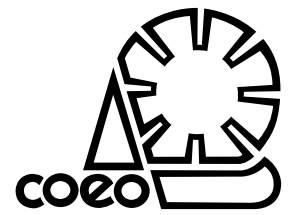


# Pathways

THE ONTARIO JOURNAL OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION  
Spring 2011, 23(3)



# 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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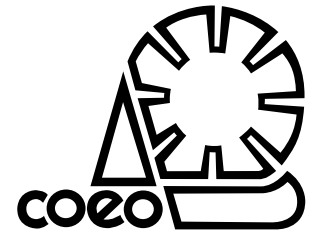
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## Features

- Sense of Place** ..... 7  
*The Role of Making the Stuff of Life in Place-Based Education*  
Zabe MacEachren  
*Discovering Sense of Place: Application through Education*  
P.J. Aucoin  
*Remembering the Roots of Place Meanings for Place-Based Outdoor Education*  
Garrett Hutson  
*Plant Yourself on the Ground and Let Your Roots Grow: Human Development through Intimate Outdoor Experiences*  
Vienna Carruthers  
*Finding Canada Outside: Building National Identity through Place-Based Outdoor Education*  
Katherine Joyce

## Columns

- Editor's Log** ..... 2  
Ryan Howard
- Letter to the Editor** ..... 3  
Bert Horwood
- In Memoriam** ..... 4  
*Kirk Wipper, 1923-2011*  
Grant Linney
- President's View** ..... 6  
Kyle Clarke
- Beyond Our Borders** ..... 32  
*Lessons from Cuba: Using Sense of Place as a Tool to Connect Internationally and a Home*  
Samantha Dear & Hilary Sayle
- Opening the Door** ..... 34  
*Change, in Time, Alters a Place and Transforms a Person*  
Aaron Ratko
- Prospect Point** ..... 35  
*The Dirt Pile*  
Jocelyn Murtell
- Tracking** ..... 36

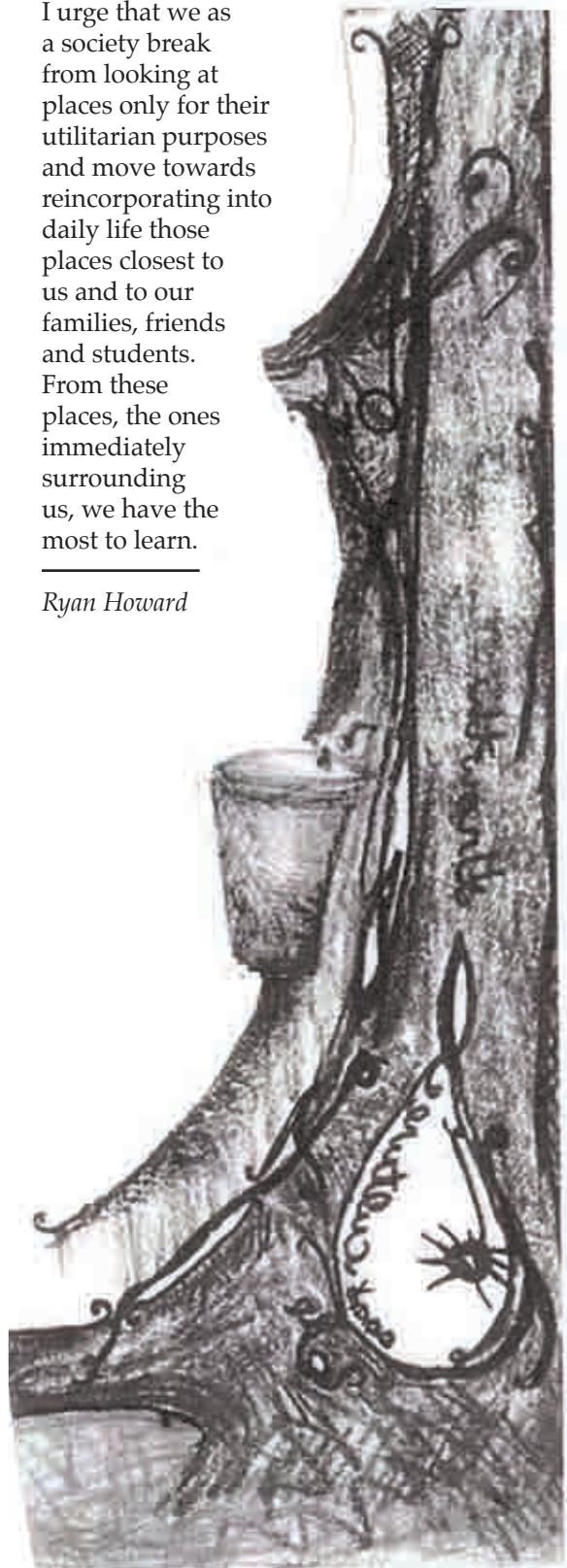
Welcome to the "Sense of Place" special topic spring issue of *Pathways*. This issue is dedicated to exploring the role of place(s) in outdoor education. The variety of the contributions within this issue offers us insight into the complexity of the place discourse while at the same time showing us that incorporating place back into our lives can be an enriching process. Admittedly, for me the idea of place can be a nebulous concept. This is especially true when terms such as sense of place, place attachment, place-based education, place meaning, place identity and so on are all used to represent the different faces and functions of place(s) within our lives and the lives of our students.

For me the discussion of place always starts with one question: *Why should I look for meaning and understanding in the places that surround me?* While this question does not have a concrete answer, it does provide me with the impetus to change my lens and look at the landscape in a different light. David Orr stated that "those things nearest at hand are often the hardest to see." This simple statement is reflective of my present relationship with landscapes. As a human culture we are for the most part a displaced people. We are what Raymond Dashmann calls a "biosphere people," in which our everyday lives are supplied with items and stories from around the world that remain highly unknown to us.

As we move towards reacquainting ourselves with our surroundings we should remember that place is not only a geographic or physical conception. Places are fundamental to our relationships, attitudes, spirituality, culture, well-being, emotions and so much more. At Walden Pond, Henry David Thoreau spent little time trying to define the precise boundaries of his place; he felt it was unnecessary to do so. So, for me, the discussion of place is centered on experiences that influence my life and the life of those around me. As David Orr has stated, place can only be understood on its own terms, as a complex mosaic of phenomenon and problems.

I urge that we as a society break from looking at places only for their utilitarian purposes and move towards reincorporating into daily life those places closest to us and to our families, friends and students. From these places, the ones immediately surrounding us, we have the most to learn.

*Ryan Howard*



Dear *Pathways*:

Being a person with a long past and a short future in outdoor education, I'd like to add a little to the snappy history provided by James Borland in the Winter 2011 issue (*Provoking Dialogue: A Short History of Outdoor Education in Ontario*).

Some teachers did not wait for the Ministry of Education to write curricula. As early as 1957 I was leading field trips with Sir James Dunn School students in the easily accessible wilds near Sault Ste. Marie. In doing this I merely followed the field-based methods of instruction I experienced in the Queen's Department of Biology. The formal subject content related to biology units, but as we all know, when youths pay attention to the natural world, there's no limit to what may be discovered. This continued in my practice and that of others from then on, certainly pre-dating the flowering of outdoor centres.

Adventure components for character and community building, among other purposes, was common much earlier than the 1990s. In the 1960s the exemplary program at Atikokan was already under way. Its founder, Bill Peruniak, was a key figure in bringing Kurt Hahn's ideas to Ontario in the form of the pioneering B.Ed. program at Queen's, which started in 1968. High school outer programs spread from this time onwards.

Good ideas and good practices have a way of diffusing beyond arbitrary subject or discipline boundaries. University departments of education, physical and health education,

and recreation established outdoor programs, adding to the existing field trip practices of many science departments. People who had experience with the Outward Bound schools brought their learning with them to professional work in Ontario schools and colleges.

At the same time, teachers' professional groups were getting involved. Sometime around 1961, I was one of the first to present on the use of field trips to the then Science Section of the Ontario Education Association. (It later became the Science Teachers Association of Ontario.) A decade or so later, there were enough Ontario teachers taking students outdoors for various purposes and various programs that another organization was needed. The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario was formally created in 1972. In its ranks were professionals who practiced all forms of outdoor teaching, not making much distinction (in my experience) among adventure, hard sciences, other school subjects, and environmental relationships. Arguably this created something of a mish-mash of purposes and interests, but one with great creative potential.

The central value that links these historical elements together is a firm conviction on the part of teachers that there is no substitute for impelling students, whatever their age and degree of sophistication, into well chosen and appropriately mediated outdoor experiences.

See you on the trail,

*Bert Horwood*

**Sketch Pad** – The art for this issue of *Pathways* was generously contributed by Sarah Horsely (cover and pages 2, 6, 14, 16, 20, 22, 26, 30, 32, 34), with the exception of that on pages 8-12, which was contributed by Zabe MacEachren.

# In Memoriam



## Kirk Wipper, 1923 – 2011

By Grant Linney

I first met Kirk Wipper in 1971 when he hired me as a counsellor for 15 year olds at Camp Kandalore. At the time, I was a second year Queen's student, and a high school friend who happened to be a Kandalore camper, and now a staff member, talked me into the magic of this gig at a Haliburton-based boys' camp. It turned out to be the best summer of my life. I was suddenly and for the first time thrust into the gloriously invigorating and experiential midst of outdoor education. I was canoe tripping, swimming and sailing and, what's more, with eager and fun-loving boys who took to such pursuits like delighted ducks to water. I was learning about camp craft, map reading and nature. I led my first 3 a.m. dawn watch. I was engaged in the all-camp shenanigans of singsongs, campfires and amazing special events that the staff pulled off with flamboyant last minute creativity. And this staff: what an astounding array of friendly, talented and committed individuals, united in a common quest for a summer of hands-on engagement with deep friendships and memorable experiences. Since this time, these late teens and young adults have moved on to notable accomplishments in a great variety of careers.

The staff was also united in finding its inspiration and vigour from Kirk Wipper, the director of Camp Kandalore and a professor of physical education at the University of Toronto. Kirk was a legend at camp. He had a knack for suddenly appearing at the most opportune moments for needed guidance and inspiration. And he was a gifted outdoor educator. Kirk's physical prowess included that of an effortless and beautiful canoeist, a master woodsman and nature interpreter, and an exceptionally fit man who could gently dispose of all comers who dared to try and get past him when he stood in readiness on the wooden bridge to the camp's south shore. What's more, his physical abilities seamlessly merged with a reflective and caring man who would take a moment to share thought-provoking insights during a short talk at the camp's weekly reflection on

Chapel Island or at some other appropriate moment. Kirk's at-homeness with nature, outdoor experience and camp pervaded all he did and thus, through his quiet but powerful personal example, he deeply impacted both staff and campers. We were all his boys. We were all encouraged to be individuals. We were all encouraged to come together in our celebration of experiential learning, natural settings and community. And our response was rapturous and amazing.

Kirk's impact went well beyond that of Kandalore. He was a highly respected professor at the University of Toronto. His passion for canoes led to his founding of the Canadian Canoe Museum, now located in Peterborough. His commitment to outdoor experiential education included terms as President of both the Royal Life Saving Society and COEO. Among many honours, he became a member of the Order of Canada. He made a lasting impression upon everyone he met and formed friendships that lasted for decades to come.

For additional information about this great Canadian's life, please go [www.kirkwipper.ca](http://www.kirkwipper.ca) and [www.canoemuseum.ca](http://www.canoemuseum.ca).

To borrow a phrase that he often used, Kirk is now "travelling on," no doubt with paddle in hand and captivating any soul whose path he crosses.

---

*Since 1971, Grant Linney has lived happily ever after as an outdoor experiential educator.*

The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario, like many other groups or organizations, makes a special effort to celebrate the hard work and accomplishments of its members. Each year at our annual conference we take time to acknowledge the efforts put forth by individuals and groups and applaud their achievements with the presentation of the COEO awards. It's true, our small award ceremony may lack the level of glamour observed on the red carpet and starlit stage of the Oscars or Golden Globes, but what we lack in glitz, we certainly make up for in worthy praise and heartfelt sentiment. It is through the presentation of our awards that we, as a community, are able to recognize and commend the many amazing things happening in the field of outdoor and experiential education across our province.

There are five awards that may be presented yearly, all of which have their own particular significance:

*The President's Award is presented to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the development of COEO and to outdoor education in Ontario. This award identifies an active outdoor educator who has volunteered time to our organization through their participation on the Board of Directors, editorial support of Pathways, conference organization or other similar contribution.*

*The Honourary Life Membership Award recognizes the substantial and lasting contributions of long-time and esteemed*

*members of COEO who are a vital part of its traditions and successes. Candidates for this award should meet the following criteria: 10 or more years of distinguished service in the field of outdoor education; held leadership positions within COEO for several years; nominated by three COEO members.*

*The Dorothy Walter Award for Leadership was created in 1986 to give recognition to an individual who, like Dorothy Walter herself, has shown an outstanding commitment to the development of leadership qualities in Ontario youth and through outdoor education.*

*The Robin Dennis Award was created in tribute to Robin Dennis, one of the founders of Ontario outdoor education in the 1950s and 1960s. It is presented to an individual or outdoor education program or facility that has made an outstanding contribution to the promotion and development of outdoor education in the province.*

*The Amethyst Award, in memory of Brent Dysart, is presented to an emerging professional new to the field of outdoor education. This award recognizes individual potential in those beginning a career. The recipient of the Amethyst Award receives a complimentary one-year membership to COEO and free admittance to the annual fall conference.*

COEO relies on its members to nominate deserving candidates. Members are encouraged to put forward the names of deserving candidates for awards. Nominations should include the following:

- Name and contact information for nominator
- Name and contact information for nominee
- Award category
- Summary of achievements related to award criteria

Nomination forms can also be downloaded from the COEO website. All nominations should be sent to the current COEO Past President: Zabe MacEachren, maceache@queensu.ca.





## The Role of *Making the Stuff of Life* in Place-Based Education

By Zabe MacEachren

Homes and classrooms today are full of items that give no clue as to their origin or that of their components. Plastic packaged goods comprise a mixture of multiple-sourced materials. As a result, such items appear to be global in origin, not from any one place. Goods such as cell phones, computers and even school desks seem to be the result of manufacturing processes that fail to reflect an actual place, a seed of genesis so that understanding can take root. Indeed, stuff today is such a conglomerate of materials that even the idea of a source of origin remains elusive. If we live in an environment defined by these items it does not seem strange that so much dialogue about attention deficit disorders, hyperactivity and obesity resounds in modern society, including educational settings. Surrounding ourselves with synthetic provenance limits and undercuts the understanding of our place and ecosystem. As a result, our idle hands have little means to comprehend the world and come to know the land through meaningful playing such as shaping a toy, let alone a functional tool for daily use. This article examines the role material culture and making items can serve in establishing a sense of place or informing place-based educational practices. It is arranged around six principles that, if used in a learning context, connect material from a place to an enhanced comprehension of a sense of place. In doing so, we can learn to build our world ourselves using the contextual meaningful familiar rather than tin tabulation of culturally bankrupt objects.

It was just a few generations ago that everything in a home (or classroom) could be replicated by its occupants. Without television people spent evenings carving wood gathered in their back 40 and knitting wool from sheep they had raised since birth. The experience of making the items used in their daily lives shaped their sense of the place in which they lived and fostered a sense of connection with and dependency upon that place. Local forests were

understood by the type of trees growing there and each species' unique features suitable for making homes, furniture, tools and so on. Local tree species were also known for the qualities they offered when cooking, curing or smoking various foods. The ground was understood for its chemical makeup in terms of which soil was best suited to growing root crops or corn, and which was best for pasture, not to mention as a source of clay for cookware and minerals that could be mined to be used for colour glazes, fertilizers and more.

As outdoor educators I think it is important to ask what practical skills students require for good living and to offer students the opportunity to learn these skills in the context of an actual setting. Such experiences should embed them in a context of an outdoor place.

In Lee Marcle's article on education, handmade items that allowed people to live in a place well are referred to as the "stuff of life." Marcle outlines how it is the actual skill of making the stuff of life that is important in education, rather than the abstract ideology in which higher education takes pride (1996, p. 88). This distinction is important to emphasize as the experience of making functional items required to live provides a critical understanding of the role place plays in one's living, and specifically the places that provide the "raw material" for the making process. Learning to extract and handle the raw material of living can result in a critical educational experience that supports the understanding of how to sustainably live well in a place.

A critical component in making the stuff of life includes shaping and making practical items like tools, food, shelter and clothing. Contemporary place-based educational practices frequently emphasize connecting children with their food through gardening activities (Stone, Barlow and Capra, 2005; Sobel, 2004, 2008), but this article emphasizes

that making practical items from local material is also a valuable way to begin learning about the place where one lives. Tools are required to plant a garden, so beginning with an exploration of how to make a suitable digging stick may be just as important as planting a seed in a plastic cup. Gardening is a wonderful experience. We all like to eat our homegrown produce, but understanding how to make durable gardening tools is an integral part of the totality and equally informative, and such a task can immediately involve a person with examining place in an intimate and practical manner. Learning to design and make practical items, just like acquiring food, creates a fundamental way of addressing the world because making the stuff of life requires a very hands-on, sensory way of knowing the materials one uses and the places the material originates. Making the stuff of life shows us the role our opposable thumbs have held in regard to our survival in specific regions because each region offers various materials and thereby requires various handwork skills and knowledgeable designs adapted to both local material and terrain. What follows are some guiding principles that can be used to enrich the context of place during making experiences focused upon the stuff of life.

## 1. Learn to utilize local material for making functional items

The spoon is the first tool most people learn to handle as a young child. Learning to make a spoon in one's youth ought to be considered a mandatory educational activity and serve as an appropriate beginning to examine the connection between our material world and place-based curricula. Walk out into a nearby natural area, look around and think about what material is available to use and might be suitable for spoon making. In some parts of the world cutting bamboo or attaching a coconut shell to a stick might provide a readily accessible spoon. I once observed an Anishinabe elder create a workable spoon out of folded birch bark in a few minutes. Bamboo, coconut shell and birch bark all are very place-specific materials. For a durable carved

spoon, various local tree species will provide different types of wood and correspondingly different results. I have witnessed numerous teacher candidates carving a spoon out of an evergreen branch only later to realize that coniferous trees leave some unique and often undesirable tastes in the mouth. The relative ease of carving and the resulting blisters earned in the process emphasize that paying attention to what local species are considered hard and soft woods is fruitful. To eliminate the possibility that applying one's effort and creativity will only result in producing a cracked and thus useless spoon, it helps to have knowledge of the local atmospheric humidity and the way in which this will impact how spoons carved with green wood are best dried.

The local species that will provide the most suitable working material for an item differ from region to region; students should become familiar with handling material available in their specific bio-region. Understanding local materials makes the substitution of material from other areas more meaningful by establishing a context for understanding what is exotic, acknowledging concerns about introduced species, and questioning the ecological footprint resulting from the use of inexpensive, possibly exploitatively sourced, foreign material. Lacking a familiarity with local material may leave a person to never question the reality and implications of going to a big-box store to purchase wood or other supplies, often from distant lands, or to consider the social and economic factors that allow foreign material to be cheaper. An appreciation for local material is best developed by intimately handling the material in the region in which it was gathered in order to make a utilitarian item to be used in the same region. Frequently passing the stump of a tree utilized for



carving projects provides rich opportunities for reflecting on the ways a place supports one's personal life. The handling of local material when making functional items is fundamental to developing a sense of place through the material world.

## 2. Understanding the way design is dependent upon and derived from bio-landscapes

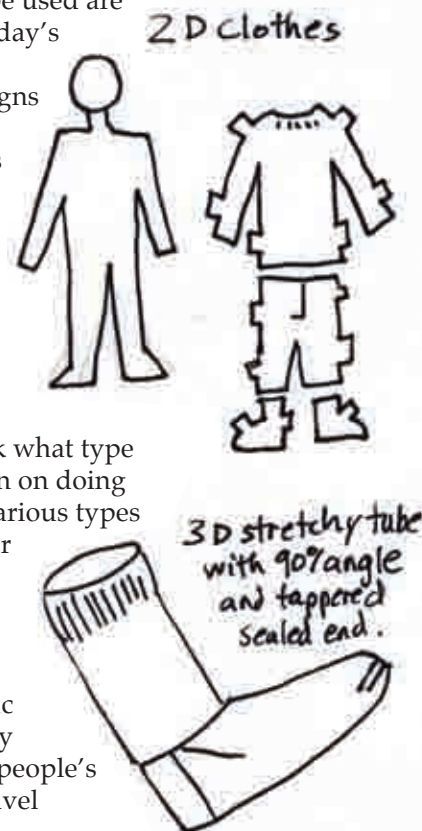
The emphasis in today's society on profit and innovation means that many people have ceased to recognize the value in basic forms and designs of the past. All too frequently people set expectations for themselves of creating and improving upon old standard practices that have served the test of time before they even understand the reasons these standard practices worked (Langsner, 1995, p. 61). It may seem that in these times of rapid technological development survival may be based upon the need for quick adaptation and changes, but the value of why traditional practices served their generation should not be readily ignored or forgotten. Changes may best only be encountered at the rate of growth of local plant species. According to Coperthwaite, "Each group of people in the world is a repository of folk knowledge that is their inheritance from previous generations. Such knowledge is a valuable resource for all of humanity. Whether this be knowledge of child care, gardening, human relations, or tool design, such knowledge needs to be gathered and studied for its value . . ." (2002, p. 14). Place-based educators require curricula that address the maintenance of folk knowledge residing in the practical wisdom of people. People have been well served by specific designs as manifested in their material folk culture. If true knowledge of place is to be had, design features must be understood in part by the linkage to specific bioregions. To illustrate this type of knowledge, recall the maps that link various designs for snowshoes or canoe/boat shapes with different Indigenous groups residing in regions of Canada. The degree to which we can readily explain the reasons for each different design, or its fit with a corresponding landscape feature,

represents our knowledge or lack thereof of the connection between design and place.

A place-based educator can use these maps of material culture to examine why such different designs arose in different cultures and specifically how regional designs were reflective of local landscape and weather conditions. For instance, an upturned snowshoe tip works well in northwestern Ontario where much of the winter lake travel condition involves a crust of snow. The upturned toe design allows a person in this region to ride above the snow crust with each step. In contrast, the same upturned tip would be a hindrance in the Algonquin Park region because it would limit the wearer's ability to climb the numerous slopes. Regions where slush is a common lake occurrence means a traveler would benefit most from a snowshoe weave with wide holes in its rawhide lacing thereby allowing slush to be readily knocked off. In Eastern Canada, snow is typically dryer, and a tight weave offers ideal floatation with minimum weight. Such linkages between the design and the conditions of the locale where the item is destined to be used are frequently lost in today's consumer market.

Advertising campaigns are designed to benefit shareholders as they incorporate large-scale generalizations and thus ignore regional differences and weather patterns.

Today, a good sales person will ask what type of canoeing you plan on doing before suggesting various types of boats designed for whitewater, easy portaging, rocky bottom and your wallet size. The promotion of specific canoe designs is only possible because of people's general ability to travel



anywhere to fulfill their canoeing preference. If we were limited to only paddling in our nearby water tributaries, our canoe choices would be different. An indigenous mindset to making a boat would include examining the designs ancestors used and understanding why such designs best suited local paddling conditions. Attending to and examining the reasons for various folk designs served as a maker's introduction to his/her ancestors' wisdom in regards to local travel conditions and the limitations of local material in fashioning tools that fulfilled daily needs.

Which brings us to this point: Designs can be influenced by local conditions or the limitations of local materials. To illustrate, the following question can be asked: Why did Scandinavian countries develop ways to use birch bark that differ so much from those of First Nations people in North America? Place-based educators should aid students to understand the link between design and bio-landscape before concentrating on innovative new ideas. Innovation is important, but even in today's world of global markets there are many occasions when local markets and local materials provide the best personal satisfaction because they reflect a person's awareness and desire to intimately fit with a place.

**3. Seek to harvest materials in a sustainable manner**

The decision to use local materials when making items provides a firsthand opportunity to foster an understanding of sustainability. Frequently, the local harvesting of material from an area allows a person to realize the impact of the process on the environment. For example, a basket maker needs to learn the growth rates of various plant species in order to determine the frequency with which s/he can harvest material from the source. Returning to the site in which a tree was cut to make

something provides the opportunity to observe the stump's composition rate and the rate at which saplings take advantage of the new patch of sunlight in the changing forest canopy. It is tantamount that educational experiences involve returning to the same place materials were harvested in order to understand growth rates and limitations required in establishing practices and boundaries for sustainable living. Purchasing all items in a home versus making them oneself shields a person from embodying and truly understanding that actions create an impact on the land. Removing plants and animals from a local area in order to make the stuff of life can allow one to develop a sense of care and compassion, especially when this practice is well mentored. The result can be that plants and animals are harvested humanely, with minimal impact and a sense of care for the bio-landscape upon which the harvester depends.



North America



Scandinavia



Scandinavia



North America

Birch bark Storage

Pack Baskets

**4. Examine the diverse seasonal influences on the creative process**

Multiculturalism has introduced many wonderful new rituals and practices to contemporary Canadian society. However, all too often the reasons diverse practices of making originated in specific regions of the world are forgotten or downplayed. Today's world of instant mobility and indoor central heating and cooling makes it easy to forget that different places have different seasonal cycles that impact the availability of different materials and the resulting practices for making things. Traditionally, making activities frequently followed seasonal and regional cycles on a calendar. As every maple sugar tapper knows there is a link between places (where maple trees grow) and seasonal cycles (the first few weeks of warm days and cold nights) that play a role in determining daily activities. Birch bark can only be peeled from trees in the spring, which meant that in former times canoe building and basket making was dependent upon a late spring outing to a local birch

grove to collect supplies for the rest of the year.

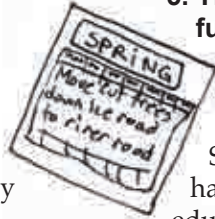
Place-based educator, determining the parameters of a seasonal calendar for a involves many different types of events and activities.

Various making practices shape a seasonal calendar in contrast with the Gregorian calendar's arbitrary monthly divisions. For nomadic people it was difficult to determine solstice dates exactly because the sun rise and set locations on the horizon were experienced differently in different locations. In Northern countries the freezing and thawing of the nearest lake served as a more accessible seasonal event and was an anchor for determining a meaningful calendar of local events. Ice and open water involves differing means of travel and influenced where and when local material could be transported. The white pine logging industry was based on using the spring ice break-up and the consequent high water levels allowed the floating of large timber.

This seasonal event was a significant mark on their place-based calendar. In a classroom participating in a Monarch butterfly curriculum, a corresponding winter activity that involves making rope with fiber from the remaining milkweed plant stems could be noted on a calendar. As is the case with flax, hemp and other fibrous plants, there is an optimum time when the fibers in the dry stalks have not rotted so much as to weaken the fiber, yet still allow the fiber to be separated from the stalk.

One interesting craft making practice that reflects a specific sense of place(s) is the traditional Inuit belief that caribou skins should only be sewn into clothing while on land. This practice seems to honour both a dependency on the animal and the place the animal lives. Caribou hides could only be worked on land and sealskins were only to be worked in winter when life was based upon sea-ice (Sperry, 2005 p. 41). Recognizing a place's unique association with seasons and

corresponding seasonal making activities is easily forgotten today. By re-establishing the link between making events and seasonal cycles, place-dependent routines can be noted on our calendars and used as maps to aid us in exploring place-based seasonal occurrences.



### 5. The role of dimensional progression in functional expression (Experience the challenges of 2D and 3D landscape work)

Since paper was developed and has become readily accessible as an educational medium (supporting reading, writing and drawing), the experience of handling, learning and thinking in two dimensions has taken preference over the handling and manipulating of three - dimensional objects. Working in three, versus two, dimensions is much more challenging, yet this distinction is seldom acknowledged in post-modern curricula that is very much based on paper-oriented tasks and cognitive development. Ask yourself which offers a more stimulating educational experience: first, reading the directions for knitting socks and their history; two, drawing an illustration of socks; three, recording a pattern for turning two-dimensional fabric into a right angle tube, with one end sealed for your toes; or, four, demonstrating that you can knit socks by first twisting wool fiber into long strands by spinning and then using your two hands to manipulate four wooden sticks into continuous interlocking loops of yarn that make a stretchy tube shape with a 90 degree angle that fits your foot. Making the stuff of life requires a demonstration of knowledge that arises from an articulation of one's body in conjunction with earth materials in order to produce what is more often than not a functional three-dimensional form. Places are seldom flat like paper and similarly clothing our three dimensional bodies well takes a lot of design understanding.

Experiences are multi-dimensional, yet many educational experiences are limited to two-dimensional paper representations. A

sense of a place, like an ecosystem, requires perception and reflection of many angles and dimensions. Working with three-dimensional forms through making experiences provides stimulating cognitive experiences that encourage a natural comprehension of multiple dimensions. Working with plant materials from a place directly requires careful observation of the stuff of places that can lead to an understanding of the connection between complex life patterns. The opposing branch pattern of a tree creates a specific wood grain pattern that can be used to create strong joints in carpentry projects. In Waldorf education students are encouraged to touch and handle various forms of spoons and scoops in order to determine what handle form best serves the desired action. A fit between hand, action and material is ultimately sought in tasks like scooping or stirring (Martin, 1999, p. 58). Discussing how bird's beaks and body shapes allow them to feed on specific food in various ecosystems is a common activity at outdoor centers. Similar knowledge concerning our material world is best assimilated when our bodies are allowed to



use three-dimensional tools and costumes to replicate the forms of others (nut cracker and straw to correspond with thick- and long-beaked birds). Similar experiential activities can be used to highlight the ways a person's body is a functional, multi-dimensional tool.

Sometimes I discuss with teacher candidates the bodily knowledge required to make things in the field without a workbench, table or clamp. Such knowledge invites experiments with using our body in conjunction with local trees to hold, pry and put pressure on the wood we might need to shape. Confining place-based education to activities emphasizing only two dimensions is like drawing a map on paper and expecting it to accurately describe our home. Such a map can serve as a simplistic

representation but its limitations should also be recognized. As we do not live two-dimensional lives in two-dimensional places a map can hardly be considered accurate. Like clothing, paper maps are simply two-dimensional coverings that have been adjusted into multi-dimensional forms. A variety of clothing is required to keep our body comfortable during all the seasons of a place. Correspondingly educational practices, of a place, need to offer multi-dimensional experiences in order to aid us in adapting our common practices with material culture to fit daily life in a place.

## 6. Encourage place-based iconography

To counter-balance the onslaught of multinational corporations' media campaigns, students should be encouraged to develop their own slogans of a place-based iconography. A heavy wool sweater with a palm tree decoration on it is just as bizarre as wearing the corporate global symbol of NIKE on a handmade fringe leather jacket. Similarly, placing pictures of teddy bears and Disney figures on children's clothing should be questioned for its manner of distorting and limiting their understanding of real bears and local places. Students can benefit by focusing their ability to be aware of local natural features to the extent they can truly determine what features distinguish their place from other places. These distinctions can then be used to establish an appropriate iconography of a place. School mascots should be of animals or plants that live nearby (or historically lived in the area.) Just like young children should not be introduced to devastating environmental issues, they ought not be introduced and encouraged to study the mega fauna of distant lands before they know the fauna of their own place.

Pride, respect and love for one's place will not develop without a deep awareness of that place and the connection that comes from representing that place in icons that reflect local bio-landscape. Sometimes craft patterns names reflect a local natural feature. It can be a very engaging experience to connect natural features into artistic patterns that are then used to develop a sense of

identity that serves to blend self with a place. For instance, the Anishinabe people created a ribbon design that they called the Otter track. The diamond patterns of this design mimics the short hops and then long slide track that otters leave when travelling down a frozen lake. Exercises that involve simplifying natural forms, like repeating five green radiating lines to mimic white pine needles, can evoke a pleasing familiarity or fondness for this tree and constitute an activity that can be used to develop personal marks that can substitute for signatures. Limiting exposure to both written and global icons while establishing boundaries that encourage an awareness of local landmarks serves as a uniquely, creative practical lesson for place-based educators.

### Conclusion

Education that enriches our sense of place will flourish when curriculum activities involve making the stuff of life from the material available in the very places we live. By recognizing and then fulfilling the need to make the practical items of daily life, the experiences that focus on the forms and designs that have served our ancestors so well can once again become common knowledge. Gathering material in an appropriate fashion fosters an understanding of place-based limitations and encourages the development of sustainable practices suited to a specific locale. Awareness of seasonal patterns and the way they influence practices and designs heightens a person's sensation of being of and from a place because totality and intimate experience is appreciated and acknowledged every time made items are utilized. Handling tangible forms from various perspectives adds multi-dimensional qualities and complexity to our comprehension and best reflect human's unique relationship with the land and the skills made possible by our physiology (such as opposable thumbs.) Unique landscape features help develop a sense of pride and honour in the local landscape, especially when regional iconography takes precedent over global icons. In our quest to connect students with places and foster a sense of community that includes the local

ecosystem, it is critical that we acknowledge that humans need material things in order to live meaningfully in this world. These material things are the very stuff of life. As students examine what practices and materials are involved in making the stuff of life, they become fulfilled and contextually empowered by understanding, designing and ultimately making things in a way that supports life as they have come to recognize it in a place. The bounty of sustainable resources that our place has to offer for making can be closely partnered with an awareness of the limitations that must be imposed when harvesting things. This awareness can become part of our learning and teaching about ways to best support life in a place. Making the stuff of life is like asking a guide to take us to the place of understanding—to immerse us in the land we depend upon to live.

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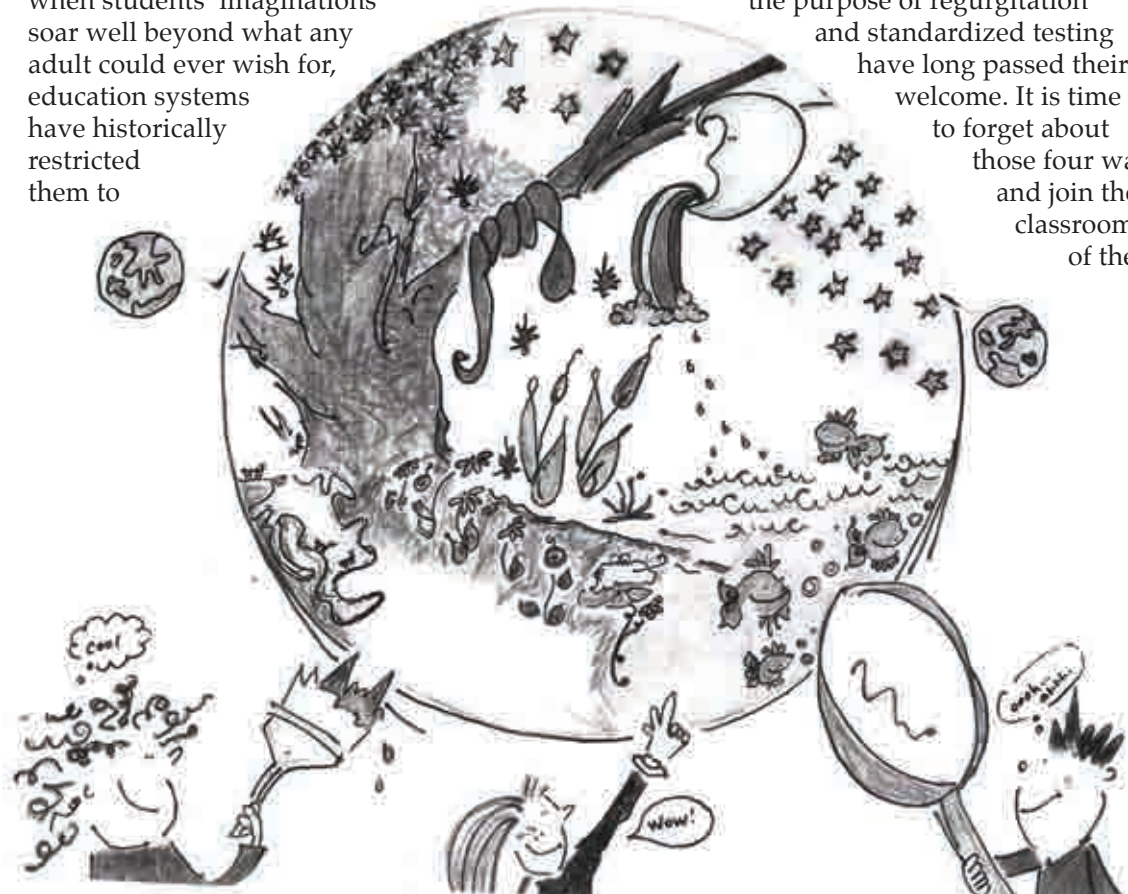
## Discovering Sense of Place: Application through Education

By P.J. Aucoin

Over the past three decades, environmental issues have been on the global forefront and continue to affect our daily lives. Although the need for environmental attention is at an all-time high, outdoor and environmental education (OEE) plays an insufficient role in our school systems. Its minimal representation in curriculum is not due to the shortage of information or resources but instead the lack of acknowledgement it has received in fostering the development of the whole child. During the late 20 and early 21 centuries, traditional education has predominantly been focused around teacher-centred instruction and a curriculum segregated into subjects of narrow-minded focus. This divide has not only drawn a line in Ontario Ministry of Education-developed handbooks but also at the classroom door. In a period of youth when students' imaginations soar well beyond what any adult could ever wish for, education systems have historically restricted them to

evenly divided rows and enabled diminutive opportunity for experience.

As technology continues to contribute to advancements in every sector of our modern world, there is a dire need for education to find its way back to its roots. In achieving this, the ministry, school board members, principals, teachers and parents need to acknowledge the importance of experiential education and creating a sense of place for students during this important developmental stage of their lives. Sense of place can have many individualized meanings; common goals relate to the basics of individuals' developed relationships and understanding with nature, the environment, wildlife, community, and, most importantly, each other. To this I suggest the days of endless textbook work, learning for the purpose of regurgitation and standardized testing have long passed their welcome. It is time to forget about those four walls and join the classroom of the





future—the outdoors. The emergence of an OEE program in elementary curriculum would be ideal for those who study in the field, but, taking a step back, this article will discuss a new direction for teaching methodologies, the importance of creating sense of place, and the potential in working with the traditional curriculum through integration of environmental and outdoor education.

American philosopher John Dewey (1938) wrote:

What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win the ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul: loses his appreciation of things worth while, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desires to apply what he has learned and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur? (p. 49)

Dewey's (1938) book, *Experience Based Education*, outlines the need for a revised outlook on education within the Western world; an education system where students are removed from their desks and become an active part of the learning experience. Through philosophies and models such as Kolb's (1983) "experiential learning cycle," we begin to acknowledge the direction in which integrated education should go to most benefit upcoming generations of students. Adopting these theories and models is the Child Study Laboratory in Toronto, Ontario. A program implemented through a partnership with the University of Toronto, it is based on the following philosophy of education:

Savouring information instead of swallowing it whole, digesting it instead of regurgitating it before its intrinsic nourishment can make itself felt. . .exploring something deeply and thoroughly, learning how to learn, how to ask questions, how to understand, how to apply that understanding to

other areas of study. (Mitchell, 2003, p. F1)

The Child Study Laboratory's philosophy portrays the whole-child approach that many, such as Dewey and Kolb, suggest should be implemented in traditional elementary schools. As schools like this continue to be the testing group for the majority, it is necessary to acknowledge the effect of cross-curriculum integration and student-based learning where the means to assessment is not a standardized test but, rather, emphasis on the development of understanding and knowledge.

### **Integration of Environmental and Outdoor Education into Elementary Curriculum**

Subjects within curriculum are often extremely topic-specific and rarely discuss cross-curricular integration let alone integration with regards to the outdoors. This section discusses the opportunities to create sense of place within traditional curriculum using the outdoors as a medium to foster learning and reunite current and future generations with the outdoors through integrated education.

#### **1. Social Sciences**

Growing up in Southern Ontario, one of my most memorable and beneficial experiences came within an integrated program of outdoor education and social science. In the small town of Port Rowan sits the heritage conservation area of Backus Mills. Integrating the outdoors and a re-enactment of the War of 1812, my classmates and I took on the roles of the British and American troops, learning about weapons and the lifestyles that required us to forage for food and create soup out of whatever items each student brought. Protecting our domain and strategizing to capture the flag of the opposition created a simulated experience of the soldiers during the War of 1812. Using the outdoors and environment, we were subconsciously developing a sense of place with our surroundings, developing an understanding of the usefulness, beauty, and appreciation for the outdoors; to this

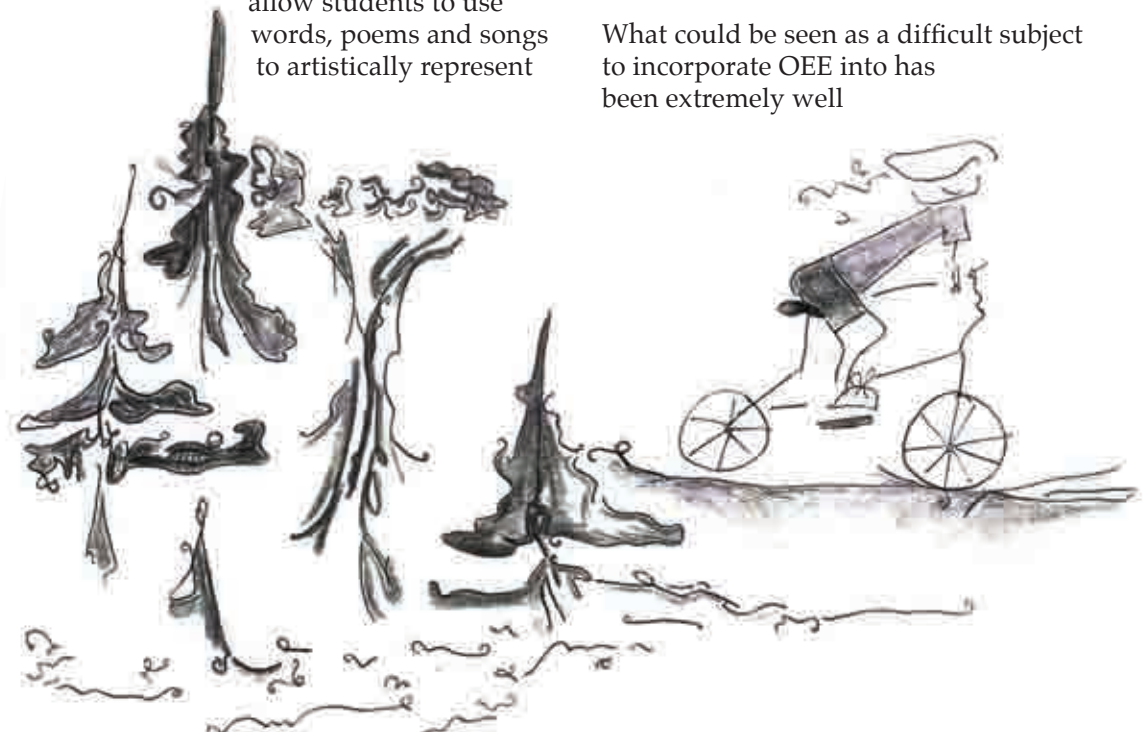
day this remains ingrained in my memory. Through role-playing we also became active learners in understanding what it was like to be a soldier relying on the outdoors for survival. Almost ten years have passed since this memorable field trip, and, although I remember very little from my elementary school days, I can still recall the major events of the War of 1812, and often think of that trip as the starting point to my love for the outdoors.

Using re-enactments, role-playing or adventure-based activities in the outdoors allows for geographical, historical and environmental issues to become involved in students' learning, which, in turn, allows them to open their minds and divulge what they have learned in whichever way they find suitable. Enabling students to use their imaginations and create their own sense of place allows them the opportunity to make connections to their material, creating a student-centred approach to learning, which I believe is extremely beneficial at all ages.

## 2. Arts and Language

Integrating the Arts and Language with OEE allows for students to create expressive and developmental understandings. Through journaling, reflection, observation and discussion, the Arts and Language subjects

allow students to use words, poems and songs to artistically represent



their experiences in nature. An example of this is in a case study by Bennion and Olsen (2002) where they explain the language development and OEE integrated process:

After coming down a steep slick-rock trail and wading through water narrows, we stopped under a natural amphitheater and wrote in journals. We then read from the journals and discussed what happened. This moved the experience beyond mere physical exercise and rush of adrenaline, to the realm of self-exploration, consideration of values, as well as emotional and mental growth. Close contact with the writing teacher produces a better work, as pre-writing experience teaches them the complete composing process. (p. 244)

This exploration process leads students to achieve sense of place within the outdoors and reflect on their experiences while developing literary devices. OEE integration allows students to capture their own perceived sense of place and, through self-expression, whether it be paintings, drawings, dances or plays, to make connections with the environment as a form of art.

## 3. Science and Technology

What could be seen as a difficult subject to incorporate OEE into has been extremely well

developed and integrated in the current Ontario Ministry of Education Curriculum for Science and Technology (2007). The ministry has not only adopted an environmental section into their curriculum design but expresses the importance of creating sense of place within students' understanding. This portion of science and technology exposes issues that students will face on a daily basis with regards to environmental justice in protecting our environment. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) states:

Throughout the grades and strands, teachers have opportunities to take students out of the classroom and into the world beyond the school, to observe, explore, and investigate. One effective way to approach environmental literacy is through examining critical inquiry questions related to students' sense of place, to the impact of human activity on the environment, and/or to systems thinking. (p. 35)

This curricular handbook thoroughly explains the importance of sense of place and environmental integration. It further discusses the practical application concerning issues surrounding the students' everyday lives in order to preserve and maintain healthy living standards for the future (Ontario Ministry of Education, p. 36). These topics may seem somewhat heavy for students ranging from the ages of 6 to 11, but, using developmental teaching models and proper discussion, students can slowly begin to develop increased environmental awareness.

#### 4. Health and Physical Education (HPE)

This subject has for a long time used the outdoors as a setting for lessons and program planning, but it has undergone immense change over the past five years. Major changes have come in the form of a new child-centred approach labelled Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU). Stepping aside from sport-based Physical Education, TGfU allows new avenues for developmental

learning as teachers who are required to adopt the new curriculum try and create new lesson plans and course programming. Elementary HPE programs based around modified orienteering, scavenger hunts, nature adventures or environmental awareness lessons provide extremely valuable avenues in creating a sense of place and outdoor education for students.

The second opportunity for OEE and HPE integration is the introduction to the Ontario Ministry of Education's (2005) policy of Daily Physical Activity (DPA) in elementary schools. As Ontario Physical Health Educators Associations (OPHEA) point out, DPA is by no means limited to classroom activities. In their "Take it Outside! Practical Strategies for Being Active Outside" (OPHEA, 2009) article, they discuss the importance and opportunity DPA has to take students out of a cooped-up classroom and adventure to the outdoors, providing a wider range of physical activities that can be implemented outside of a school setting. Whether this takes the form of a nature walk or just simply playing games in the outdoors, DPA has the ability to apply the overall goal of OEE in giving students a sense of place. Students can unmindfully create a relationship with the outdoors using both unorganized and organized play as a tool in recognizing the beneficial opportunities the outdoors provides in their daily lives. (See also Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010.)

#### Future Outlook

The integration of OEE and the use of student-based learning do not come without challenges. Current teacher-based learning has developed the notion within our society that assessment should result in a formal grade, leading parents to track progress in terms of the marks students bring home. Whether it is a grade or a piece of artwork on the refrigerator, parents seem to have obtained the idea of an "end product" in achieving an overall understanding of lessons taught. This, of course, does not fit with the case for student-centred education. Kolb's (1983) "experiential learning cycle" gives reference to the ongoing learning that

may take weeks or months for students to fully grasp. The idea of an increased developmental process that requires time to learn and be revisited in order to apply across context has to be acknowledged and understood in the schools and homes of the students in order for longitudinal successes to be realized.

Marie Von Ebner-Eschenbach once stated, "In youth we learn, in age we understand." This quotation encapsulates the objectives of experiential-integrated outdoor education. Sense of place is not specifically about a single lesson, or experience, but instead about building relationships and understanding one's surroundings. Curriculum that integrates outdoor and environmental education not only opens the door for greater understanding but also allows students to develop an attachment to the environment that will hopefully result in raised awareness and action to preserve this environment in its natural forms. The concept of sense of place is not a singularly driven event but an overall opportunity for students to make connections and gain relationships with the environment around them. Providing a chance to obtain a sense of place within educational settings encourages environmental and place-based thinking over a broad context of subject areas, allowing students to make connections and apply these connections back to their daily lives. Experiential learning becomes a tool in developing social relationships, transferable skills and knowledge, and environmental awareness, and removes students from the confinement of their desks or classrooms to obtain experience that no textbook or test could ever achieve.

A lot of work is yet to be done with regards to student-centred education reform and integration of outdoor and environmental education, but, with increased understanding of the benefits they provide, the possibilities are endless and exciting. In order to "save" nature we have to first learn how to love it, and developing future generations into environmental thinkers should be a vital goal of our education systems in order to preserve and appreciate that which is all around us.

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# Remembering the Roots of Place Meanings for Place-Based Outdoor Education

By Garrett Hutson

*By acknowledging such links between the inner, psychological world and the perceptual terrain that surrounds us, we begin to turn inside out, loosening the psyche from its confinement within a strictly human sphere, freeing sentience to return to the sensible world that contains us.*

—Abram, 1996, p. 262

## Introduction

Place-based education seeks to connect learners to local environments through a variety of strategies that increase environmental awareness and connectedness to particular parts of the world (Sobel, 2004). The concept of place meanings encompasses the subjective ways people construct meaning through their experiences with an array of settings (Gustafson, 2001; Manzo, 2005). Place meanings are personal, often with a human focus, and are open to interpretation, while place-based education tends to be framed more concretely within the particulars of local environments. In this article, I will argue that these two concepts can work together to broaden thinking around “place” as it relates to outdoor education pedagogy (Cosgriff, 2008). The purpose of this paper is to promote the utilization of place meanings within approaches to place-based outdoor education by (1) revisiting some of the conceptual and historical underpinnings of place-based education and place meanings to show similarities and differences between the concepts and (2) presenting a synthesis of place meanings within place-based theory to inspire a useful approach to doing place-based outdoor education.

## Place-Based Education: A New Localism

Place-based education has been referred to as being part of a “new localism” (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008, p. xii) movement within globalized societies in response to aspects of the modern world that break down the building and sustaining of local communities

and landscapes. Place-based sentiments do not necessarily reject a capitalistic society or practices; instead, they seek to honour the past, and enhance current and future community life. Additionally, place-based educational strategies aim to more intentionally incorporate all aspects of education into community life. Place-based educational theorists seek to re-vision all educational practices with a focus on the needs of local communities/ environments as a primary educational objective at all levels of schooling (2008). Overall, for the purposes of this paper, place-based education can be thought of as a “community-based effort to reconnect the process of education, enculturation, and human development to the well-being of community life” (2008, p. xvi). This definition of place-based education encompasses the importance of a new localism while highlighting education as a means to create and sustain vibrant and healthy communities. Outdoor educators are in a unique position to help achieve some of these place-based goals.

For instance, place-based education has been described as a necessary precursor to solving modern social and environmental challenges (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008). Specifically, Gruenewald and Smith suggested that in order to address these challenges, people must globally resist

ideas and forces that allow for the privileging of some people and the oppression of others—human and other than-human. At other times, place consciousness means learning how to reinhabit our communities and regions in ways that allow for sustainable relationships now and in the long run. (p. ix)

The focus of this paper is on the latter, through addressing the possibility of helping others learn how to reinhabit place by combining place-based educational ideals

with place meanings in order to explore how sustainable person-place relationships might be more explicitly nurtured in outdoor education contexts.

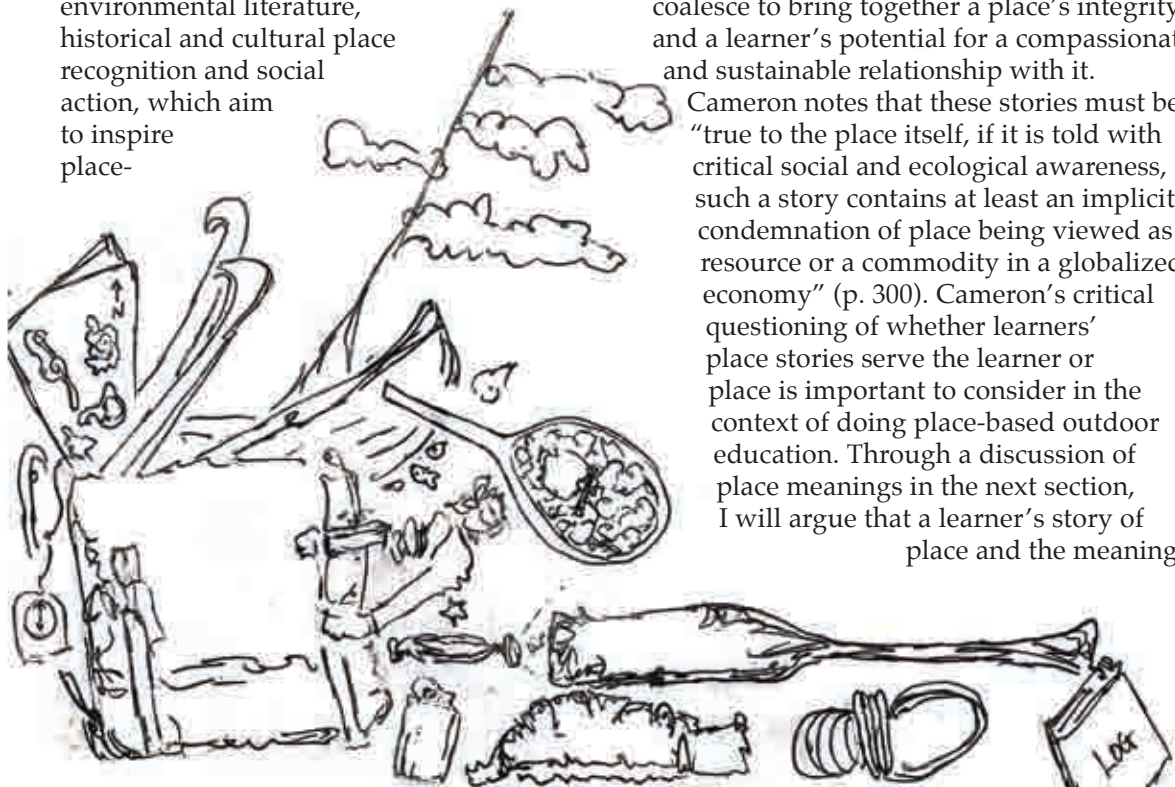
Gruenewald and Smith (2008, p. xix) posed important questions about how to do place-based education, including: "What educational forms promote care for places? What does it take to conserve, restore, and create ways of being that serve people and places? What does it take to transform those ways of being that harm people and places?" As I will argue later, place meanings have the potential to answer some of these questions. At the heart of place-based education is the theme of commitment to a community/region, its history and its future. Ideally, approaches to place-based education address each of these elements in a way that honours the needs of people and community (including the biotic community) as one entity in a reciprocal relationship between people and a place (Orr, 1992).

Many other educators have successfully utilized place-based ideals in practice. Cameron (2003) brings together student field experiences with critical thinking, environmental literature, historical and cultural place recognition and social action, which aim to inspire place-

based educational ideals. In Australia, Cameron (2008) teaches university students to be aware of the places around them in conjunction with their own thought processes and responses to those locations. He supports learners in their own human-centred development and responsiveness while honouring the authenticity of the place, its processes, history, features and problems.

Furthermore, Cameron (2008) facilitates place-based education by encouraging his learners to track the stories of place from both individualized perspectives and place stories that unfolded apart from the learner's experience. Cameron asks his learners to critically question themselves during this process as to "whether the story is in the service of the place, or whether the place is only in service to the story they are constructing" (p. 299). He cites examples of students becoming aware of the loss of indigenous stories within a landscape as a successful use of place-based educational ideals. Moreover, Cameron suggests that if these types of place stories are retold by his students, then, the power of place-responsiveness and human responsiveness coalesce to bring together a place's integrity and a learner's potential for a compassionate and sustainable relationship with it.

Cameron notes that these stories must be "true to the place itself, if it is told with critical social and ecological awareness, such a story contains at least an implicit condemnation of place being viewed as a resource or a commodity in a globalized economy" (p. 300). Cameron's critical questioning of whether learners' place stories serve the learner or place is important to consider in the context of doing place-based outdoor education. Through a discussion of place meanings in the next section, I will argue that a learner's story of place and the meanings



they attach to it can potentially enrich relationships to place while adhering to place-based educational ideals.

### Place Meanings

Conceptually, place has been described as a centre of felt value “incarnating the experience and aspirations of people. Thus it is not only an arena for everyday life. . . [it also] provides meaning for that life” (Eyles, 1989, p. 109). Theorists have suggested feeling bonded to a setting is a principle need of being human to provide stability in personal identity and in understanding our notions of self (Casey, 2001; Eyles, 1989). Environmental psychologists Low and Altman (1992) theorized that it is the ways in which people process relationships with surrounding environments that form the meanings of attachment that are associated with places.

The often-cited Yi-Fu Tuan (1974a, 1974b, 1977) described the meaning of place through the emotional bonds people form with physical settings. Yi-Fu Tuan has been considered by many to have provided a seminal part of the foundation for many modern place theories (Hubbard, Kitchin & Valentine, 2008; Seamon, 1982). However, in the context of doing place-based outdoor education, it is noteworthy that some of Tuan’s ideas have been criticized as having too much focus on human responsiveness, with little regard for the place itself (see Malpas, 1999). In other words, it has been suggested that some of Tuan’s views of place have not necessarily been true to the places themselves but were instead locked too much in the realm of human feelings and expression. This is similar to Cameron’s (2008) concern for whether his students are acknowledging place or only their construction of it. However, I will argue that many of Tuan’s foundational ideas of place have similar themes to place-based ideals that can potentially expand possibilities of doing place-based outdoor education. Some of these important links in Tuan’s work are re-explored in the following paragraphs.

Tuan (1974b) contended the meanings of a place could be found in the expressive

symbols people use when they want to give a setting greater emotional and personal sentiment. He noted that to understand a place is also to understand the makeup of a person. He suggested that the emotions people attach to locations move the experience of a particular place to a layer of meaning beyond the practical functions that other locations carry. He elaborated on this conceptualization of place through descriptions of the perceived spirit and personality that certain locations hold for those who experience them.

Tuan described the spirit of an environment in the context of places that make themselves known to observers. Tuan’s spirit of place exhibited a sense of mystery that may compare to sensing a spirit in a cemetery, an old home or indigenous ruins. Just as a human being may attempt to make her or his spirit known to the world, Tuan (1974b) thought it possible for a place’s spirit to make itself known in a variety of forms. Tuan described the personality of a place through the uniqueness that it holds. Like human beings, Tuan felt places developed and exemplified “signatures” (p. 233) over time through applied meanings that were assigned to them. He contended that the personality of a place develops just as the personality of a child becomes recognizable to a parent. In the same way a parent watches and recognizes the personality of their child grow and change, “regions have acquired unique ‘faces’ through prolonged interaction between nature and man [or woman]” (p. 234), which Tuan thought was revealed through feelings of awe and affection.

For example, the awe of a place is exhibited through its sublime and dominating characteristics (Tuan, 1974b). Tuan might suggest that environmental features that dominate places like Niagara Falls, Algonquin Park or the Yukon Territory all have awe as part of their personality. Tuan thought that places such as these command attention due to their sheer size and dominance over their surrounding landscapes.

Conversely, Tuan thought more ordinary places elicit a deeper type of affection “in

the same sense that an old rain coat can be said to have character” (Tuan, 1974b, p. 234). Places are imbued with the character that is assigned to them by those who experience specific places over long periods of time. Places, like the old raincoat, may represent objective use and meaning that over time transforms into something comforting, dependable and nurturing with a personality that can be only understood with a history of experience.

Furthermore, Tuan (1974b) asserted that places have a spirit and personality, but it is only a sentient being that can have a sense of place through the meanings that are assigned to specific locations. Tuan (1977) suggested that to sense a place is to know it on a personal and intimate level. Tuan noted that long-term sense engagement is what creates a contextual and specific sense of place over time. On another level, Tuan and others observed that people who inhabit places for long periods assign meaning to those settings subconsciously through touch, smells, sights and sounds that leave experiential memories and emotions embedded in one’s identity (Low & Altman, 1992; Tuan, 1974b).

These embedded emotions led to Tuan’s (1974b) conceptualization of place stability as reliance on feelings of home and community consistent with the same emphasis that place-based ideals often put on embracing the local. Similarly, Tuan suggested that to travel the world would create less environmental awareness than staying in one place and getting to know it intimately over time. Tuan also posited that learning the various layers and patterns of stability of a specific setting creates deeper meaning than visiting faraway places for short periods. For Tuan, the meanings of a place are captured most powerfully through repeated exposure and rootedness in particular settings. Tuan highlighted the importance of recognizing the differences between meanings attached to places of repeated exposure and those that only hold meaning to the eye (Tuan, 1977, 1974b). Tuan (1974b) considered that differences in perception are continually forming through

emotional bonds that are being attached to a setting, both consciously and subconsciously, with the potential of transforming a setting into a field of care. While public symbols are aesthetic and pleasurable sights (Niagara Falls, for instance), often instilling awe and amazement in observers, Tuan described fields of care as eliciting more permanent emotional responses. A public spectacle might be a place that is widely known as sacred, such as a formal city garden or famous national park. Alternatively, a field of care may be better represented as a local city park or a secret swimming hole on a slow-moving river that is not dependent on “ostentatious visual symbols” (p. 238). Rather, these settings become meaningful through repeated exposure and internalization of the setting into the pattern of one’s own life over time (Lowenthal, 1961). These ideas parallel place-based ideals and are consistent with notions of bringing a new localism into the pattern of one’s life.

Tuan’s conceptualization of place meanings, through the affective domain, is presented on a continuum. This includes the public and universal symbols of places as adventurous and exciting to fields of care such as being attached to a particular place or community over time. All parts of this continuum are important to consider in the context of place-based education. Tuan’s notions of place seem clearly biased toward the human realm, but I would argue are not independent of the physical environment. Tuan’s ideas seem to create a fusion between people and their environments that together create “place.” Tuan seemed very much aware of the ways places shape the identities of people as well as the ways people shape places. Additionally, Tuan seemed to favour the particular landscape over universalistic accounts, thus demonstrating his bias and respect toward local places. Where Tuan’s ideas diverge from some place-based ideals is through his emphasis on the emotional and sensual human experience. Human experience, place meanings and the particulars of local environments seem inseparable from Tuan’s perspective. By combining Tuan’s views with the place-based educational framework highlighted



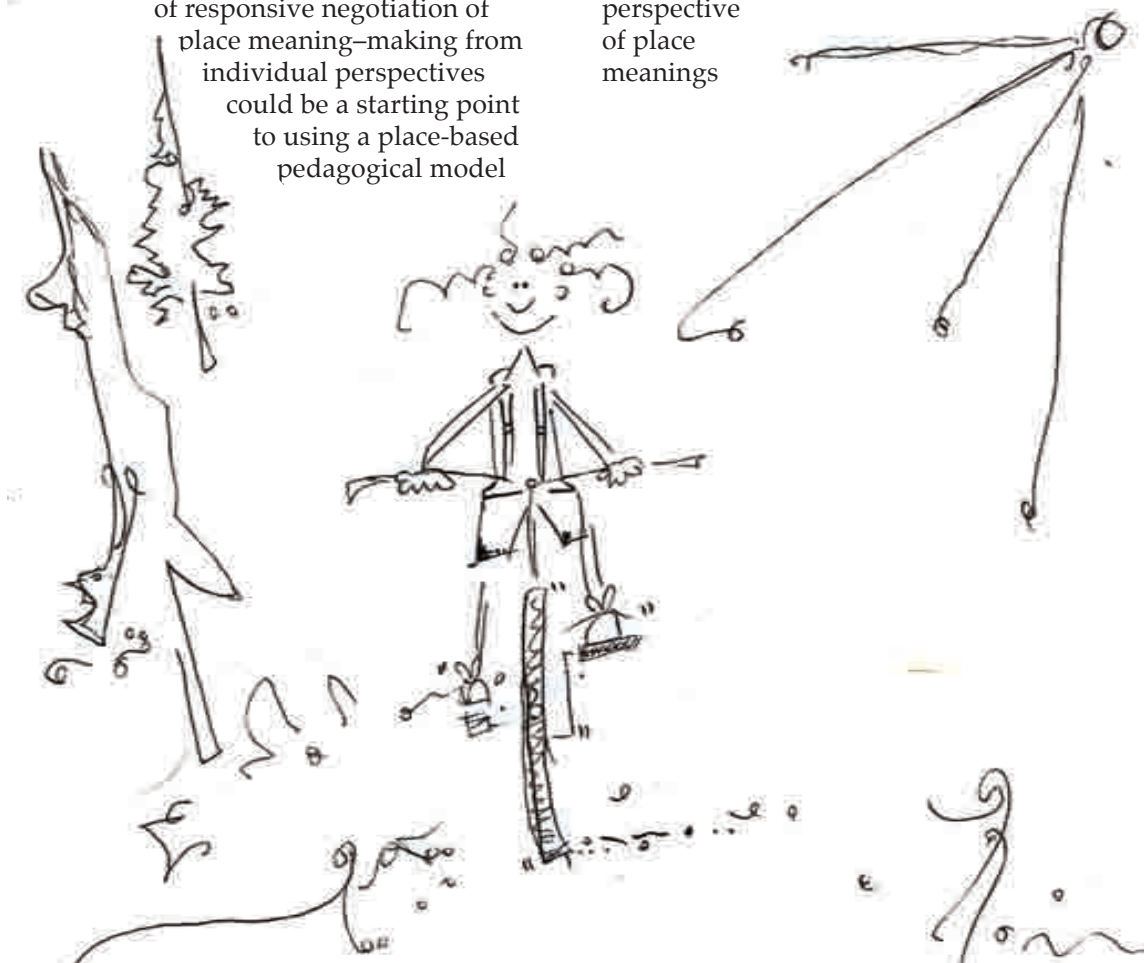
by Cameron's (2008) ideas of "re-storying" place, it seems the story of a place could become more complete and perhaps sustainable by not only honouring the place stories that have come before but also by further nurturing and exploring the current storyteller's story.

### A Synthesis of Place Meanings and Place-Based Outdoor Education

Place meanings can perhaps be used both as a way to personalize place-based outdoor education and to be critical of current practices and perspectives. Progressive thinking has already been articulated to make place-based educational ideals achievable by outdoor educators, as demonstrated by Wattchow (2006, p. 253), who suggested outdoor educators need to promote "responsive negotiation" between people and their surrounding local environments. Tapping into a process of responsive negotiation of place meaning-making from individual perspectives could be a starting point to using a place-based pedagogical model

that keeps human responses in the forefront without losing place-based ideals.

For example, as highlighted in Cosgriff (2008) and Brown (2008), it has been suggested that in New Zealand, outdoor education in schools may perhaps overemphasize adventure programs and outdoor pursuits that promote challenge and personal development with too little emphasis on the natural environment. While there has been a call to create more in-depth place-based programs that embrace place-based ideals from start to finish (see Brown, 2008), current adventure-oriented programs could also integrate place-based ideals into their outdoor experiences without abandoning adventure and challenge as their core. As suggested by Cosgriff (2008), they might be encouraged to do more to teach about place within their programmatic structures and tie adventure and challenge to the local landscape. From the perspective of place meanings



described in this paper, if adventure and challenge become reference points for learner-centred place meaning, perhaps it would be possible to re-contextualize adventure as a means to learning about and responding to the needs of local places.

For instance, while debriefing a rock climbing experience, outdoor educators could perhaps do more to discuss and highlight a learner's adventurous experience with the landscape and then connect that experience to the place's social and environmental history and challenges. Again, this might give learners a chance to connect their own stories of the landscape with those stories that came before theirs. And this may provide a reference point for positive memories, further reflection and self-critique regarding the nature and power of person-place relations. In terms of doing place-based outdoor education, this intentional connection could provide a learner a context for what a sustainable and mindful person-place relationship looks and feels like.

I do worry that this suggestion would lead to places being viewed as commodities that provide adventure and challenges for those who can afford it—negating any hope of creating sustainable place-based ethics. In other words, I worry this approach could inspire the valuing of a place only because it provides people with a service or product of some kind. However, I believe place meanings may also be able to inspire Cameron's (2008) ideas of re-storying one's experience "alongside" a place's history to potentially create a catalyst for people to see themselves more clearly within and a part of local landscapes. Critics might argue that such a leap might promote too much of an anthropocentric perspective within person-place experiences, and, to some extent, those critics are likely right.

However, I can't help but wonder about a place-based perspective that does more to embrace place meanings as well as their implications for outdoor educators who potentially can guide others toward living

in harmony with their local places in a compassionate coexistence. This coexistence might be crystallized by a mutual understanding and respect for diversity in place-meaning views in conjunction with place-based ideals that serve to protect and revere the local. The rather positive view of place meanings presented in this paper does not mean to discount other pertinent issues like critical views of place that further explore and critique politics, gender roles and class that are inherent parts of experiencing place but are often lacking in place-based literature (Morehouse, 2008). Instead, the view presented in this paper is meant to inspire further dialogue about the topic of place-based education through arguing for a more intentional integration of individualized place meanings within a place-based outdoor education context.

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## Plant Yourself on the Ground and Let Your Roots Grow: Human Development through Intimate Outdoor Experiences

By Vienna Carruthers

*I enter the forest taking a deep breath of the cool crisp air, filling my lungs and awakening them with its freshness. It is autumn now, the leaves have all changed colour and begun to fall. I absolutely adore the colours of autumn; there is something about them that just mesmerizes me. It must be the way the leaves light up the trees as if they were on fire. They look so lively and vibrant that it is wild to think that they are actually dying off.*

*I continue to follow the path, hearing the crunch of fallen leaves beneath my feet, being careful to not interrupt the songs of the birds. Curiously I follow the narrow trail, wondering if and hoping that I will find it, that perfect spot, one that I can call my own and learn to know and love. This spot will be my haven. But where? Where do I find it? How will I know if I've found it? Will it call out to me? Will I stumble*

*upon it? Will there be a sign? Or, will I just know? I want to find it. . . .*

— Author's Journal Entry,  
October 29th, 2010

Ever since I first read about the concept of a "Sit Spot" in *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature* by Young, Haas and McGown (2010), it struck a strong chord within me. I've been aware of the concept of having a special place within nature that you are connected to and return to often, but I hadn't known that there are structured lessons created to enable practice.

I don't have a sit spot of my own; I have been curious to have one, but never knew where to go to find it. Throughout my life I have felt connected to many places—some in the natural environment, some not—and had moments in many spots, but never have I had one place stick with me. Due to my on-the-go



lifestyle, I have not had the chance to seek out one of my own. I feel that I can connect with anywhere I go and make a temporary sit spot in any moment that I require one. Nevertheless, after reading about it I knew it was a feeling I couldn't ignore; a spark had been lit within me, inspiring me to explore this concept.

This book encouraged me to think back through my life and, ultimately to my childhood, and see if I have ever had a Sit Spot routine. I was saddened that there was no specific place sticking out in my mind. As a child I was not one to go off and sit by myself in nature; I would much rather be playing in it. In the summertime my sister, two neighbourhood boys and I would spend everyday outside from dawn to dusk, and our many adventures provided me with some of my favourite memories. It occurs to me that the memories I have from childhood that involve nature relate more to the idea of "place" than to a specific spot. I believe that the concepts of "place" and "sit spot" are directly interrelated.

One author writes that "his Sit Spot. . .had more to do with his development as a human being, not to mention as a naturalist, than anything else" (Young et al., p. 37). I connect with the idea that an experience can have such a large impact on a life that it enables human development and that "when you go to it your attitude overflows with childlike curiosity, discovery, and uninhibited playfulness" (p. 38). Interactions with the outdoor environment stimulate people in a way that brings out their inner child and lets their inhibitions disappear.

### Sit Spots and the Impact on Development

Can it be true that children are quickly losing their connection to nature day by day? Tom Brown Jr. (1989) put it very simply when he said,

Most children...seem to lose the yearnings of their hearts and are stripped of true awareness, adventure, excitement, and rapture of living fully. Children also lose their connection to the earth and creation as their feet are

removed from the soil and transplanted into a world of electronics, concrete, and plastic. (p. ix)

It has been shown that "children who spend. . .time outdoors are healthier than those who are indoors. . .playing in a natural environment also benefits their motor skills" (Brügge, 2007, p.122). The whole process of having a sit spot can exercise and sharpen a child's senses. It helps them to learn how to "put on the brakes" and start to really pick up on everything around them (i.e., the songs of the winds and birds, the colours of the plants and trees, and the smell of the forest). If given the opportunity, the natural world has the unique capacity to impress.

Ruth Wilson (2008) explains that young children need frequent interactions and experiences with nature that have a positive impact on them in order to give them a "sense of caring and responsibility for the natural world" (p. 6). Without those kinds of interactions, it is believed that it is more probable for them "to develop unfounded fears and prejudices about nature that impede the development of an environmental ethic" (p. 6). Those fears will get in the way of any future positive interactions that can impact their human development. In the sit spot children are given the opportunities to have moments of silence, solitude and stillness. Children are invited to explore their curiosity and the natural wonder as "nature itself invites quiet contemplation or intense fascination" (Tovey, 2007, p. 78). They are able to

get eye-to-eye with a diversity of life-forms and weather-patterns; the place where they face their fears—of bugs, being alone, of the dark—and grow past them; and the place where they meet nature as their home. (Young et al., 2010, p. 37)

"Once children learn to love and respect the Earth, they are likely to care deeply about its well-being" (Wilson, 2008, p. 14). Through these interactions children are given direct experiences and get to observe and create a full understanding of the natural world. This practice provides a great deal of cognitive, emotional and aesthetic development.

Children are naturally inspired to learn and expand their knowledge through exploration and discovery. Through spending time alone, children develop emotional stability and become “in touch” with feelings and emotions.

### Connection to Place through Sit Spot Practice and Development

One key benefit of sit spot practice is developing a connection to “place.” While sitting in a “spot,” an intimate connection to that location is created. The essential attitude of this routine is getting to know one place really well—one biome, one community of soils and plants and animals and trees and birds and weather systems—at all times of day and night, and in every season and weather (Young, Haas, McGown, 2010).

Cross (2001) examined the multiple ideas of what sense of place means across five separate fields. Collectively they were all very similar and contained the common themes of it being an emotional bond/connection/attachment that provides “understanding of and relation to the environment” (p. 1) and stimulates learning and discovery. It is this connection to place that gives a sit spot its magic. Having a sense of and connection to place gives people a strong feeling of belonging, which fulfills the constant human desire to belong somewhere (Cross, 2001). Once you gain that sense of place, familiarity and comfort of your sit spot, it is then that you learn the most from it. That connectedness motivates you to return, and make that place your own.

### Now What?

Through the exploration of sit spot practices and idea of place, I have become more aware of all the developmental benefits they have to offer. The thought that children don’t experience nature the same way they did only ten years ago upsets me. I believe nature experience is an integral part of human development; whether it is through sit spots or direct interactions with the natural environment, it has many lessons to offer that you truly cannot learn anywhere else—lessons that will challenge you, foster growth

and learning, and, most importantly, push you to your limits.

After taking a close look into these theories and opening my eyes to all they have to offer, I have been inspired to search for a sit spot of my own, and to create that connection that can help me to further develop. I am motivated to go on an adventure to find it, and I look forward to what this adventure will bring me.

*Curiously I follow the narrow trail, wondering if and hoping that I will find it . . . But where? Where do I find it? . . . I want to find it . . .*

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## Finding Canada Outside: Building National Identity through Place-Based Outdoor Education

By Katherine Joyce

If, as Benedict Anderson (2006) argues, nations are little more than imagined communities, then we need to find a way to make imagining the connections between citizens possible. In a country as diverse as Canada, spread over an incomprehensibly large land mass, these connections may require more imagination than Anderson had in mind. One way that these connections have been traditionally imagined in Canada is through national myths, including the myth of the wilderness. This myth draws the Canadian identity out of an “untouched” wilderness landscape.

This conception of the Canadian identity is rife with problems. By nature, myths are exclusionary, privileging those who already enjoy power in society. The myth of the wilderness draws its power from an imagined landscape devoid of people, except for those who are using it as a recreational space, perhaps canoeists. Those who use this landscape for survival, most notably Aboriginal peoples, but also rural inhabitants who live off the land, are conspicuously absent. They do not figure prominently into the picture that the word “wilderness” brings to mind.

But, as much as there are problems with the wilderness myth of Canada, the land provides a valuable connection between all disparate members of Canadian society. And so, I would like to propose a much more inclusive re-imagining of this myth, in which we draw national identity from the land in all the variety of its meanings and uses. In this way, Canadians can work to develop attachments to their specific pieces of land, while acknowledging the interconnections of the national landscape.

There is no doubt that in all countries, but perhaps more significantly in democratic ones, schools play an important nation-building role. Traditionally, this role has been fulfilled through the study of history, which is not without its problems. National

history taught with the purpose of building national identity is often fraught with myth, and excludes the vast majority of people from its timeline. Conversely, Canadian history does not have to be presented this way. National identity can be located in the present, not the past, and in the landscape instead of embodied in a few political leaders and historical figures. This will make it more inclusive of all Canadians.

Creating this new sense of national identity can and should be done in schools through place-based outdoor education programs. Place-based pedagogy, as described by Andrew Foran (2005), “help[s] students connect with their unique place in the world” by blending together outdoor and experiential education, along with geography and history. Although outdoor education programs do not have to be specifically designed or connected to their unique locations, Andrew Brookes (2002) argues that the most effective ones are.

Places are important because they are both physical locations as well as locations with meanings attributed to them by a person or a group of people. E. Relph (1976), a geographer who has written extensively about place, argues that “[t]o be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know your place” (p. 6). Knowing one’s place helps people understand who they are, and so people with strong connections to place are more secure in their existence than those who are not.

The attachment to place experienced by communities and individuals “constitutes our roots in places; and the familiarity that this involves is not just a detailed knowledge, but a sense of deep care and concern for that place” (Relph, 1976, p. 37). We need to work to facilitate the development of this concern for place in our increasingly suburbanized and placeless world, in which the identity of places are

weakening “to the point where they not only look alike but feel alike and offer the same bland possibilities of experience” (p. 90). This concern could encourage us, as a society, to work to maintain our distinct places, which will not only protect our national identity but also enhance our environmental protection measures.

Currently, more than 80% of Canadians live in urban areas. For those who grow up in urban areas, there are very few opportunities for daily interactions with nature, with even fewer opportunities for interactions with “wilderness”-type settings. Wilderness settings differ from park or park-like settings found in urban areas in their degree of management. Parks are much more heavily managed, often involving manicured lawns and purpose-planted trees and shrubs. Wilderness settings are very minimally managed and tend to evoke an “untouched” atmosphere. Parks are indeed valuable places, but wilderness areas are special and represent a more natural ecosystem and can only exist apart from dense human settlement. We need to, as educators, work to give every child the opportunity to not only experience natural places but to meaningfully engage with them. In so doing, we can work to communicate the myriad reasons why these places are important and worth preserving.

To do so, we must make these engagements relevant. Although they must be specific to their place, programs should explore the relationships between places and how they have changed over time. Discovering how the city, countryside and forests interact will help make the more distant places meaningful to those who have little opportunity to experience and understand the intrinsic value of wilderness areas. They can also explore how humans alter the landscape to create rural, suburban and urban places, to demonstrate that we are able to affect change and the direction in which that change takes place.

Most importantly, place-based outdoor education programs should be about the creation of home, “the foundation of our

identity as individuals and as members of the community” (Relph, 1976, p. 39). If we all become attached to our homes, to our local communities, we can create a Canadian identity based on shared connections to the land. Although the pieces of land will be different, the land will become valued as an important part of being Canadian. Protecting the environment will become linked to what it means to be Canadian, thus entwining concern for the land and Canadian identity.

But, as you probably know, there will be many challenges in implementing this sort of program. First of all, very few provinces support outdoor education at the provincial level. Of the 13 provinces and territories, only three have stand-alone outdoor education curriculum—Alberta, New Brunswick and the Northwest Territories (Joyce, 2010). The rationale for New Brunswick’s secondary-level course, *Outdoor Pursuits 110*, is to “provid[e] the opportunity to address growing public concern for our precious natural resources, while at the same time providing students the opportunity to experience outdoor recreational activities” (New Brunswick, 1995, p. 1). However, although this course seems to address many important issues and would be valuable for all students to take, very few in fact do. For example, over the past three years (2007–2010), less than 1.5% of New Brunswick high school students enrolled in *Outdoor Pursuits 110*.

Secondly, there are very few programs in faculties of education that train outdoor educators, and those that exist are regionally focused in Ontario. If we desire to implement place-based outdoor education programs, it would be valuable for teachers to be trained in the region in which they would be teaching. Thirdly, liability and legal concerns make it difficult for those teachers with an interest in taking their students outside to do so. As a whole, in this era of international economic competition, our school systems do not readily value outdoor education programs. But we can work to change that.

So, we as educators need to work to introduce our students to the places in which



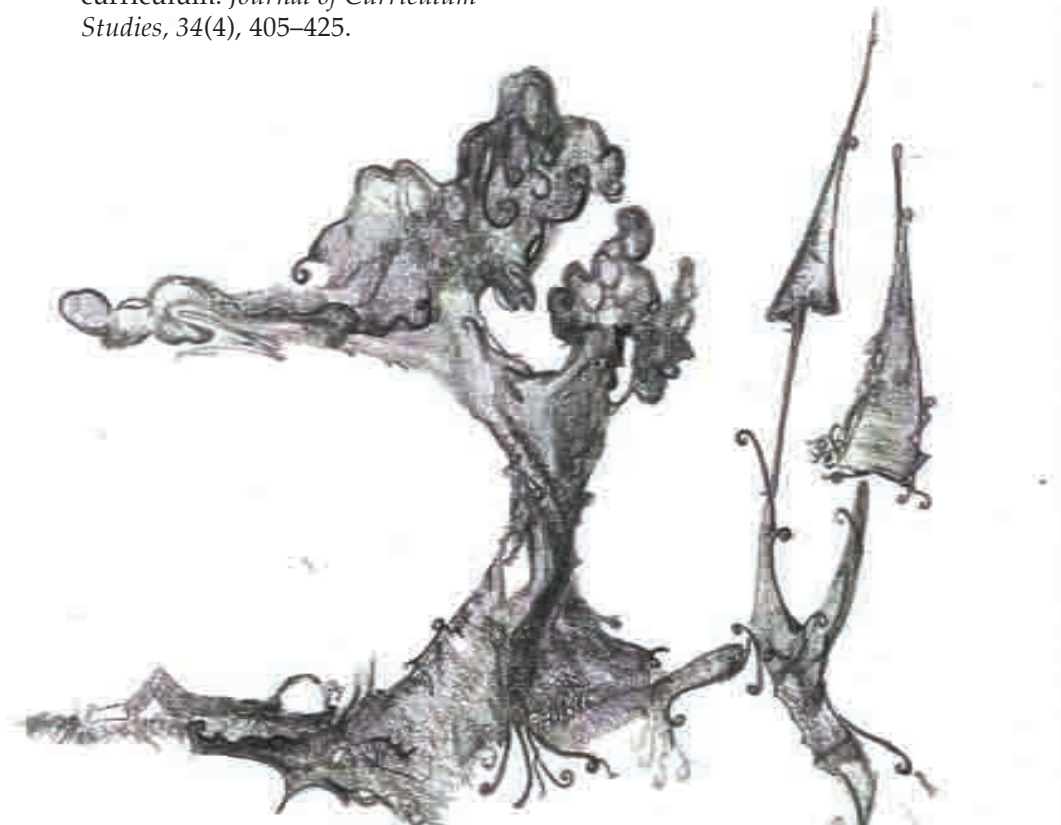
they live. We then need to encourage them to find the connections between their selves and their places in addition to fostering an understanding of their connections to others and other people's places. We need to show students how we are connected to the land and to each other through the land. As citizens, we need to encourage governments to incorporate place-based outdoor education programs into the curriculum, not only because of its potential for nation-building in community-starved times but also because we need to encourage attachment to the land in order to save the land. We need to understand the Canadian landscape as our home, open to all who inhabit it.

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## Lessons from Cuba: Using Sense of Place as a Tool to Connect Internationally and at Home

By Samantha Dear & Hilary Sayle

In the spring of 2010, 16 Recreation and Leisure Studies students from Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, travelled to Cuba to complete a fourth-year field class titled International Field Experiences in Recreation and Leisure. After a week spent in Havana, Brock University students engaged in a unique outdoor education experience. With support from Mountain Hardware (that provided tents and sleeping bags), Brock students were able to share a cross-cultural experience with 16

Cuban students from the University Superior de Cultura Fisica, Cuba's national university for sport and recreation. Together both Canadian and Cuban students travelled to the western province of Pinar Del Rio where they exchanged knowledge on outdoor and environmental education at Cuba's National School of Speleology.

When we were asked to reflect on "sense of place" and how this concept fit into the program, we were surprised that many of the tenets of place mirrored the pre-departure curriculum of this course. For example, gaining knowledge of the political, social and environmental conditions of Cuba, prior to departure, helped Canadian students understand and engage in informed and critical discussion with their Cuban peers. However, upon further consideration of place, the most intriguing and unexpected realization was that Cuban and Canadian students naturally began to teach one another new ways to understand and connect to their *home* country. The following stories from the trip exemplify two moments where this unexpected exchange occurred: 1) at the Museum of the Revolution, and 2) reactions to "Leave No Trace" (LNT) principles.

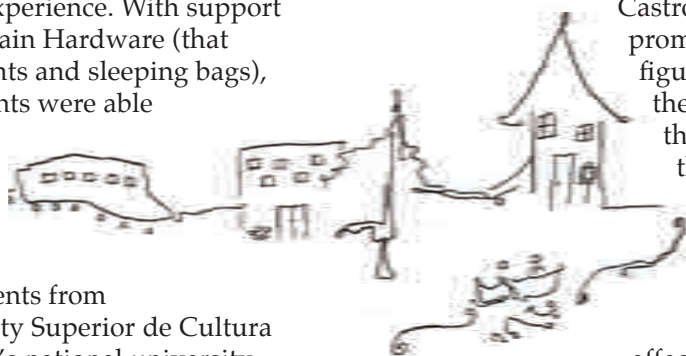
### At the Museum of the Revolution

During the first week spent in Havana, Cuban students from the Universidad de la Habana toured the Canadian students through the Museum of the Revolution. Without preparation, Cuban students knew the story behind every picture of Fidel

Castro, Che Guevara and other prominent revolutionary figures. They knew dates, they knew political songs, they knew why and when the bullet holes appeared in the wall of the front foyer of the museum and they knew how these various moments in Cuba's history

affected their own lives. The Canadian students were intrigued by Cuba's story and equally impressed by the amount of knowledge Cuban students knew about their native country. At the end of the tour, a Canadian student commented, "If the Cubans were to show up in Canada and I had to tour them around and tell the story of my history, I certainly would not have the same knowledge. It would be embarrassing." Later on in the week, a Canadian student approached a Cuban student and complimented her on her knowledge of her country's history. The Cuban student gave a smile and responded, "Do you not have to take history classes in school?" The Canadian student nodded yes, and the Cuban student quickly replied, "Well, what happened?"

The realization that Cuban students knew their country so intimately was a recurring point of discussion for the remainder of the trip. Their knowledge of Havana far outweighed our collective grasp on the history of our country's capital city, let alone Canada as a whole. This significantly impacted our group and motivated students to learn more about the history of Canada and how they fit into that history.



### Reactions to Leave No Trace Principals

During the second week of the course, both Canadian and Cuban students travelled to Cuba's National School of Speleology, a remote camp in the western province of Pinar del Rio. This was the first time that the Cuban students had left Havana and experienced camping in tents with sleeping bags. During our second day at the camp, Evilio, a Cuban professor of outdoor education, guided Canadian and Cuban students through three kilometres of a karst cave system. Excitement levels of both Cuban and Canadian students grew as Evilio toured us through sections of the caves where it was necessary to either crawl on our stomachs or wade through neck-high water. Schooled in LNT principles, Canadian students remained fairly quiet during their time in the cave, many simply observing and taking pictures. Conversely, the Cuban students rarely stopped loudly laughing and yelling to one another. That night, back at the camp, a Canadian student expressed frustration over the noise level generated by the Cuban students. It was obvious that this student and many others in the course had a particular way they connected to natural places.

Coincidentally, the following morning, three Canadian students were scheduled to present the LNT principles to the Cuban students. The lesson plan involved Cuban students rotating through stations that allowed them to experientially understand the seven principles. After the lesson, the Canadian students expressed that the Cuban students were enthusiastic about the content and thanked them for the lesson.

The following day while on a hike into a forested area near the mountains, Cuban students were much quieter and travelled in smaller groups. The Cubans' excitement level was still high as they observed and asked questions about flora and fauna they had only seen in their textbooks. It was clear that the Cuban students had begun to practise a new way of connecting to place.

The complexity of the stories above far outweighs the scope of this paper. However, while it may appear counterintuitive, these stories do exemplify the potential of international field experiences' ability to inspire students to connect to their home country. For the Canadian students, making the connection from these experiences to home in Canada was reinforced by a presentation from an international organization operating in Cuba. During the presentation a student asked, "When travelling in Cuba, what's the best thing I can do for the country as a tourist?" The presenter replied, "Well, not much in two weeks. But how you choose to live your life in Canada does affect the rest of the world, including Cuba." As outdoor educators who wrestle with effective strategies for the transference of international field experiences to the everyday lives of students, we related well to this presenter's philosophy and encouraged students to consider his advice.

As educators, our unexpected realization that both Canadian and Cuban students were teaching each other new ways of connecting to their home countries did not happen until after the course ended. It is our hope that in future courses both students and we will be more attentive to these teachable moments. Utilizing the stories presented in this paper as a tool for class discussions may be one approach to better applying the aspects of sense of place as they relate to not only the way we travel but also the way we choose to live at home.

We would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Erin Sharpe, co-instructor and initial visionary, for this course.

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*Samantha Dear and Hilary Sayle are both graduate students in the Faculty of Recreation and Leisure Studies at Brock University. Sam's research focuses on exploring issues of reciprocity in international service/volunteer experiences. Hilary's research is motivated by her belief that outdoor education is not an industry but a movement towards closing the gaps between urban and wilderness lifestyles.*

## Change, in Time, Alters a Place and Transforms a Person

By Aaron Ratko

The suburban backyard of my family's bungalow in Windsor, Ontario, is where I grew up. The overshadowing Chrysler building that gave shade across the alley was the only thing that seemed to have consistency for me in our yard. I can picture all the changes the yard went through, almost as if they occurred in the time frame of a single day.

The blue and white metal swing set had its four-person chair-swing changed to an independent swing, the rings that enabled me to do flips changed to a bar that allowed me to hang upside down. The "giant" turtle-shaped sandbox—home to my dinosaurs and Snakey, the rubber cobra—changed spots around the backyard until it finally turned into a wooden square-shaped sandbox. The mature cherry tree changed with the seasons, and in the spring it bloomed brilliantly, giving most delicious cherries.

As that cherry tree aged, an increasing number of branches fell on to the neighbour's lawn. The neighbors complained, and, tragically, over time the tree was dissected, limb by limb, and eventually cut down to a foot-high stump. This, I remember, was the greatest change—that incredible natural jungle gym (better than anything you could build) was removed because our neighbours were not able to coexist with products of the natural changes and functions of the tree.

In an attempt to replace the tree, a two-level fort with a rope and shingled roof was built, then painted maroon, then blue, and then monkey bars were added. . .the whole thing now painted grey. The plum trees that lined the back fence blossomed annually in beautiful shades of purple as the brilliant yellow pollen would attract my eyes, along with the bees. Unfortunately, this led to the

next change in the yard as my mother insisted we remove them after I experienced an allergic reaction to bee stings!

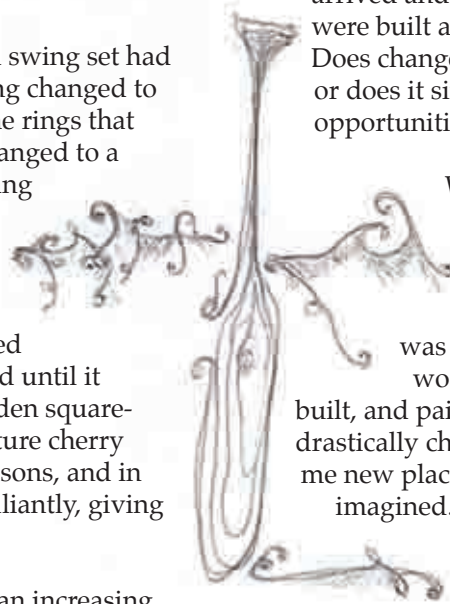
The garage changed, the garden changed, the compost changed places numerous times and everything changed as the seasons did. Ice rinks were built. Snowmen and snowwomen arrived and melted away, and snow forts were built and toppled year after year. Does change cause a loss in sense of place or does it simply create new and different opportunities to experience it?

When change in my backyard came, it brought forth emotions of sadness, but it also brought with it opportunity. When the perfect climbing tree was cut down, it gave room for the wooden jungle gym and fort to be built, and painted. This outdoor experience drastically changed my environment, giving me new places to sit, and new ideas to be imagined.

Change will occur. As time passes, both natural and human-made changes occur in our lived environments, impacting how we interact with our surroundings. As these changes occur, opportunities for people to experience a sense of place present themselves; new environments offer new places for people to become engaged in diverse means of sensory awareness and discovery. To be fully engaged in a place is to be engaged in the changes that are happening to it as well. Experiencing your sense of place also means experiencing those changes that are occurring in that environment. As time passed, natural changes to the cherry tree in my backyard took place and I was able to experience my sense of place because of it.

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*Aaron Ratko is an undergraduate student in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at Brock University. Aaron dedicates his time to pursuing outdoor recreation in natural areas.*



## The Dirt Pile

By Jocelyn Murtell

In the summer of 2009, I ran a photography project with a group of youth—mainly girls aged 12 to 16 who lived in a large housing complex in a small Ontario city. I was interested in learning about local spaces the youth used for fun and leisure, what they did in those spaces and how they experienced them. One of the most popular places to hang out and explore was an open field—just an empty lot, really, with mud, grass and weeds located next to a grocery store parking lot, a city parkette and a construction site. However, for the youth this space served as a backdrop to all kinds of elaborate stories—a large snake that had escaped from the local pet store, dangerous plants, a homeless man who had temporarily inhabited a section of the lot and scared the youth (but who “turned out to be pretty nice”), ghosts that haunted the field and other dangers that lurked once the sun went down. The field was also the subject of many photographs taken that summer, including the sun going down as it filtered through the trees, buildings that lined the lot, wildflowers and birds drinking from rainwater collected in potholes.

Early in the summer, the landscape of the field changed when a truck from the construction site dumped a large mound of dirt at one end. Over time, grass grew from the pile of dirt, and many of the neighbourhood kids walked up and down it enough to create a winding path. When I asked the kids if they could show me pictures of some of their favourite spots, they dismissed the photos and took me on a live tour instead. They wanted to show me “the hill” because you could get a unique vantage point of the neighbourhood by standing on top of it, up above everything, and looking over the fences. On the hill the grass was tall and the path well beaten. Kids would ride their bikes up it, run up and down it, stand on the very top of it and yell at the top of their lungs, or just sit and enjoy the view.

About a month later, the landscape changed again; this time a plow had come and dug out half of the hill, disrupting the path and leaving a steep cliff. The girls were upset: “They ruined our hill!” A bunch of us walked

to the field to inspect the damage. We walked to the end of the path looking down from the new cliff. It was pretty high up but the dirt was soft, almost like sand or powder. A couple of the girls started to jump off, laughing and screaming as they leapt into the air, landing in the dry powdery dirt. We had our cameras with us and the shooting began: “Get a picture of me in the air!” and then the dares to those of us who were reluctant to take the plunge. At first I was a spectator and took pictures for the girls that wanted evidence of their bravery for Facebook. Then I handed the cameras over and walked to the edge of the cliff and the girls cheered. I took a running leap off the hill and landed knee-deep in soil. I have to admit it felt good, free-falling for a second or two and getting really dirty. Later, when we all sat down to talk about the different places that the youth used for fun, the girls joked about how much they like to play in the field: “We love that flippin hill!”

Since moving back to a small city, I had noticed that even in suburban sprawl, these unused, so-called dead spaces or lots were becoming rare. One of the girls had also noticed and said to me, “Soon a little piece of grass is going to be like gold—it will be worth millions of dollars—there is hardly any of it left.” By the fall of that year, the hill was gone; the truck had come and removed what remained of it, and the entire lot had been paved to make way for a parking lot for a condo that was to be built. I visited the complex recently and went to look at the paved square surrounded by a fence and felt sad. That summer, my experience with the youth reminded me of how much fun you can have in what appears to be an empty space, and the value of just hanging out with your friends and using your imagination. I glimpsed for a second what it was like to be 13 again and to go outside and play.

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*Jocelyn Murtell is a master's student at Brock University in the Recreation and Leisure Studies. She is interested in visual research methods and the politics of representation. On one magical day in the near future she will finish her thesis.*

# T racking

Each year COEO sponsors an Ontario Youth to join the On the Tip of the Toes expedition in memory of Mike Elrick's work in outdoor education.

In 2011, the Mike Elrick Tribute made it possible for 14-year-old Lauren Macleod to take part in this past winter's expedition. Together with 12 other teenagers living with cancer, Lauren left on a nine-day journey into one of the wildest regions of Quebec—James Bay, also known as Eeyou Istchee by the Cree people.

The group left civilization behind to live the way of the nomads. Each day opening new trails, they travelled more than 600 km by snowmobile. During the expedition, participants were hosted by Cree families with whom they learned about and lived the traditions of this wonderful and rich culture.

*To Tip of the Toes!*

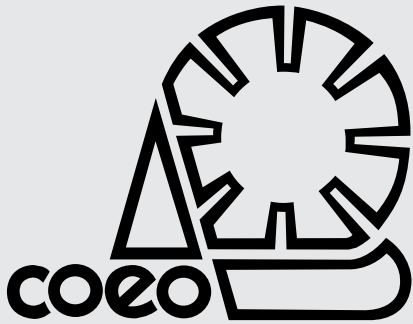
*There is no way to ever thank you enough for giving me the opportunity to participate in the On the Tip of the Toes expedition. I cannot explain how much it meant to me to be a part of something so amazing. I will never forget the expedition or all of the amazing people I met. Thank you for being so supportive and encouraging, and bring us all together into one family. You made me feel so special and helped me see how a difficult experience can be turned into*



*something so positive even if there are bumps along the way. Thank you for everything! Love and thanks from Lauren*

The mission of On the Tip of the Toes Foundation is to help adolescents living with cancer regain their self-esteem and sense of pride by offering them an exceptional challenge in adventure therapy in Canada. Supervised by medical specialists and outdoors adventure experts, these expeditions also aim to change the image of cancer for both the youth and the general public.

For more information, visit [www.tipoftoes.com](http://www.tipoftoes.com).



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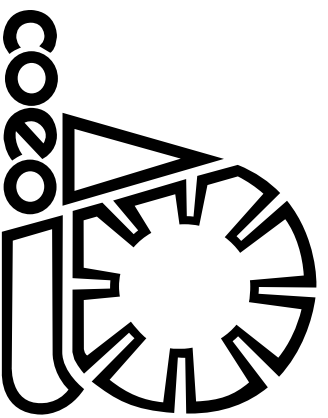
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