before me that I too could do it no matter how tired my arms felt!

Tea ceremony is a special time at the camp. It was initially tried on a whim to temper the first night's social enthusiasm with a slow-down, just-look-at-where-we-are activity. We learned from the wealth of journal entries highlighting this activity that we had struck

gold with this one — the right activity, the right way, the right time, the right group. It has become a mainstay from the first journal feedback.

It was not till the silent tea by the water that I really felt calm. I think that those ten minutes of silence, surrounded by nature, were ten of the most spiritual moments in my life. No joke. I'm not big on religion and I don't know what I think of "God" but I imagine if it was tangible, or conceivable, it would look like that. The calm, perfect waters, the green trees, the sounds of nature. It was the first time all day I felt at peace and calm. That's what God is, right? A force/person/icon/feeling of peace and serenity. It was beautiful and SO needed for me.

*Take your tea in silence
Won't you listen to the night?
Take the time for peace of mind
Soaked in lantern light.*

On Reflection

The job of a good educator is to make the simple seem strange.

I cannot let my journal disappear. It has too much learning in it.

This trip taught me how I want to lead the rest of my life.

Our self/group-propelled travel/camping experience sets up an expansive curriculum that allows for the ecological unconscious to be celebrated. The curriculum is interdisciplinary and inter/intra-personal. The curriculum is so much fun and relevant that schooling and student/instructor divisions are largely forgotten. We are all co-learners. The relational components of summer camp are confounding, and we as educator/guides are not accountable for all that is learned. Rather, we learn about what is learned from interpreting the experience

both at the time and by reflecting on student journals. The students' "positioned background" idea and themes explored in journals suggests to us that alienation from self, nature and others is a concern some address "on trail." This often manifests as a liberating energy experienced by hand, head and heart. Over the years we have collected entries that capture this passion for positive change in life. In the words of Park, "Our culture has shaped, and has been shaped by, a narrow curriculum of success that does not reflect our need to live well in our places" (2007, p. 52). Our curriculum is expansive! We explore living well.

My body and mind had space to stretch out and relax.

Our passion for our work largely comes from our opportunity each year to learn from students, specifically from their field notes and trip end reflective journal entries, which are not graded. The writing is often excellent, a sure sign that genuine personal meaning is involved.

Passion is no ordinary word.¹ We do not use the word lightly. This is an exposé of students' passion for trail life and their learning along the way. We all see the J-stroke being taught or the meal cooked on the fire or the initiative to quickly get a tarp up to keep dry, but there is so much more beyond what is easily seen.

Far behind, you can still see the outpost – a tiny spec on the shore. But in your heart there is calm, and that is your link to this place. The doorway you can step into every time you close your eyes. . . . I'll see you there!

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- Bob Henderson teaches outdoor education at McMaster University. He cannot bear to throw out reams of paper and journal entries as he starts the process of cleaning out an office.*
- Deb Schrader teaches outdoor education at McMaster University and is much beloved by all her students.*
- Erica Roebbelen is in her third year of the Arts and Science Program at McMaster University. She loves being a student and is hoping to prolong this stage of her life as long as she can.*

¹ "Passion Is No Ordinary Word" is the title of a Graham Parker song on the CD titled *Squeezing Out the Sparks*.

Return from the Bush: A Brief Personal Anthology of Meaning and Question

by Zsuzsi Fodor

We fell silent around the lantern at our initial tea ceremony at the outpost. In the dark, I took in the place — its sounds and my blind interactions with the trees, the creatures, the wind and the waves. I felt so alive in the dark, staring into a sky that goes on for eternity. Even though this was my first trip, canoeing has been a strong presence in my life. Having been surrounded for years by peers and role models who live for tripping, their stories and nostalgia, I was anxious to finally be on the inside. I was going to become privy to the secret, the reason my friends start counting down to summer in October and flee to the bush the moment our last exam is over.

After Day One, my arms were aching, my throat was sore, my legs were scathed and my bowels confused. How anticlimactic. There's got to be more to tripping than this. As I looked out on the lake, Northern Ontario's natural beauty seemed a well-kept Canadian secret. Born and raised in suburban Toronto, it was news to me. It is a wonder we've moved so far away from this landscape.

I often romanticize the primordial state of living and being; this was probably as close as I came to realizing it. Why do urbanites who have never been fully immersed in the natural world connect with it so sincerely? I wonder whether meaningful relationships with nature are part of human nature or something necessitating a certain degree of nurture.

On the bus ride back, I was asked why I would return to tripping and how my reasons might differ from the people in my life who have been tripping forever. I could not answer this question right away, but it has been a frequent point of reflection since my return to the city. On trip itself, I did not consider such "big questions;" I was focused



on getting through the portage, pitching the tent, making dinner — simple tasks with clear consequences. Whatever I was doing in that very moment necessitated my entire focus: not tripping on that rock, conquering that headwind, finding the perfect tree. I found little time to philosophize or reflect.

Yet on Day Four memories of the life left behind began to creep into my mind, perhaps a subconscious indication that return was imminent. I joked about reintegrating into the "real world," as if paddling the North was somehow imaginary or fantastical and my life in Hamilton was authentic. This must be backwards: what could be more genuine than this? Living for the moment, depending on each other and ourselves, refusing constraint — this felt real.

Zsuzsi Fodor is spending her fourth year of the Arts and Science Program at McMaster University living in and loving downtown Hamilton, writing her thesis on local community food security, and dreaming of returning to the North.

Another World

by Laurence Abbot

"There is another world, but it is inside this one."

Paul Eluard

This quote resonated with me for the duration of this trip and continues to have a significant impact upon my daily choices. Initially, I processed this line quickly, thinking it would go in one ear and out the other, but there was more to these words. Once I had the chance to fully unpack and digest this quote, I came to realize that I was dealing with something special. I experienced this "other world" with my group on this canoe trip.

I began to ask myself, "What is the big difference between both of these worlds?" Firstly, I rhymed off all the painfully obvious discrepancies: I am in a canoe vs. my car, I have land obstacles slowing me down vs. traffic jams. But further insight was already unfolding. I began to compare and analyze both these seemingly conflicting worlds in my head: I am planning my day around my body and what it needs vs. planning my day around my watch and what others expect from me, I enjoy the companionship of my friends vs. secluding myself from my peers in front of a television or a computer screen, I take time to appreciate the day's special moments and allow for self-reflection vs.

rushing through a day with barely enough time to brush my teeth before I am off to bed for the next hectic day. All of these things were new and completely opposite to what I had been doing all summer, but at the same time, they felt so natural and in most cases better than what I normally did. This realization triggered me to be more aware of what I feel I need to pursue, regardless of what society deems "correct" or "the norm."

Why was this realization so sudden during this canoe trip? I felt as if the Canadian Shield and the situations we were put in were perfect buffers, allowing us to rid ourselves of day-to-day societal expectations, norms and pressures. With a clear mind and the blinders off, we could finally see, listen and learn from our natural and environmental instincts. This comfortable and newfound "world" can be entered by regular society but we have to work hard and pay close attention as to what we need and where we need to go to receive this comfort.

My experience in the bush was by far one of the best I have had in my entire life. I took so much away from this trip that I feel will help me be more in touch with myself and with nature. The learning atmospheres were

extraordinarily healthy and allowed for excellent conditions for personal growth and reflection. I am excited to have experienced my own "other world" and look forward to integrating it into my life each day!

Laurence Abbott is completing his third year of Kinesiology at McMaster University.



The Rewards of Our Labour

by Erica Roebbelen

I've been thinking recently about how detached we are from the labour it takes to support our way of life. Traveling by air has never felt quite right to me; though I enjoy experiencing other cultures and places, I find it unsettling to travel such immense distances without feeling any physical strain. As the plane soars I feel my body resisting — I was never meant to go this high or fast. I think culture shock exists because we can enter foreign cultures so quickly. I suspect that if we traveled by slower methods the culture shock wouldn't be so great. We would have time to notice the subtle changes in landscape, climate and peoples along the way.

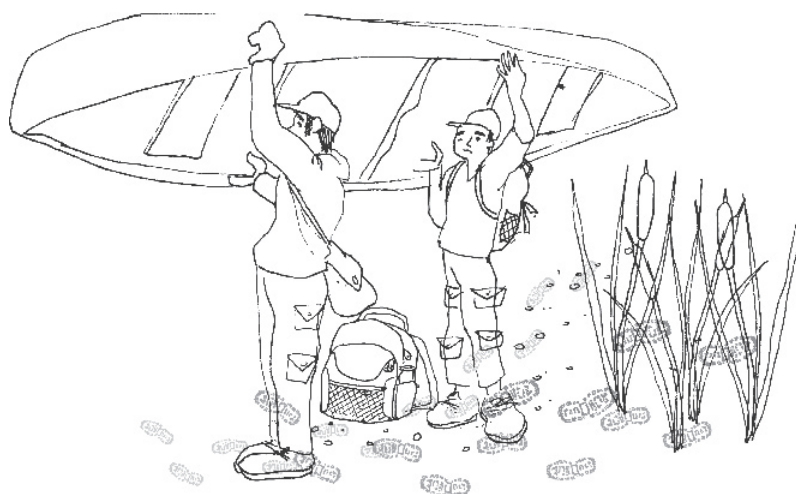
During our canoe trip I was most thankful for a chance to feel the work associated with living and traveling. A few kilometres traveled by car offer no reward, but when those same kilometres are traveled by canoe the reward is great. Paddling offers the opportunity to see the world along the way. I think most of the trees we've seen in our lives have been viewed from a car window while going 100 km/h. It's hard to learn much about trees if that's the frame you're looking through. On the canoe trip, however, we could discern species and were given the chance to touch and smell and hug.

I also enjoyed our conversations about the social effects of technology. A community degrades when tasks that once required communication and cooperation can be done by a machine operated by a single person. Every portion of our canoe trip was accomplished by the will and efforts of the group. Even portages, which could be thought of as loading a pack and canoe and hiking on your own, are only done well when the group is in constant conversation with each other, warning one another of tripping hazards and slippery rocks, offering advice on the best path to take, and expressing words of encouragement.

I recall a conversation about hearths, central sources of heat that used to be the gathering place in a house. A furnace delivering heat through vents to each room in the house eliminates that need to congregate. I am dismayed that televisions are installed where fireplaces once were. Television, which requires no participation and offers passive entertainment, has become the heart of the modern home. On trip, gathering around a fire was a special time. By its light and warmth we enjoyed storytelling, singing, reading, eating and sharing. There is shockingly little time or space afforded for these fundamental activities in modern life or in a modern home.

Though I have enjoyed tripping and camping for some time, it was this particular trip that helped me understand why. Now that I understand, I hope to be more intentional in my future experiences.

Erica Roebbelen is in her third year of the Arts & Science Program at McMaster University.



A “Powerful” Professional Learning Experience on the Stikine River

by Linda Leckie with Neil Piller

Nothing within a school has more impact upon students in terms of skills development, self-confidence, or classroom behaviour than the personal and professional growth of their teachers. When teachers examine, question, reflect on their ideas and develop new practices that lead towards their ideals, students are alive. When teachers stop growing, so do their students.

Barth cited in Fichtman Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008, p. 143

I had to travel all the way to Tucson, Arizona to find my kindred spirit. At the Association for Experiential Education (AEE) conference in 2000 I met Neil Piller, the Director of Outdoor Education at St. George’s School in Vancouver. Despite standing in completely different locations on the map of Canada during Bob Henderson’s “Literary Landscapes” activity we later realized that we stood in the same place in terms of our interests, attitudes and philosophy of practice as educators and wilderness travel guides. The outdoor pursuits we offer our students may vary in their mode of travel and setting but our programs share mutual goals and objectives that are consistent with our schools’ missions and philosophies of learning. Whether students are in Grade 4 or Grade 10, participating in a residential all-grade program or involved in an optional wilderness expedition, we are committed to natural and cultural interpretation, the acquisition of outdoor skills and the development of a personal environmental ethic, while first and foremost meeting curriculum objectives through direct contact with nature.

In 2008, knowing that I was on a sabbatical leave, Neil invited me to be his guest and

paddle the Stikine River with him, his co-guide Tony Shaw, and nine Grade 10 boys enrolled in St. George’s School’s Discovery 10 program. Here was a chance to move beyond the prominent model of teacher professional development workshops that are organized by administrators and delivered on in-service days when teachers work and students are on holiday. Often referred to as “sit and get” models of professional development, teachers learn about new pedagogy from an outside expert and are encouraged to implement in the classroom this new knowledge garnered by educational researchers. These research-based practices are not necessarily easily transferable to a specific classroom context. While the information may be useful, it is not sufficient without follow-up support for teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

I initiated and organized my professional development adventure on the Stikine River to meet my needs as an experienced outdoor experiential educator and wilderness travel guide. My students were still in class and I was out of school to share best practices with other seasoned outdoor educators. This was an opportunity for what the authors of *The Reflective Educator’s Guide to Professional Development* call “powerful” professional development. According to Nancy Fichtman Dana and Diane Yendol-Hoppey, a powerful professional development experience acknowledges all three types of teacher knowledge: knowledge for practice, knowledge in practice and knowledge of practice.

Knowledge for practice includes new theories about teaching and learning that are of importance and interest to all educators. Knowledge in practice addresses the complexities of teaching and recognizes the

importance of practical knowledge. Teachers need to test out these new ideas in their own classrooms, reflect on their experiences and then construct new knowledge in practice that can be shared with others. Knowledge of practice moves beyond the nuts and bolts of classroom practice to inspire teachers to study their own teaching and engage in collaborative inquiry so that “teachers make problematic their own knowledge and practice as well as the knowledge and practice of others” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1999).

What follows here is my story of a powerful professional learning experience that was self-directed, appropriate to both the daily challenges I face with my students and to the stage of my teaching career, and informed by research (knowledge for practice), experience (knowledge in practice) and collaboration (knowledge of practice). By examining, questioning and reflecting on our knowledge-in-action, Neil and I hoped to grow as professionals and to develop new practices to keep our students growing too.

St. George’s School: The Outdoor Education Program and Discovery 10

The School. Founded in 1930, St. George’s School is a private university preparation school for 1,150 boys that offers a day program in Grades 1–12 and a boarding program in Grades 7–12. The school describes itself as “a community committed to the love of learning, the joy of living, and the healthy growth of body, mind and spirit.” In support of this mission, St. George’s academic program follows the core curriculum outlined by the BC Ministry of Education with additional enrichment programs at all levels. In addition to scholarly pursuits, the school offers a strong extra-curricular program consisting of athletics, fine and performing arts, and 20 special interest clubs including the Duke of Edinburgh Club, which focuses on wilderness and service initiatives. St. George’s also provides a sequential outdoor education program, coordinated by a full-

time director, to promote the acquisition of lifelong outdoor skills, enrich and enhance the academic program, foster a personal environmental ethic, and develop students’ emotional and social skills.

The Outdoor Education Program. The outdoor education program at St. George’s offers a wide range of experiences for students in all grade levels. As part of the school’s extra-curricular program there are several activities open to students with an interest in outdoor adventure. Options include after-school programs like rock climbing, hiking and learning to roll a kayak in the school pool, and occasional weekend outings in the greater Vancouver area to explore the BC coast, mountains and inland waterways. The outdoor education program also offers multi-day international trips so students can mountain bike in Utah or sea kayak in the Baja or work on a humanitarian aid project in Peru. St. George’s outdoor education staff ensure a safe, positive and successful outdoor learning experience for all students by assisting senior students involved in the Duke of Edinburgh program who act as facilitators.

In addition to these optional outdoor activities and expeditions, every student from Grade 1 to 10 participates in a mandatory “grade program” experience that is an integral part of the curriculum. These grade programs vary from one to six days and are usually based at a residential camp or, in the higher grades, involve wilderness camping. Grade 1 students get a gentle introduction to environmental awareness and outdoor skills during a half-day intertidal study of the Spanish Bank. Grade 2 and 3 boys venture further afield on full-day outdoor excursions and in Grade 4 the boys participate in their first residential program. In Grades 5 and 6 the boys continue to develop personal and interpersonal skills and strengthen their relationship with the natural world. With these foundational experiences complete, the outdoor education program focuses on curriculum-based science field studies in Grade 7, personal

and interpersonal skills in Grade 8, and leadership in Grade 9. The Grade 10 Sea to Sky is a week-long culminating outdoor education experience where small groups of 10–12 students sea kayak, canoe, backpack, backcountry ski or snowshoe on independent expeditions.

Discovery 10. Recognizing the unique learning opportunities that are presented in an outdoor setting and the effectiveness of experiential learning, St. George's also offers

an optional program called Discovery 10 to those Grade 10 students with a passion for the outdoors. These students go to natural areas on a regular basis where, far from the distractions of a modern urban existence, they are encouraged to develop an increased awareness of themselves, others and the natural environment. This is achieved through a wide range of school-based activities and out-trips designed to challenge the boys' bodies, minds and spirits to become positive, contributing members of society.



The Discovery 10 program is limited to 21 students who are selected through an application process that includes a written application form, assessment from the Grade 9 outdoor education instructor, and input from the Head of Grade and the Grade 9 counsellor. The selected students form a cohort for the duration of the school year, which allows teachers to schedule around the almost monthly out trips and to conduct catch-ups blocks when students are in school. The Discovery 10 boys take science, English, and social studies together as a class and they are timetabled into the math and language course of their choice. In addition to these five mandatory credits, students select one elective from a menu of ten options. There are also two Discovery Blocks in their timetable to provide time for trip planning and learning outdoor skills. This preparation time along with the monthly out trips earn the boys credit for PE 10 and a credit for the locally developed Discovery 10 course for a total number of eight credits.

Like all of St. George's outdoor education programs, Discovery 10 aims to fulfill the school's mission. Program objectives "encourage the pursuit of excellence in all endeavours and the acceptance of responsibility for the betterment of society" and include lifelong skills in four areas.

Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Skills provides students with opportunities for personal growth and leadership while learning to make a positive contribution to their community. **Environmental Awareness** enables students to study natural systems to examine their own interdependent relationship with the environment and develop a personal environmental ethic. **Academic Integration** allows students to make connections between their outdoor experiences and concepts studied in the classroom. **Outdoor Skills** offers students the ability to become proficient, safe and environmentally responsible wilderness travelers throughout the rest of their lives.

Throughout the school year the boys acquire an impressive wilderness expedition resumé totalling over 60 days of hiking, canoeing, sea kayaking, backcountry skiing, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and rock climbing. The culminating year-end trip is 15–18 days long and is designed to physically and mentally challenge the students and to utilize the many skills that they have developed over the year. The final wilderness travel experience assists and supports the students as they make the shift from participant to trip leader. When assuming the responsibilities of "leader of the day" the students are called upon to use what they have learned about organization, time management, initiative, goal setting, effective communication and conflict resolution. The boys work together in small groups to set up camp and cook their own meals, navigate their way down river and find their way overland on rambling hikes that test their outdoor travel and living skills. A 24-hour solo towards the end of the trip provides students time for deep personal reflection on their growth and development over the year and to consider their relationship with nature to develop a personal environmental ethic.

When Neil was designing and implementing the first Discovery 10 program in the fall of 2002 he contacted Tony Shaw, then-President of the Recreational Canoeing Association of British Columbia, for assistance with and advice on the logistics of the final canoeing expedition. Tony, a Master Canoe Instructor and recently retired teacher, joined St. George's outdoor education team to train and prepare the students for a June trip on the Wind River. In 2004 the BC government announced mandatory provincial exams commencing in June 2005 that would force the final expedition to take place a month earlier. Tony and Neil discussed a number of options and decided the Stikine River would be a suitable alternative. Tony knew the area well, having lived and worked in the region for over 20 years, and he also knew that the river's May water levels would provide a window of opportunity between break-up

and the spring flood. In August 2004 Tony reconnoitred the trip and the two co-guides went on to craft a collaborative personal and professional relationship in leading the St. George's boys on a voyage of discovery through the Coastal Mountains. Every trip has also included an invited guest.

The Final Expedition — Paddling the Stikine River

When I met up with the 2008 Stikine Expedition in Terrace BC, the nine Grade 10s were already a bit road weary having left Vancouver by bus two days prior. Neil made the necessary introductions and as a complete group we continued another day north making several stops along the way to learn about the area's First Nations. On the Nishga'a Reserve in the town of New Aiyansh we visited the National Band Office. Our host Paul Mercer, the Youth Council Coordinator, was excited to tell the students about his canoeing trip with the Nishga'a youth — a component he was inspired to add to his program after meeting the St. George's group several years ago. The next day took us to the native community of Iskut where Tony had been the school principal for 12 years. We visited Oscar, one of Tony's former students, whom we located by following the sound of a chainsaw he was using to clear mountain bike trails. While his dad Jimmy looked on with pride, Oscar shared his remarkable success story of living and working on a native reserve.

Later that day we made our last stop at Dease Lake and turned west to follow the caribou to the river. The harrowing drive down steep hills and around hairpin turns took us through the desert-like terrain of the Coastal Mountains' rain shadow and offered magnificent views of the Grand Canyon of the Stikine River. When we arrived at our put in it was as though we had travelled back in time to 1862 when George Douglas put the town of Telegraph Creek on the map. A walking tour revealed a rich cultural history and the ghost

town came alive with stories of the rogues and characters who sought out refuge and fortune on the banks of the river.

The next day we were on the water and for 12 more days the current of the Stikine took us on a gentle ride through an area of incredible natural beauty and history. We learned about the Tahltan tribe of the interior and the Tlingit people on the Pacific coast who shared the river and its resources through trade and marriage until the Russian fur traders brought small pox, which decreased their numbers from 1,500 to 300. We stopped at the site of the town of Glenora and considered the area's early explorers and pioneers who came up river by steamboat and then travelled overland to the northern gold field during the Klondike Gold Rush of 1890. One of those intrepid explorers was none other than RM Patterson who shares his Stikine story in *Trail to the Interior*, which I had brought along to read. That evening around the campfire, we read an account from environmental pioneer John Muir's journal about his ascent and harrowing descent of Glenora Peak with an inexperienced missionary.

The area yields plenty of natural history as well. We witnessed stunning snowy peaks framing the river and saw lots of wildlife including mountain goats, wolves, moose, beaver and eagles. We visited a petroglyph site, spent time with renowned environmental activist, fisherman and homesteader Bill Sampson, and toured the Great Glacier Salmon operation. When we crossed the border into the United States I finally got warm in the Chief Shakes Hot Springs. Eventually the river emptied out into the ocean and we had a half day's paddle to complete our 240 km journey to the community of Petersburg, Alaska. This was not just the place to catch a boat ride back home; our time there was filled with tours of the town, a visit to the museum and a trip to a local bookstore with an amazing collection of natural history and local heritage titles. Our timing was impeccable as our

day in Petersburg coincided with the town's annual celebration of its Norwegian heritage. We dined on Alaska King Salmon as special guests at the Elk Lodge and the day came to a perfect close as the Alaska State ferry rocked us to sleep. The next day we arrived in Prince Rupert and our re-entry into Canada was a lesson in international relations. After a quick dinner we said our fond farewells and I left the St. George's crew to continue their two-day drive to Vancouver.

So . . . what did I learn? How did I grow and develop as an outdoor educator and wilderness travel guide? Here are five ways that this professional learning experience enabled me to expand and enrich my knowledge for, in and of practice.

- **Teaching Leadership** — The guides took a back-seat role and allowed the boys to navigate, make decisions and organize the group. (The guides did, however, step in to override any decisions that seemed unsafe or questionable.) Watching Neil and Tony deal with situations as they arose was a lesson in the fine art of teaching to lead and leading to teach. Every night the group gathered once camp had been put away to debrief the day. The gathering opened with a review of the highs of the day (a great positive way to start the discussions) and no lows were mentioned. The student leader of the day then shared a quote he had chosen from an extensive library of readings and the group discussed its meaning and significance. My favourite quote was from Aristotle who said that "a friend is a second self." Next on the agenda the

leader of the day shared with the group what leadership tools he had found to be successful and suggested ways to improve. The leader then asked the rest of the group for feedback on his leadership. To close the meeting the torch was passed to the next leader of the day who then prepared the group for the following day's logistics.

- **The Solo Experience** — This experience occurred in a specifically selected location that did not involve travel. Boys who choose to participate were assigned a place to stay that was close to the basecamp but private enough to provide a powerful period of self-reflection. All the boys chose to participate in the



solo experience and had, in fact, been talking about how much they were looking forward to it all trip. Neil and Tony ensured the boys looked after their physical needs with food, water and shelter materials. They checked on the boys at sunset, collected their food to cache for the night, and brought it back to them in the morning. The students were well prepared to reflect on their experience in the Discovery 10 program. With no fire, stove, watch or reading material the boys were left to write in their journals. Their assignment was to write a letter to themselves based on the following themes:

- **Natural:** using the five senses to express the relationships they developed with the natural world
- **Interpersonal:** sharing the best qualities they brought to Discovery 10
- **Intrapersonal:** stating their accomplishments, what they were proud of and how they have changed throughout the year.

To aid in this reflective process the students found, as a surprise in their food bags, the letter they wrote to apply to the Discovery Program the year previous.

- **The Role of the Guide** — I could have paddled the Stikine River on my own. My experience, however, was enhanced by the practical knowledge of the two guides. As true guides they knew the river well and introduced people, places and concepts not found in any guidebook or map. The Stikine holds great significance for Tony and he developed a strong sense of place there while serving as the principal in Iskut and running a canoe outfitting business on Lake Eddontenajon. This attachment inspired him to take on a stewardship role and as the Director of the Friends of the Stikine he assisted Bill Sampson with ridding hovercraft from the river in the mid-1990s and worked with writer Wade Davis on other issues around the river.

- **The Value of this Type of Professional Development** — It is one thing to hear and read about what someone else does; to see it live and live it firsthand is a whole other thing. To be part of the debrief discussions, to see facilitation in the moment, to observe the teachers' personal practical knowledge in action, to watch the guides answer questions they had never heard before or handle situations that had never happened before, and to have time to talk about it all was indeed a powerful opportunity for me. Nothing can take the place of seeing an educator and their program in action.

Conclusion

"We know that teachers learn best from other teachers."

Kathleen Wynne

While Neil and I arranged this exchange on a very informal basis, there is now a formalized initiative by the Ontario College of Teachers to allow experienced classroom teachers to engage in advanced professional learning and to share their learning with others. The Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP) is a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Education and teachers' federations to take teachers beyond traditional professional development activities and to support self-directed advanced professional learning. The program funds proposals from classroom teachers who seek a peer leadership role in curriculum development, instructional practice or supporting other teachers.

In the 2007–2008 school year there were two cohorts of successful applicants representing 155 projects involving research and work by approximately 1,000 people (Miller, 2009). The Ministry of Education is now inviting teachers to submit proposals for next year's TLLP. Proposals may come from individual teachers or groups of teachers. For more information about TLLP, including the application process,

selection criteria and timelines, visit www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teacher/pdfs/guideline.pdf. The next round of funding proposals is due at the ministry in late fall of 2009.

An example of one project is Leading Learning Together. Four teachers from Chelmsford Valley District Composite School in the Rainbow District School Board attended a summer institute based on Barrie Bennett's *Beyond Monet: The Artful Science of Instructional Integration*. The group members are committed to changing the culture of their teaching. They are learning to build their instructional intelligence and to teach more effectively by co-teaching, peer mentoring, engaging in lesson study across divisions, grades and subjects, and working collaboratively to establish best practices and continuous improvement.

If teachers learn best from other teachers then I would propose that outdoor experiential educators learn best through collaboration and professional interactions with other outdoor experiential educators. The TLLP has the potential to give teachers "the time we need to research, talk and reflect in meaningful ways that will truly help improve both our own practices and student learning and success" (Lielkalns cited in Miller, 2009, p. 59). Whether we do it formally as part of the TLLP or informally, creating opportunities to expand our knowledge and skills in outdoor education and then sharing those exemplary practices with other outdoor educators will make for some very "powerful" personal and professional development.

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Linda Leckie is the Director of Outdoor Education at The Bishop Strachan School in Toronto for girls. She would like to take a page from Neil Piller's book and invite fellow COEO members to join her from June 20–25 as her "guest" on the annual BSS North June Canoe Trip. This year the students are planning a return to Algonquin starting at Kiosk in the north and travelling due south or down river ending up at Canoe Lake. If you would like to join the group, contact Linda at lleckie@bss.on.ca

Neil Piller is the Director of Outdoor Education at St. George's School in Vancouver for boys. He has an MA in curriculum with a specialty in outdoor education, instructor certifications in moving water and flatwater canoeing, qualifications as a river rescue, avalanche and wilderness medical technician, and over 20 years of outdoor leadership experience. For more information about his program go to www.stgeorges.bc.ca

Belfountain Public School's ECO Focus

by Scott Caspell

Dream big dreams, then put on your overalls and go out and make the dreams come true.

Fred Van Amburgh

"Snow buntings!" Ms Somerville shouted. The fifth graders eagerly scrambled to the classroom window to get a better look at the avian visitors fluttering in the freshly fallen snow. A short while later, on a snowshoe excursion, the class had an opportunity to see how close they could get to the birds before they flew a safe, short distance away.

The fifth grade students at Belfountain Public School (BPS) were almost as excited to see the snow buntings as I was to hear that the school has been implementing an ECO — Environmental education, Conservation education, Outdoor recreation — focus for its curriculum. The entire school, Kindergarten to Grade 6, has begun the process of integrating an environmental, community-focused approach into daily operations and teachings. As the school website notes,

The Belfountain ECO Focus is best viewed as an "umbrella" under which the Kindergarten to Grade 6 Ontario Curriculum concepts are consolidated for learners through authentic, highly meaningful interactions with and in the local Credit River Watershed. . . . Students apply learned knowledge and skills to meet environmental challenges — essentially providing those learners with both the intent and ability to become effective life-long stewards of our planet and all its inhabitants.

The ECO Focus started when several of the students' parents approached the school with the idea to create more environmental education opportunities for their children

and the other students at the school. In the 2006–2007 academic year, a parental committee privately funded a Peel Board Outdoor Education instructor to work with the teachers and students of the Grade 2 and 6 classes one day a week at the school or nearby conservation area. While this one year pilot project benefited the students who took part, it fell short of the broader goal of creating locally focused environmental education and recreation opportunities for all students at the school.

For the 2007–2008 school year, it was decided to adopt the ECO Focus for each of the grades with the following vision, mission and goals:

Vision: Cultivating relationships in the Credit River Watershed

Mission: To develop environmental authentic learning for head, heart and hands

Goals: Eco-literacy, Environmental Ethics, Contributing to the Community

The staff at BPS are currently revising the vision, mission and goals for the ECO Focus. To help fulfil existing goals the staff and parents have been creating what they call "Eco Learning Grounds." Visitors to the school find outdoor teaching-learning areas, a composting unit and a butterfly and vegetable garden, all of which are continually maintained by the students. The school also has an eco lab — a science lab with a variety of teaching resources, such as aquariums and terrariums, microscopes and an LCD projector. Additionally, the school has acquired backpacks, snowshoes and field study equipment to aid students' outdoor explorations.

The classes are fortunate to have excellent access to natural areas. The school is located on the Niagara Escarpment, within walking distance of the Credit River, surrounded

by farm fields and woodlots. The school property also has easy access to a multi-use trail system, which some classes use for hiking and mountain biking. Teachers at BPS are encouraged to develop partnerships with community members and organizations, and students often have interactions with local residents, such as farmers, parents and staff from the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). For example, for the last several years the students raised Atlantic salmon in classroom aquariums, and with staff from the MNR released the fish into the Credit River near the school. As part of this project the students researched the best circumstances for salmon to be released (water temperature, depth, velocity and so on), measured the stream flow in the local river, and then worked together to raise and release the salmon hatchlings into the river.

Throughout the process of raising salmon hatchlings, or researching and planting a butterfly garden, students are immersed and engaged in learning. Such projects also help students develop firsthand connections with their local human and more-than-human communities. For instance, one teacher contacted the local Caledon Agricultural Society and found that they have a mandate to contribute to the community. Consequently, members of the society have offered to help students create a native plant garden on the school grounds. This project will also connect with the Grade 3 curriculum relating to plants and soil, as well as the Grade 4 animal adaptations curriculum. Mr. Bibby-Smith, the Grade 6 teacher, noted that this type of outdoor, experiential, project-based learning has a “tremendous effect on the social dynamics in the class. Students come out of their shell, push their comfort levels and draw connections for themselves. It enriches the students’ learning.”

During my two visits to the school, I heard mostly supportive sentiments about the new ECO Focus; however, the teachers at the school were open and forthcoming about some of the challenges that they have

experienced as well. My conversations with the school’s principal and teachers indicated that the successful integration of the ECO Focus has been dependent on support at various levels, including parents, teachers and administration, both within the school and the Peel Board of Education. While there has mostly been positive support for and a smooth integration of the various initiatives associated with the adoption of the ECO Focus, several projects did need to be modified in order to align with board-wide health and safety policies. For example, the school wanted to create a stone circle — an outdoor teaching-learning area surrounded by large boulders where classes could sit outside — but the Peel Board of Education had specific safety parameters associated with the height of the stones and the distances separating them from one another. The school worked with the Operations Department of the board and co-operatively adjusted the placement of the stones to make the circle conform to board guidelines.

Although many parents have been strongly supportive of the ECO Focus, one teacher noted that some parents questioned whether the curriculum was being adequately covered through outdoor learning. This same teacher worked to diffuse parental scepticism by documenting curricular ties for various outdoor projects the class completed and openly sharing this document with parents on “meet the teacher night.”

The school principal, Michael Walmsley, pointed out that only one teacher at the school has previous outdoor education experience. In fact, Walmsley was keen to highlight that the Belfountain staff consists of a majority of teachers who are learning their environmental connections, literally, on the job. In this way, Walmsley feels that the ECO Focus at BPS can serve as a model for other schools that likely do not have many trained outdoor educators on staff. Walmsley also commented that the teachers at BPS are continually learning how to develop and apply their outdoor education skills. Yet he noted that

some staff, particularly those teaching the younger grades, have been cautious to ensure that time is well balanced between the development of literacy and numeracy foundations and the integration of subject matter in the outdoors. These are staff that are in their first several years of teaching and may be finding it challenging to adopt an ECO Focus while striving to learn the ins and outs of classroom teaching. These details indicate that adoption of a school-wide ECO Focus is heavily dependent upon the continual effort and dedication of the teaching staff. This will continue to be a major challenge for the expansion of such programs at other schools. For this reason, sharing resources and ideas, within and between schools, is essential for such programs to develop and thrive.

The development of the ECO Focus at BPS shows the educational opportunities that are possible when teachers, parents and administration work together towards a shared goal. While there are always challenges associated with starting a new program, BPS's experience serves as an inspiring example for teachers interested in incorporating more place-based, outdoor and environmental education into their schools.

For more information, see the following resources:

The Belfountain Public School website:
<http://belfountain.peelschools.org/index.htm>

Sobel, D. (2004). *Place-based education: Connecting classrooms and communities*. Great Barrington: Orion Society.

Principles of Successful Place-based Education (www.promiseofplace.org/how_pbe_works/)

1. Learning takes place onsite in the schoolyard, and in the local community and environment.
2. Learning focuses on local themes, systems and content.
3. Learning is personally relevant to the learner.



4. Learning experiences contribute to the community's vitality and environmental quality, and support the community's role in fostering global environmental quality.
5. Learning is supported by strong and varied partnerships with local organizations, agencies, businesses and government.
6. Learning is interdisciplinary.
7. Learning experiences are tailored to the local audience.
8. Learning is grounded in and supports the development of a love for one's place.
9. Local learning serves as the foundation for understanding and participating appropriately in regional and global issues.
10. Place-based education programs are integral to achieving other institutional goals.

Scott Caspell serves on Pathways' editorial board. He is looking to collect submissions for place-based activities to be published in Pathways' Backpocket column. Scott can be reached at scottcaspell@hotmail.com.

Sense of Place: Reflections on Nature, Spirit, Relationship

by Garrett Hutson, Mary Breunig and Tim O'Connell

The three of us, all members of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at Brock University, recently held an off-campus meeting. We were discussing curricular changes for the upcoming academic year while climbing on the limestone boulders of the Niagara Glen. It was Mary's first trip to the Glen and she was transfixed by the wonderland of mossy trees, the blue hue of the Niagara River, and the mystical boulders that seemed deliberately placed there by some giant hand. As Tim moved up the rock, he experienced a mind/body union, resulting in a feeling of connectedness to the boulders and thus to the place itself. Garrett, a frequent visitor to the Glen, felt that the time spent together amongst these boulders enhanced our relational knowledge of one another and our collegiality.

Sense of Place

During a subsequent conversation about our pedagogical praxes, we were reflecting back on our experiences at the Glen and realized we had developed greater awareness of how we experienced the Glen in different ways. For Mary, her experience on that day was primarily about her connection to the specific characteristics of the environment and subtleties in the landscape. For Tim, the mind/body union is what he remembered the most about his experience. For Garrett, the focal point of the day was about his interactions with others in an outdoor environment and the way in which these interactions differently defined a place that was already familiar.

As a result of this conversation, we realized that our experiences resonated with some of the conclusions from Garrett's doctoral research. Three main themes emerged from Garrett's research study that explored the different perceptions of place experienced by outdoor professionals (Hutson, 2007). Those three themes emphasized 1) a focus on nature; 2) a focus on spiritual experiences; and 3) a focus on relationships that define places for others. What did we (the three of us) experientially learn and what did Garrett empirically uncover related to these three themes?

Garrett's research findings elaborate on these three perspectives held by outdoor professionals. In his study, one group subscribed to a natural view of place — these individuals suggested it is the details and knowledge of the physical environment that define how outdoor settings become meaningful. Others in the study subscribed to a spiritual point of view suggesting outdoor settings become meaningful through spirituality that is realized and sustained in natural environments. Still others subscribed to a relational point of view and claimed it is their relationships to people, family and settings over time that are most representative of the ways they value places in the out-of-doors (Hutson, 2007).

Through our discussion, we all became aware that as outdoor recreation practitioners we each have different perceptions about what makes the Niagara Glen (as place) meaningful. We must then recognize that if place potentially means something different

to each of us as outdoor educators, it likely holds different meanings for our students as well. We also must acknowledge that a person's interpretation about a certain place is situated and contextual. Thus, the meaning a particular place holds for a given person on any given day is dynamic.

Suggestions for Outdoor Practitioners

Given the above insights, what might outdoor practitioners do to facilitate place-based meanings for others? The suggestions that follow highlight a number of key insights that we share as educators, but this list is certainly not exhaustive.

First, it is important to acknowledge that each of us likely holds a bias toward any given place. We believe it is imperative that both educators and students recognize their individual biases and primary way in which they make meaning of place and begin to adopt a broader view of the continuum of perspectives. For example, if Garrett's primary experiences most often come from a relational perspective, he should be careful to consider the range of ways places reveal themselves to others and consider educating others from this broader continuum of place-based perspectives.

Second, as outdoor educators we need to be cognizant of how we design place-based curriculum. Traditionally, place-based education is about imparting knowledge that begins with the history and details about the local landscape and community (Sobel, 2004). Our experiences have revealed to us that perhaps place-based education needs to expand from its focus on the historical and local to include a full range of perspectives.

Third, we believe educators need to be responsive to the dynamic nature of the environment in which they are teaching (the place itself), the group needs, and the ways in

which meaning-making happens as a result of experiences in that environment. One way to do this is to capitalize on "teachable" place meaning discussions as they arise. For example, if Tim is climbing on a boulder and experiences a mind/body union, he could pose a reflective question to the group about how his bouldering experience facilitates one type of connectedness to place (i.e., spiritual).

Finally, given the context in which we teach and in light of Bob Henderson and Tom Potter's (2001) claim that place is one of the defining aspects of Canadian outdoor education, educators should meaningfully explore and teach about the social, cultural and heritage knowledges of the places we all travel in. Further, integrating these quintessentially Canadian social, cultural and heritage perspectives alongside the natural, spiritual and relational perspectives of place-based education must be considered.

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Pages Amongst the Pines

by Brianna Sharpe

Mention the word “journal” to a typical outdoor-oriented young person and most likely you’ll get an eye-roll or a blank diverted gaze. The student is likely thinking something along these lines: How can writing in a small book of bound pages compare to picking a line on a set of rapids or finding that sweet hand-hold on a rock face?

Passionate outdoor educators, in contrast, commonly espouse the enormous value of giving students reflective writing time. Such educators may well ask, How do you convince a student that a paddle and a pen carry the same “cool” factor?

Somehow, between the ambivalence of students and the commitment of educators, journaling gets relegated to a “should-do” in outdoor education — an activity that gets put in a programmatic corner and forgotten.

For my part, I am a writer. It is what I do. Writing is in my blood. My fingers itch if they don’t write what flows from my brain like water from a faucet. Yet I recognize that not everyone shares my love of writing. Thus, I have created this backpocket guide to help educators foster in students an appreciation for writing. While I designed it with older students in mind (aged 12–20), it can be adapted to work with younger scribes as well.

Tips and Tricks

1. **Buy-in: A little framing goes a long way!**
 - a. *Change the name:* Make it specific to the population. For example, Blurbber for little ones, Scribbler for adolescents, Black Book for young adults, Courage Catcher for teen girls, and so on.
 - b. *If you don’t buy in, neither will they:* Be a passionate writer role model! If you

take writing seriously, chances are they will too.

- c. *This is not your Grandma’s journal:* Not all journaling is serious, weighty and reflective; it can be wacky and weird as well. Have students design their journal cover themselves; have them give their journal a name and a personality. Invite them to play games in it as well as to engage in reflective activities. If you are running a residential or integrated program or have a lot of time at your disposal, have students bind their own books; it’s actually fairly straightforward and generates buy-in.

2. **Structure is necessary for freedom: Don’t let it become a free-for-all.**

- a. *Give every experience integrity:* Plan your lessons in advance. Have expectations ready and communicate them clearly to your students. Journaling can easily seem flakey if expectations are unclear.
- b. *This education is experiential:* Give students an example of your own writing or someone else’s to whom they can relate so they can experience good writing.
- c. *Give them permission:* Give your students an activity and then give them permission to not be perfect; writing can be scary.

3. **The Experiential Learning Cycle: Use what you know!**

- a. *Think about the student experience:* We all know the drill from Kolb and Fry (1975): Experience – Reflection – Abstract Conceptualization – Application. Use a journaling activity to your advantage. Place it in sequence so it can assist with the

reflective aspect of an activity or experience.

4. *Writing is a kinesthetic activity.*

- a. *Sure, it's not mountain-biking . . . but it is physical. Your whole body goes into holding the pen, holding the book, scripting the words, crafting a capital "T" or penning the period at the end of a sentence. Encourage students to get comfortable, seek out an inspirational spot to write, even find a pen that feels good to hold.*

Lesson Ideas

1. *Free Writing*

I have used free writing in traditional classrooms, backcountry base camps, integrated semester programs — really, it goes everywhere. I am taking it directly from the fantastic book *Writing Down the Bones* by the equally fantastic Natalie Goldberg; this was my bible through high school.

Students often fear judgment in writing, just as they know their peers are watching them light the fire, or their instructor is judging their ability to put a canoe on their heads or tie a figure-eight. Writing in this activity is free from scrutiny. I emphasize that if students don't want me to read something, I won't. It's that simple: writing is *theirs*. This activity is the first I do with students, and I have led courses where we do this every morning, and I never look at their journals except to make sure they're writing. It's like stretching for your brain — just to get the kinks out and warm things up in there.

Materials

- Journal (or just a good piece of paper)
- A pen or pencil that each student feels *great* about
- Willingness to go with the flow

Purpose

- To de-stigmatize writing; it's for everyone, not just Margaret Atwood
- To help students feel less intimidated about putting pen to paper
- To aid in transference or reflection for any activity

Process

Have students find a pen they love and a journal with which they are comfortable; highlight that this activity is about *them* and for them. Give them a predetermined amount of time (e.g., 5–15 minutes) to simply *write* within these guidelines:

1. Keep your hand moving. Just write, don't stop. Go through all the red lights.
2. Don't cross out. There are no mistakes here.
3. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, grammar.
4. Lose control.
5. Don't think. Don't get logical. Let it flow, like breathing, or running really fast.
6. Go for the jugular. Scary is good; if it makes you uncomfortable, go there!

2. *Senses, Senses Everywhere*

The key to keeping any reader hooked on a piece of writing is to draw them in by their senses. Luckily, the outdoors is *all* about connection with senses: smells, touch, sights, feelings — learning to connect once again to the world around us and to feel its effect on us is one of the primary reasons we do what we do as outdoor educators.

Materials

- Journal
- Pen/pencil with sharpener
- Large piece of paper and fat markers (if in classroom) or similar wilderness adaptation (hull of canoe and charcoal, and so on)

Purpose

- To increase students' comfort with journaling
- To support awareness of the senses
- To heighten a sense of connection with place and with the natural environment

Process

1. Have students write a list of all the senses on one page of their journal.
2. Invite students to find a spot in their surroundings where they feel comfortable and inspired, whether they are in the backcountry, a park, or the front yard of a school.
3. Frame sensory experience: a pine tree isn't just "brown and green"; it has smells, texture and temperature, it holds sounds in its branches. Just like a cake, writing needs ingredients; the senses are the ingredients that make writing turn out well.
4. Have students walk to their spot with their journal and write down EVERYTHING they hear, smell, see, touch, taste (do not taste inedible things!). Leave students there for longer than you think they need; boredom can be fruitful as well.
5. Upon their return, have the students brainstorm their findings and write down their sensory experiences.

Tidbits: Some Backpocket Journaling Activities

1. **The Yearbook:** Encourage students to each write in one another's journals, as they would in each other's yearbooks. Journal entries should be as accessible and friendly as we can make them.
2. **The Most Random:** Invite students to sit in a comfortable place where they can hear you. Ask them to just start writing, and every so often, throw a word in that they must use in their entry when they hear it. The tales will often be hilarious, disjointed, and unpredictable!

3. **Brain Teasers:** Ask students to put their "macro" lens on and try to write every detail they can about an everyday experience — for example, how to make a PB 'n' J sandwich, or how to tie a bow — as if they were talking on the phone to an alien who had never done such a thing before. This stretches students' descriptive capacity and is much harder than it sounds.
4. **The Story of a Word:** Encourage students to write a story about a character you have named thematically. For example, on a Grade 8 girls' canoe trip where the theme is courage, give them the first line of "There once was a young girl named Courage . . ." and have them write their stories from there.

At the end of the day, writing is an encouragement to listen to one's own voice, to value it, to take seriously all the many things that each of us has to say. I am hard-pressed to find what educators could possibly instil in their students that is more important than a sense of self-awareness coupled with a celebration of their own words and the contents of their imagination.

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Brianna Sharpe is the Educational Contracts Manager at Outward Bound Canada and believes in the words of John Muir that "the space between every pine tree is the doorway to a new world."

Moving Water Canoe and Kayak Participation as an Educational Activity

by Jeff Jackson

Moving water paddling can be a valid and valuable educational activity. When managed correctly, the experience can be leveraged to realize learning outcomes difficult to achieve in a classroom or other learning environments. Achieving these goals requires a team approach that pairs the classroom teacher with a professional paddling instructor.

Statistics are of little help in establishing the comparative “safety” of paddling. Canada does not have mandatory licensing for recreational paddling and there isn’t an agency that publishes incident or fatality rates. Even determining accurate participation rates in paddle sports is elusive and problematic since paddling statistics often include sea kayaking, flatwater canoeing, moving water canoeing and kayaking, and sometimes even whitewater rafting. By including the latter, an activity the Ontario School Board Insurance Exchange (OSBIE) defines as “high risk” and its high profile fatalities involving secondary school students, statistics become inflated.

A second, more relevant issue is that institutional and educational paddling experiences are not separated from recreational incidents and fatalities. An American Canoe Association (ACA) analysis of published canoe and kayak fatality reports concludes that “Many of those who die while using a canoe or kayak do not even consider themselves a ‘canoeist’ or ‘kayaker’ and therefore do not seek out paddling specific safety information” (Black, Jenkins, & Snow Jones, 2003, p. 6). Moreover, the ACA report points out that 50% of paddling fatalities occur while fishing, 25% involve alcohol consumption, and 75% were due to paddlers failing to wear personal floatation devices (PFDs). Clearly, this information is

not instructive when considering the risks of paddling as an educational activity.

The Ontario Physical Health Education Association considers moving water canoeing and kayaking to be valid outdoor education activities. In contrast to snowboarding, skiing, swimming and skating, OSBIE’s statistics of incidents and claims do not register paddle sports as statistically significant, even in their year 2000 focus on outdoor and adventure activities (OSBIE, 2000). Outdoor activities pale in comparison to slips and falls and playground injuries, which make up 42% of school board insurance claims (Welsh, 2008).

For comparison, Algonquin College’s Outdoor Adventure Diploma program supports 18,000 student field days per year, approximately 20% of which are moving water related. From a yearly average of 45 incidents and injuries, six are paddle related and are relatively minor (i.e., sprains/strains). These represent 13% of incidents and yield an activity specific incident and injury rate of 0.0016 per student field day — lower than normalized automobile driving injury rates (not accident rates, which are much higher) of 0.0085 (Transport Canada, 2007). There has not been any serious injuries or fatalities.

The reality of institutional moving water canoe and kayak programs is that the risk level is low. Utilizing easy/novice moving water, proper equipment, and qualified instructors to deliver a conservative and deliberate progression minimizes exposure to risk.

Many school boards across the province, such as Renfrew County District School Board, have continued to allow moving water paddling. It is a valuable vehicle for a variety of educational outcomes, from ecology to physical education to leadership

development. In many cases it can be a means of engaging at-risk students, and can be a highlight for many individuals (Lieberman & Hoody, 1998).

A more relevant discussion initiated by OSBIE in 2000 focused on the entertainment vs. educational value of the activity. Many school boards that allow moving water paddling may not question the educational validity of the activity — in effect allowing it to exist as entertainment. While risk management and OPHEA guidelines are met, little is done to articulate educational outcomes. This approach minimizes the educational potential of this (or any) outdoor experiential activity and creates a questionable moral basis for authorizing such experiences. As outdoor educator James Raffan implies, some teachers may want to integrate outdoor experiential activities into their curriculum for personal and selfish reasons, and not for the educational potential (2007).

In addition, teachers using moving water as a learning environment need a very specific skill set — one not cultivated in the current educational training system or school environment. It is unlikely an individual teacher could cultivate the required experience and technical, environmental, safety and risk management skill set even on their own time to adequately lead such an activity. OPHEA guidelines and certification requirements omit key risk management, group management and field experience requirements.

Moving water paddle sports can be easily managed by professionals in the field. Organizations that specialize in paddle sports instruction, and specifically educational and institutional programming with youth, are the agents best qualified to provide such valuable experience to students.

A relationship in which a professional third-party service provider is contracted to provide activity expertise, but is vetted, briefed, and has the educational content outlined and

validated by a certified teacher, creates the best potential for realizing practical and developmental gains such an activity can generate.

Teachers are trained to deliver curriculum; professional paddling instructors are trained to lead paddle sports. Together they can integrate moving water into provincial curriculum guidelines, minimize exposure to risk, and enable students to experience the challenge and beauty that a moving water environment offers. From here, many powerful lessons can be learned.

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Organic Play

Reviewed by Amanda Grassick

Review of Harris, J., & Wood, D. (2008). *Organic play: A trail guide to changing the world by transforming the way we live, work, and play*. Eureka, CA: Creyr Publishing. ISBN: 0-97635943-2

The introduction of *Organic Play* lays out the philosophy of authors Joy Harris and Donna Wood: play can have a transformative impact in the world. Harris and Wood believe that the “all-natured act of having fun,” hereafter called “organic play,” deepens interpersonal connections, breaks down barriers, promotes respect and understanding and helps build strong communities.

Infused with this philosophy, *Organic Play* strives to be much more than an activity book. Underpinning every activity is the authors’ belief that play can help to transform interpersonal relationships and promote diversity and respect. Harris and Wood explain their philosophy as the S.L.U.G. Attitude, urging readers to Slow Down, Leave a Trail, Unearth Values and Go Play!

I thoroughly enjoyed the intentionality of the book. Harris and Wood put a new twist on the idea of a survival kit by using the traditional survival items (matches, first aid kits, and so on) as metaphors for leadership qualities. Their “Survival Backpack” brings a “flashlight” of focus on the impact that a facilitator’s style can have on a group in a novel way.

The activities, some of which are new twists on old games or else creative new ways to build relationships, are well-written and organized. Each activity has a “Compost Pile” section that offers great ways to adapt the play for different age groups, outcomes and experience levels. My favourite part of each write-up, and what sets *Organic Play* apart from other activity books, is the “Think About” section at the end of each description. Harris and Wood use this section to infuse the S.L.U.G. Attitude into each

activity by providing helpful hints to ensure the emotional and physical safety of the participants.

Most of the time the book delivers on its promise to provide activities that use play to impact all types of people. There are times, however, when the activities fall well short of that intention. “Wild Flower,” for example, is an easily recognizable, albeit more socially appropriate, re-tooling of “Hangman” and seems out of place in a book with more innovative activities. In addition, the entire “Love Our Planet” chapter, with the exception of the “Art Studio” activity, fails to meet the standard set by other books that focus on activities employing reuseable materials. While Harris and Wood did not set out to write a book filled with environmental games, I was disappointed by the lack of innovation in this chapter. In most instances the only thing that differentiates these activities is that the materials include recycled paper.

While the activities themselves will probably be nothing new to an experienced outdoor educator, the S.L.U.G. Attitude will help to focus even the most veteran activity leader. The questions provided in the “Reflection Pool” will surely encourage facilitators and participants to be mindful of the impact that their actions and intentions have on themselves and others around them. *Organic Play* is a great book for any organization that aims to provide resources to new facilitators and to remind experienced facilitators to Go Play!

Amanda Grassick has been working with youth and playing on the trails for 15 years. She is currently the Program Director of Project C.A.N.O.E.

Mark your calendar! COEO 2009 Conference planning is underway and things are exciting! Building on the success of previous conferences, the 2009 conference "*Connections & Directions*" plans to see strong registration for a dynamic and engaging weekend (September 25-27) in eastern Ontario.

The 2009 Conference will be held at RKY Camp located near Parham, on beautiful Eagle Lake, 45 minutes north from Kingston, near Hwy 7 (1.5 hours from Ottawa and 3 hours from Toronto). Expect a solid COEO-style agenda with some special highlights that will focus on the uniqueness of Eastern Ontario and will examine the ministry's newly released environmental education policy. Come and experience diverse geography, a rich sense of history, beautiful water, stunning fall colours, the birthplace of outdoor education in Canadian academia, sustainability projects, an active local food network, a long-standing tradition of unique and successful outdoor education programs, and much more!

The theme for 2009 is "*Connections & Directions*," which reflects the importance of fostering a strong community of outdoor educators, the goal of building connections and synergy with related fields of study/practice, the need for examining future directions, and the importance of highlighting the diversity in outdoor education in Ontario.

The Conference Committee is full of enthusiastic members who are well on the way to planning a dynamic conference — but there is always room for your help! If you are interested in helping, in any small or large way, please contact Walt Sepic (walt.sepic@yahoo.com) or Kate Humphrys (katehumphrys@hotmail.com). See you in September!





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M^{ont}tréal

Information for Authors and Artists

Purpose

Pathways furthers knowledge, enthusiasm and vision for outdoor experiential education in Ontario. Reflecting the interests of outdoor educators, classroom teachers, students and academics, the journal focuses on the practice of outdoor experiential education from elementary to post-secondary levels and from wilderness to urban settings. *Pathways* highlights the value of outdoor experiential education in educating for curriculum, character, wellbeing and the environment.

Submitting Material

The *Pathways* editorial board gladly considers a full range of materials related to outdoor experiential education. We welcome lesson outlines, drawings, articles, book reviews, poetry, fiction, student work and more. We will take your contribution in any form and will work with you to publish it. If you have an idea about a written submission, piece of artwork, or topic for a theme issue, please send an e-mail outlining your potential contribution to the Chair of the Editorial Board, Kathy Haras (kathy@adventureworks.org).

We prefer a natural writing style that is conversational, easy to read and to the point. It is important for you to use your style to tell your own story. There is no formula for being creative, having fun and sharing your ideas. In general, written submissions should fit the framework of one of *Pathways*' 20 established columns. Descriptions of these columns may be found at www.coeo.org by clicking on the publications tab.

Whenever possible, artwork should complement either specific articles or specific themes outlined in a particular journal issue. Please contact the Chair of the Editorial Board if you are interested in providing some or all of the artwork for an issue.

Formatting

Use 12 point, Times New Roman font with 1.25 inch (3.125 cm) margins all around. Text should be left justified and single spaced. Place a blank line between paragraphs but do not indent. Please use Canadian spelling and apply APA referencing style.

Include the title (in bold) and the names of all authors (in italics) at the beginning of the article. Close the article with a brief 1–2 sentence biography of each author (in italics).

Do not include any extraneous information such as page numbers, word counts, headers or footers, and running heads.

Pathways contains approximately 500 words per page. Article length should reflect full page multiples to avoid partially blank pages.

Submit articles to the Chair of the Editorial Board or issue Guest Editor, preferably as a Microsoft Word e-mail attachment.

Each piece of artwork should consist of a single black and white drawing (cross-hatching but no shading) on 8½ by 11 paper.

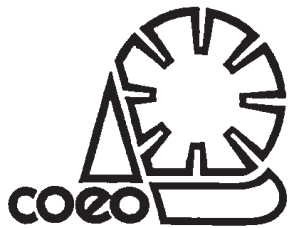
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Submission Deadlines

Volume 1	Fall	September 15
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Volume 3	Spring	February 15
Volume 4	Summer	April 15

Complimentary Copies

The lead author receives one copy of the issue in which the article appears and one copy for each co-author. Lead authors are responsible for distributing copies to their co-authors.



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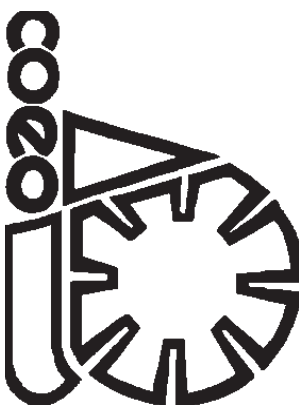
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