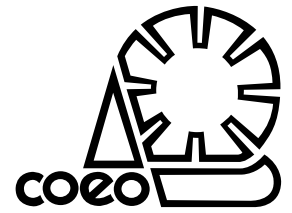


# Pathways

THE ONTARIO JOURNAL OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION  
Spring 2012, 24 (3)



# Pathways

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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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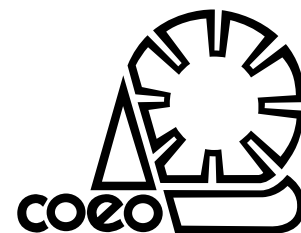
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# Pathways

THE ONTARIO JOURNAL OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION

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Kyle Clarke

We are happy to present this special issue of *Pathways* based on the theme of last fall's conference, **Harnessing the Power of Adventure**. As members of the conference organizing committee, we were truly astounded by both the level of enthusiasm and amount of excitement that this theme generated. We received many early inquiries about this event, numerous presentation proposals, and a great response from the COEO membership based on the number of people who chose to register and attend. As a result, it was no surprise to us that, after sending out a call for submissions for this theme issue, we were soon flooded with articles from conference presenters and attendees alike. Through this issue of *Pathways*, we hope to have captured some of the energy this theme created. We believe the articles contained within illustrate the diversity of topics and ideas shared throughout the conference weekend.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank a few selected individuals for their special contributions to the conference as well as to this issue of *Pathways*. Thanks go out to illustrator and teacher Katie Sweet for creating a wonderful conference poster and providing the artwork for this issue of the journal. Katie is a talented individual and we greatly appreciate the time and effort she put into supporting this endeavour. Also, we would like to thank Nils Vikander and Tim Gill for delivering the keynote addresses at this year's conference and for submitting articles so that we all might have a chance to revisit and reflect on the ideas they presented. COEO is fortunate to have many international friends like Nils and Tim who are willing to travel and make great efforts to share their rich experience and unique perspectives with our community of educators, practitioners and leaders.

Kyle Clarke and Kyla Krawczyk



The countdown has begun. By now I am sure that many of you are aware of COEO's upcoming 40th anniversary and that our annual fall conference will mark the beginning of this very special year for our organization. Both the Board of Directors and Conference Committee are hoping that members (current, new and past) will plan to attend the conference and take part in what is to be a great celebration.

Along with the planning of an anniversary-sized fall conference, COEO is also hoping to orchestrate a number of other special projects throughout the 2012–2013 membership year. We plan to once again offer the *Make Peace with Winter* conference in 2013 (that's if winter agrees to cooperate!) and will also explore the possibility of hosting a variety of other professional development and promotional events. Some of the ideas put forward so far include

- sponsoring a national student research day for outdoor and environmental education
- supporting member-delivered presentations for school boards to promote outdoor education
- funding the creation of outdoor education (OE) resources for classroom educators
- organizing the classic OE game, *Instincts for Survival*, to be delivered the same day / time at OE centres, schools and parks throughout the province
- arranging regional events like certification courses, workshops and clinics
- . . . and the list keeps growing.

However, like everything else that takes place within a volunteer-led organization, individual members will need to step forward to take on the coordination of such events. So here is the call: If you are interested in helping out with one of these projects, or if you have a great idea of your own to share, now is the time to act. Send an e-mail to COEO's Volunteer Coordinator, Wes Onofrio, at [volunteercoordinator@coeo.org](mailto:volunteercoordinator@coeo.org) and indicate your area of interest. Wes is eager to hear from members and ready to assist in matching volunteers to the right project or task.

Finally, with summer approaching, it is now time to once again consider nominating a worthy colleague, OE centre or organization for a COEO award. Descriptions and criteria for the awards are available on the COEO website, as are nomination forms. The selection committee is always available to answer any questions related to the nomination process. Please forward any inquiries to Past President, Zabe MacEachren, at [maceache@queensu.ca](mailto:maceache@queensu.ca).

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Kyle Clarke

**Sketch Pad – The art for this issue of *Pathways* was generously provided by Katie Sweet. Katie is the artist responsible for creating last fall's much applauded *Harnessing the Power of Adventure* conference poster. She is a talented secondary school visual art teacher who, along with taking on all art-related extracurricular responsibilities in her school, also manages to find time to illustrate a very popular web comic, which has an international following. Thanks go out to Katie for the contributions she has made to COEO during the past year.**

## Harnessing Our Collective Power: A COEO Adventure

By Mary Breunig

It had been a long time between COEO conferences for me when I boarded the boat to Camp Kitchi this past fall. I have typically been rock climbing with Brock University outdoor education students during the COEO conference weekend, but not this year. This year, I was enthusiastic to be joining current and former students and friends for a weekend of camaraderie and new learning. I felt warmly embraced as I stepped (rather hobbled, given my recent knee surgery) out of the dark and into the glowing light of the dining hall and welcome company of friends. I certainly don't attend many conferences these days that originate with a late-night water crossing in a boat filled with equal parts people and musical instruments. I was pleased that this one did and delighted to experience both of these engaged in harmonious activity throughout the long weekend.

I enjoyed drumming with Zabe and hearing about the uniqueness of each of our brains. I met for the first time Kyla, a therapeutic recreation student from my own department. I shared a breakfast table with Margot, with whom I am always pleased to spend time, and we smiled, enjoying the ever-infectious laughter of Bonnie. Former Brock student Justine Wilmot was at that same table and she talked to me about her experiences in the Queen's University program. Friend and former Lakehead student Meg Sheepway reminded me of the importance of taking life slowly and treating the gift of it gently. I very much enjoyed seeing Tim receive a leadership award and hearing all the accolades from former and current students and colleagues. A small group of exuberant people sat down at our lunch table on Sunday and I came to learn that it was Mike Elrick's family. What a delight to hear their stories, share in their enthusiasm and witness with everyone else the dedication of the dining hall.

It was my research of Mike's integrated curriculum program (ICP) that initially brought me to COEO and my ongoing research of that program and other programs that, at least in part, brought me back. I was pleased to be part of a panel, including Grant Linney, Stan Kozak and Kristen Brooks, and facilitated by Ryan Howard, that came together to "harness our collective" interests in environmental studies programs (ESPs) (one form of ICP). Based on the session attendance and participant responses, there appeared to be a high level of enthusiasm and interest in these programs. Our interactive panel discussion focused on the intersection of integrated environmental education theory, praxis and research in relation to ESPs in Ontario with a view towards new pathways and opportunities in the future. The panel members sought to explore how integrated environmental education research might influence teaching practices and policies and session participants added insights and posed questions related to these programs. For me, this form of panel discussion with the merging of others' insights is one example of the potential of harnessing our collective power to gain greater insights into our own work and praxes. Some of what I learned and were the outcomes of this participatory session included the following:

- There are pathways for new program development and research of these programs. The fall 2011 issue of *Pathways* provides excellent examples of past and current initiatives with a hopeful view toward the future (Stan Kozak provides some important insights to this point).
- There is work yet to be done regarding how and what gets communicated to the Ministry of Education and vice versa; more policy work needs to be done as one means to further encourage support

of and funding for these innovative programs (Zabe MacEachren does some related work in this arena). How does policy support programs and what policies serve to support programs, detract from them or further challenge implementation (e.g., Specialist High Skills Major – the Environment)?

- There exist many programs outside the province of Ontario and reading the fall 2011 *Pathways* was like meeting new colleagues for me – there are people doing great work out there that I have yet to engage with. Is there a way for us to coordinate our efforts? Is there a mechanism we should be considering for idea exchange?
- There are educative opportunities for researchers and practitioners to further collaborate. What should researchers be researching when they study these types of programs and how and to whom should results be communicated?
- There are stakeholder groups that are untapped resources. Grant Linney recently wrote about the important role that parents can serve as program advocates (Linney, 2011). During the conference panel session, we talked about the important role of boards, principals and school counselors as well as the role of research ethics boards, both at university and secondary school levels.
- There exists documented evidence of the successes and challenges of ESPs (Horwood, 1994; Russell & Burton, 2000; Sharpe & Breunig, 2009) but there is work yet to be done on how these programs influence students' choices about professional pathways and future lifestyle choices. There is some research to date about the ways in which program participation engenders pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. There is work yet to be done regarding types of behaviours and many of us (Mary Breunig, Jocelyn Murtell, Ryan Howard (Brock University) and Constance Russell (Lakehead University)) remain curious to further explore what teachings and experiences lead to emancipatory pro-

environmental behaviours (e.g., making “just” food choices as a result of a deep understanding of issues of food security) versus domestic environmental behaviours (e.g., recycling).

I look forward to our ongoing work together as we harness the collective power of our shared ideas and experiences with respect to further developing ESPs, influencing policy, and collaborating into the future. For me, this year's COEO adventure was about harnessing positive collective power from start (my entrance into the dining hall on Friday night) to finish (sitting next to someone playing “somewhere over the rainbow” on the harmonica as we crossed Georgian Bay en route home).

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Mary Breunig is an Associate Professor in Recreation and Leisure Studies at Brock University and President of the Association for Experiential Education.

# Adventure Spaces: How We View Our Adventure Places

By Ryan Howard

*But on my first excursion to the summit the whole mountain, down to its low swelling base, was smoothly laden with loose fresh snow, presenting a most glorious mass of winter mountain scenery, in the midst of which I scrambled and reveled or lay snugly snowbound, enjoying the fertile clouds and the snow-blooms in all their growing, drifting grandeur.*

John Muir, in Edwin Way Teale's *The Wilderness World of John Muir* (2001, p. 252)

This short discussion explores the relevance and importance of place in adventure recreation and has evolved in part from an effort to understand the overwhelming influence of places on my own adventure experiences. While there is a depth of research and writing on both place and sense of place, this article highlights some practical notions that should induce further thought and reflection on the meaning of the spaces wherein we choose to recreate.

The preceding quote by John Muir paints a picture of the meaning found within a place through one person's experience. Muir describes this place with words and meanings that transcend simple descriptives: his words embody power, thought and emotion, giving the reader a sense of the tremendous influence that Muir must have felt in that very moment he described. Muir's feelings, like many we have all had through our own outdoor experiences, are evidence of a body of knowledge and experience that grapples with understanding the multitude of influences and outcomes our surroundings impart upon our lives. Encountering these feelings is a part (large or small) of all adventure recreation experiences.

### Person and Place

To begin deconstructing places, it is important to differentiate between abstract space and meaningful place. This dichotomy illustrates that for place to be meaningful one must recognize it as such. Furthermore, a meaningful place must be organized in

a manner in which meaning can be found, while abstract space is either yet to be interpreted or devoid of influential meaning for a particular individual.

The question thus arises as to what makes a space meaningful. While there is no simple answer to this query, place and person-based characteristics help in illustrating the dimensionality of this question. Place characteristics generally include scale, size, physical characteristics, history (story), location and so on, while person-based characteristics often include length of residence, mobility, age, security, social aspects, value systems and so on.

It is equally important to consider that place characteristics exist in concentric levels, each with its own organization, meaning and influence. Consider place characteristics as similar to the concentric rings formed from the reaction to a pebble cast into a pond — as the rings move away from the centre (i.e., a specific place in which you find meaning) towards the outer rings (i.e., larger more diverse spaces) the scope of your initial point is engulfed by a much larger area. To put this analogy simply, specific meaningful places are a part of larger spaces that at each level embody some characteristics found within your specific meaningful place (Low & Altman, 1992; Relph, 1976). Why is this important to recognize? To start, it begins the process of acquiring skills to reflect on the characteristics (dimensions, location, and so on) embodied within a meaningful place, and further it allows for the description and

understanding of a meaningful place within its larger surroundings.

As an exercise, think of one place in which you find meaning. Build a concentric series of rings that grow outwards from that place. With each ring ask yourself, what are the similarities to your meaningful place, what are differences, and what does this tell you of the interconnectedness of finding meaning in places? This concept and these questions may lead you further towards finding the important (meaningful) characteristics of places to which you connect.

## Place in Adventure

Integrating adventure experiences into this discussion finds us first confronting the separation of home versus not-home. Meaningful space is divided primarily between these two areas (Lewicka, 2011) with home being the place that constantly surrounds us and serves as a spatial anchor (Golledge & Stimson, 1997) upon which we base our experiences away from home. According to Porteous, home “is our major fixed reference point for structuring reality” (1976, p. 386). Is the contrast of our home an important factor in the construction of our attachment to our adventure and recreation places? Or does our home play a much more subtle role in directing us towards finding meaningful places?

Looking back through history, people were considerably place oriented within their daily lives. Currently, within many developed and modernized societies, there exists an expansion of our geographic horizons through increased mobility, abundant and available access to information and other globalization processes. With all this, how do people find and connect to meaningful places? Furthermore, how does the expansion of our geographic horizons influence our connection to the land and ultimately our attitudes towards the world around us? Are we as a society moving towards a more cosmopolitan way of existence and how do we find our way back to being connected to local places?

Experiences in the outdoors, either through adventure recreation or other means, may in part offer one solution to some of the preceding questions. Many of the characteristics of an adventure experience — such as risk, excitement, discovery, physical activity, and perseverance — all add their own importance and meaning onto the place(s) in which we “adventure.” With this statement I leave one question: Does the very nature of an adventure experience lead someone towards finding meaningful connections to place(s)?

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# Paddling the Seas of Tsunami Capitalist Persuasion: Manipulated or Self-determined?

By Nils Vikander

All *friluftsliv*, or “open-air living,” is to some degree a “quest.” This certainly applies to paddling the big, open waters, although William James (1981) originally used the term to deepen our understanding of the Canadian soul during expeditionary travel on the great northern rivers. James was inspired in his task by the classical quest sequence of *Preparation, Separation, Tribulation and Return*. Gaining insight into the panorama of paddling the seas and great lakes of the world could be no less well served through viewing such voyages in terms of these historical quest segments.

### Preparation

All *friluftsliv* beyond nude swimming involves equipment as mediating links between humans and nature, whether impediments, enhancers, or simply as necessities in the nature experience. Today, equipment for the outdoors is generally commercially produced, and this raises the question “Cui Bono?” or “To Whose Advantage?” Is the *friluftsliv* devotee likely to gain maximum satisfaction from equipment purchases or are the producers and retailers the main beneficiaries? Since the capitalist system of production is driven by the principle of profit maximization, the answer to “Cui Bono?” appears to favour industry. Reflections of this type are the result of my experiencing deep personal disjunctions over many years between paddling canoes and kayaks on the big waters in North America and Europe. Although I enjoyed both, my canoeing in such settings has drawn bafflement and sometimes outright hostility from observers, who must have viewed me as paddling against a tsunami of ideological correctness. Immersing myself into relevant literature in the area has confirmed my heresy. Being an “outlier” provided the impetus for my writing presented here.

### Separation

I began this voyage by examining my paddling life history, which now spans more than half a century and includes both private and pedagogically oriented ventures. This was supplemented by a review of my *friluftsliv* writings as well as a wide-ranging document analysis of quantitative and qualitative texts and illustrations of canoeing and kayaking.

### Tribulation

An intensive examination was undertaken of the assembled material with the objective to arrive at a just and sober comparative evaluation of the kayak/canoe debate. Now the paddling vessels are truly launched . . .

### “Put-in”

As prominent Canadian naturalist Neil Evernden (1993) has pointed out, “the map is not the territory.” This compass needle affirmed my conviction that personal experience overrides all information from other sources. In the present case, I trust my finding that a canoe performs equally or, indeed, outperforms a kayak in open water. “Maps” are external and virtual worlds based on educated guesses, or at best, a series of tested hypotheses. As the philosopher of science Karl Popper (1957) wisely advised, “science must begin with myths, and with the criticism of myths.”

A major problem of industry is that, as medical researcher Servan Schreiber (2008) phrased it, “changes in lifestyle cannot be . . . patented.” This observation is especially pertinent in the present context, since *friluftsliv* is very much a lifestyle phenomenon. What, then, is industry’s solution to this profit barrier? Its response is the “persuasive communication” (Robert Tamilia, 2011) of advertising as the

tool of client shaping. Its desired socio/psychological process may be described in the following steps:

Perception → Recognition → Interest → Desire → Need → Addiction

The key to an individual's journey along this trail is, according to Canadian scholar Marshal McLuhan (1965), *repetition*. The lifestyle product is presented as an integral part of larger social purposes, and its commercial success is tied to "ad repetitions . . . quite in accord with the procedures of brainwashing." What can individuals do to protect themselves from this onslaught? Consumer psychologists Chartrand & Fitzsimons (2011) maintain that individuals in the marketplace can "defend themselves when unconscious processes can lead to negative outcomes." There is a growing literature with this purpose of equipping buyers with weapons of defence.

How does this intellectual discussion compare with my personal paddling experience? Have I done sufficient paddling in challenging environments to be certain of my position on the canoe/kayak evaluation issue? A list of the waters paddled may provide an indication. In addition to seas and large lakes, I have included mountain lakes where low water and air temperatures in combination with often rapidly changing wind conditions provide challenges comparable to big-water paddling:

**Solo Sea Kayak:** West coast of Vancouver Island, Princess Louisa Inlet (British Columbia), Puget Sound and San Juan Islands (Washington State), Stockholm archipelagos, south Swedish Baltic Sea archipelagos (provinces of Småland and Östergötland), Strömstad archipelago (Swedish Atlantic coast), Trondheim Fjord and Nord-Trøndelag Atlantic coast (Norway).

**Double Sea Kayak:** Vaddö/Örskär archipelagos (Baltic Sea, north of Stockholm).

**River Kayak:** Gaspé coast (Quebec), north and south Stockholm archipelagos, Alta Fjord (Finnmark, Northern Norway), Trondheim Fjord and Nord-Trøndelag Atlantic coast (Norway), mountain lakes in Jämtland and Härjedalen (Sweden) and Nord-Trøndelag and Sør-Trøndelag (Norway).

**Canoe:** West coast of Vancouver Island; Lake Superior; Georgian Bay (Lake Huron); Gaspé coast (Quebec); Åland Baltic Sea archipelagos (Finland); Åbo Baltic Sea archipelagos (Finland); Vasa archipelago (North Baltic Sea, Finland); High Coast islands (North Baltic Sea, Sweden); Swedish Baltic Sea archipelagos Vaddö – Kråkelund (ca. 350 km aerial straight distance); Sweden's three largest lakes: Vänern (5,655 sq km), Vättern (1,912 sq km), Mälaren (1,140 sq km); Trondheim Fjord (Norway); mountain lakes (Lapland, Jämtland and Härjedalen provinces in Sweden; Nord-Trøndelag and Sør-Trøndelag provinces in Norway).

Reflecting on the variety of these paddling experiences, and in particular, the vast archipelagos of the Baltic Sea, my self-assessment is that the volume of comparative data is sufficient for me to regard my evaluation of the merits of the canoe and the kayak in open waters as reliable and valid.

### Kayak and Canoe in Writing and Colour Photography/Art

Although having lived and worked in Norway for many years, I am by origin Swedish, and have also spent a large part of my life in North America. My text below will span both sides of the Atlantic, and in view of my theme, this is appropriate. Canada and the Scandinavian peninsula are northern, sparsely populated regions, with lengthy coastlines and numerous lakes and rivers ideal for paddling craft. The geographical and cultural parallels are striking. My long-term memberships in Sweden's historic outdoor organizations opened doors to examining their journals for the topic at hand.

The Swedish Touring Club (STF), established 1885, is one of Sweden's largest voluntary organizations (ca. 300,000 members), and has a marked friluftsliv profile. Its journal, *Turist*, reaches a readership far beyond its membership. A paddling content analysis of the journal from 1994 to 2003 was undertaken in two five-year segments.

The most striking change that took place over these years is the massive growth of kayak advertising in the second five-year period. From having been virtually invisible, the kayak industry began to present itself with great vigour. Was there a specific year that could be regarded as a watershed? Yes. In 2000 there were 18 kayak advertisements, as opposed to only two in 1999. In both these years *Turist* had no features on kayaking whatsoever. In 2001, however, five such features appeared (together with 11 advertisements); clearly the editors had changed their editorial policy as a consequence of industry advertising efforts.

In addition to *Turist*, I analyzed issues of the journal *Friluftsliv*, published by the

organization Friluftslivfrämjandet (established 1892, ca. 100,000 members), from 2004 to 2010. As made clear from its name, this is specifically a friluftsliv body. The content analysis of the seven-year period is shown in the table below for both journals

In *Turist* the exposure of the canoe remained modest at slightly reduced levels, while the kayak industry's advertising eased off somewhat from the previous high level. The battle for the consumer was perhaps regarded as being "won"? The spectacular growth of free advertising through the journal's own kayak presentations rendered industry-paid advertising less important.

The *Friluftsliv* kayak exposure was not less than extraordinary over this period. Advertisement and journal features stroked virtually synchronously at a high rate. The canoe was left far behind in the kayak's wake. Of interest, though, is that the minimal canoe exposure was virtually identical in the two publications, while the kayak in *Friluftsliv* was given nearly three times the coverage it received in *Turist*.

**Table 1: The Kayak and the Canoe in Swedish Touring Club Journal *Turist*, 1994–2003**

| Years                      | Vessel | Features | Advertisements |
|----------------------------|--------|----------|----------------|
| 1994–1998<br>(2,392 pages) | Kayak  | 9        | 2              |
|                            | Canoe  | 15       | 19             |
| 1999–2003<br>(2,628 pages) | Kayak  | 11       | 55             |
|                            | Canoe  | 10       | 17             |

**Table 2: Canoe and Kayak in *Turist* and Friluftslivfrämjandet's *Friluftsliv*, 2004–2010**

| Journal                                     | Vessel | Features | Advertisements |
|---|--------|----------|----------------|
| STF Journal <i>Turist</i><br>(3,726 pages)  | Kayak  | 36       | 46             |
|   | Canoe  | 15       | 16             |
| Journal <i>Friluftsliv</i><br>(2,368 pages) | Kayak  | 113      | 111            |
|   | Canoe  | 17       | 15             |

It should be noted that by far the majority of the items featuring the kayak in *Turist* from 1994 to 2010, and in *Friluftsliv* from 2004 to 2010 were in open-water settings, while very few such articles featured canoes. Combining the two journals from 1994 to 2010, 88 percent of the kayak presentations were open-water compared with 12 percent of canoe features, while 88 percent of canoe presentations were in river and lake settings whereas only 12 percent of kayak items were so.

The picture that emerged over these years was that the kayak has been presented as the paddling craft of choice in general, and in particular for open waters. The canoe has been portrayed as relegated to small lakes and rivers. This panorama is reinforced when viewing Friluftsrådet's national activity calendar for the 2007 summer season. The number of single, date-specific kayak events listed was 333, with 20 serial events to be added (events that recurred on given days of the week). The total kayak events were then estimated to number over 500. For those Swedes interested in canoeing, there were 16 single events on the calendar, and two serial events. The estimated canoe events totaled ca. 30. These numbers speak for themselves, and again, the kayak events were overwhelmingly open-water while the few canoe events were on sheltered lakes and serene rivers.

How, then, is this reflected at the retail level? Svima Sport AB, in the Stockholm area, is the country's largest and oldest (est. 1974) specialized paddling craft retailer. In 2011 the shop offered a spectacular choice of 59 solo sea kayak models as compared with the meager offering of four tandem canoes suitable for the big waters. Particularly noteworthy is that in the two years since 2009, the kayak model offering has nearly doubled (from 30) while that of the canoe has been reduced by one. Clearly the retail picture corroborates the journal presentations. The 2011 kayak prices range from 12,900 to 35,900 (mean = 26,324) Swedish kronor. For price-assessment, the Canadian dollar = ca. 6 Swedish kronor. The prices of the four canoes range from 13,500 to 17,900 (mean = 15,550). Essential in viewing

the cost of paddling is that most open-water kayaking is done in solo kayaks, whereas most canoeing in all types of water is performed in tandem. Thus, for two people, kayaking tends to double the number of vessels, not to mention more than double the cost. Noteworthy is that Svima offers only three double kayak models; their reputation as "divorce boats" is difficult to shake off.

What does the historical context say about the present inquiry? In my survey of the literature on the canoe in North American history, the following quotes may serve as examples of what caught my attention:

*"The development of a satisfactory marine canoe came early; the Namu archeological site . . . dates back eight thousand years, and yet this camp is virtually inaccessible except by salt water."* (Roberts & Shackleton, 1983).

*"The Beothuk travelled in their canoes . . . also on the ocean. By sea they went as far as Funk Island . . . which lies about sixty kilometres out into the Atlantic . . ."* (anthropologist Ingeborg Marshall, 1996).

*"It is when the ocean meets the land that a canoe is born."* (Raffan, 1999).

*" . . . the recent popularity of kayaks on the Pacific coast overlooks thousands of years of aboriginal canoeing."* (Grant, 2007).

*"The canoe originates from the Indians in North America who paddled their craft on calm waters in conjunction with hunting."* (Ericsson, 2009).

Aside from the last citation, these writers confirm the age-old characteristic of the canoe as ably challenging open waters.

The Ericsson quote is from Sweden, and is typical of the erroneous view of canoe history there and in many other parts of the world (North America included). Another Swede, Lars Fält (2004), was more accurate when he summarily wrote, "Without canoe, no Canada." Of course, the First Nation canoeists did not stop when they reached the large lakes and the oceans; they simply kept on paddling!

In Sweden the canoe did not find adherents until the 1920s, mainly due to the domination of the kayak since its introduction from Greenland via Britain in the 1860s. Paddling history could have been quite different, however, had Anders Chydenius received a more welcoming reception in the mid-eighteenth century. He brought the birchbark canoe to Finland (then part of Sweden), but his mission to convince the public of the merits of the craft was met with derision despite Chydenius's respected position in society at large. Canoe name-calling made its debut with "Barkboat-Anders" being hurled at Chydenius. Nevertheless, this pioneer made his mark in canoe history by writing at the University of Uppsala what may well have been the first scholarly treatise on the canoe.

The redemption of the canoe was a long time coming and the epochal event has been described by Billy Joelsson (1982): "The canoe's excellence as a tripping vessel was made evident to the Swedes . . . in 1923 by the English canoepair, C.G. Anderson and his wife, who paddled from Vänern to Stockholm, crossing both Vänern and Vättern in difficult weather."

It should be added that when the Andersons reached the Baltic Sea they had well over 100 km of saltwater paddling before they would reach the more sheltered waters of Stockholm. This journey aroused considerable public attention and generated desire to try this craft. The kayak culture mobilized its opposition and the '20s and '30s were characterized by epithet attacks on the canoe such as "Bathtub" (in Nilsson & Ax, 1987), "Sunday toy" (Svartengren, 1927), "Columbi egg?", referring to an apparently insoluble, though actually simple, problem (Kantotisten journal, 1930's), "Fairweather boat" (in Joelsson, 1982), "Ugly duckling" (in Nilsson & Ax, 1987), and "Wood chopping" in relation to paddling technique (in Joelsson, 1982).

Advertising, whether free and negative, as in the above, or paid and positive, as in what the paddling industry inserts into journals, finds its framework within the Thomas

theorem (1928): "If we define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." Words and pictures can become powerful forces for behaviour-shaping if they are regarded as credible, notwithstanding that the map provided is not the territory. The antidote? Personal comparative testing.

How does the kayak history compare? As with canoeing history, there is much mythology. Kayaks, like canoes, vary greatly as Dan Ruuska (1984) pointed out: "The Greenland Eskimo kayaks . . . were used primarily in protected waters. . . . True stormy water kayaks were used by the Western Alaska Eskimos. . . . They were more seaworthy, safer, drier riding, and the most well designed of all the Eskimo kayaks."

The Swedish Canoe Federation (2002), however, restricted itself to commenting on the Greenland kayak, and its views were not consonant with Ruuska. This was not unexpected, since the kayak in Europe was largely defined by the British infatuation with kayaking in relatively nearby Greenland: "The kayak was for many hundreds of years a tool for the eskimoos' hunting of seal and other animals on an unprotected, stormy and iccold sea around Greenland and the North Pole." (*sic.*)

But was the kayak really worth emulating for recreational paddling south of the Arctic? Steve Grant (2008) offers another perspective: "Even the Inuit, credited with inventing the kayak for hunting in the Arctic, also used open umiaks for transportation."

And what type of craft was the umiak? It was very much like a canoe, open deck and all. Moreover, the Inuit, practical as they are, were also quite ready to adopt the southern canoe when brought north by Caucasians.

In Sweden the kayak was an unchallenged innovation, promoted astutely from the mid-1860s, as described by Carl Smith (1892): "The modern tripping-canoe, which about 25 years ago was introduced to the civilized world by the Scot, John MacGregor, can be said to originate from the Eskimo kayak."

More than a century later, respected friluftsliv scholar Klas Sandell (1999) wrote: "The seakayak wave from particularly Great Britain (again!) still rolls onto the shores. With Derek Hutchinson's book 'Sea Canoeing' from 1976 as an important milestone, the new narrower and Greenland-inspired fiberglass kayaks (ca. 5.5 x 0.55 m) with small cockpits and waterproof bulkheads made their commercial victory parade in Sweden."

"Canoeing" terminology, it should be noted, was and is broadly used in many parts of Europe as an omnibus term for all paddling vessels. The canoe as we know it in Canada is still today called a "Canadian" in Sweden in order to distinguish it from the kayak.

Dan Ruuska (1984), legendary kayak builder in the Seattle area, is one of the few in the kayak industry who has articulated the role of marketing and advertising in the growth of sea kayaking: "The Eskimo kayak had to be good — otherwise the Eskimo would not have survived. Modern kayaks don't have to be designed as well — promotion and salesmanship can sell anything."

And how has this been done? In Ruuska's eyes (1984) it was a British orchestration: "The British sea kayak style has become THE style to imitate, not because [of] its merits, but because of its promotion. Popular sea kayak books on the market are written by the British. Sea kayak symposiums have been sponsored by businesses involved with the sale of British sea kayaks. And, of course, keynote symposium speakers have been British, too."

So far, much of the text here has dealt with broad paddling-craft issues. What about more specific characteristics?

**Stability:** The Swedish national newspaper *Expressen* (1996) featured an article by two inexperienced paddlers who had headed out into the Baltic Sea from Stockholm: "... we paddle sea kayaks, and we wobble precariously ... I had visualized a safe and stable craft. Perhaps like a rowboat or at least in the direction of a canoe."

Another comment and question by Dan Ruuska (1984) is pertinent in this regard: "We don't see the point of narrow tippy kayaks for ocean touring. Do you?"

Width is a key factor in stability (Winters, 2001). Sandell (1999) indicated above that the British kayak wave rising in the late 1970s had narrower crafts (ca. 55 cm) than those found in Sweden prior to this. The 2011 Svima shop offerings referred to above had a mean width of 54.4 cm with the widest at 59 cm. Clearly the kayaks used in Sweden (internationally, a broader choice is available) have retained a very narrow design (the narrowest listed was 45 cm!). How does this compare with tripping canoes? The four appropriate Svima models had a mean width of 87.8 cm (range: 85–91.5 cm) — a spectacular difference from the kayaks. Clearly the wobbly Stockholm archipelago paddlers would have felt more stable in a canoe. And how do Ruuska's Alaska-inspired kayaks measure up in this regard? His Polaris II sea kayak is 65 cm wide — not canoe-width, but more than 10 cm wider than the mean of Svima kayaks. Even the Ruuska river kayak I have used at sea was 61 cm, wider than the widest Svima sea kayak.

**Skill:** Hilding Svartengren ruminated about the nature of canoe paddling back in 1927: "No, 'rowing' like in a kayak . . . forces one into a static body position. Canoe paddling provides more variation. If you change sides every half hour and give yourself a 5 minute break every hour, then you can happily take an 8-hour workday at the paddle without any muscle problems."

I can vouch for his seemingly exaggerated claims for the kindness of canoe paddling. My setting out on a long canoe trip without any paddling since the previous summer evokes no hardships. Really! And is kayaking that different? It certainly is: The locked-in body position and the monotony of the paddling movement lead fairly quickly to substantial stress and fatigue.

With rudders being almost legion in today's sea kayaks, paddling skill development as such is hampered, as Ruuska (1987) asserts:

“When you’re ruddering, your feet move back and forth and your knees move up and down. When you’re not ruddering there are no solid footrests to keep your knees up in the kneebraces. But, you NEED to brace your feet and knees against something solid, otherwise you can’t KAYAK.”

What, then, happened after the kayak/canoe strife of the prewar era in Sweden? The canoe grew steadily more popular, and remained so into the 1980s. Possibly the impetus for the “Canoe Wave” (as the national federation eventually called its canoe promotion program), found its source in the Second World War when coastal paddling was not so enticing, while inland paddling was a safer alternative. This may well be an important root for the inland definition of the canoe in the Nordic region.

What insights, then, can the literature provide on the issue of actual comparisons of the kayak and the canoe? Friluftsfrämjandet takes the challenge in 2006 and writes that “After the canoe wave of the 80’s, now it is the kayak-wave that matters. But the canoe still lives, though it is hardly noted in the kayak turbulence. A perfect vessel for our inland waters.”

Yes, the canoe is there, but barely. Not so in the United States. The Outdoor Foundation

observed that in 2008, 7.8 million Americans participated in kayaking while as many as 9.9 million were canoeing. So, on the other side of the Atlantic, the canoe still dominates, with approximately 27 percent more participants. What is the situation in Canada?

Some short quotes from Swedish literature illustrate the culture clash over the vessels:

Especially noteworthy here is the 2002 Turist canoe quote, where it is to be wondered why the canoe is recommended for “turbulent rapids” but not for waves and currents at sea?

Two other citations with “sins of omission” are presented here:

“We had from before no experience of canoes, which are not suited for the Karlshamn archipelago where we roam, and minimally out on the open sea.” (Bengtsson, 1946)

Bengtsson wrote here of a journey partially in the southernmost Swedish Baltic Sea archipelago. No mention whatever is made concerning encountering any paddling problems in the Baltic section!

“A canoe does not tolerate wind or heavier

**Table 3: Assessments of Canoe versus Kayak in Swedish Writings**

| Canoe   | Kayak  |
|---|--|
| “Could be good enough for a pond, but on the real waters they are simply dangerous.” (Orre, 1930) | “ . . . for archipelago use.” (Sandberg, 1979)   |
| “ . . . should be banned.” (Pseudonym “T”, 1934)  | “ . . . for outer areas: here the kayak is the perfect vessel (Lönn, 1993)                         |
| “ . . . can be used in the archipelago in good weather and in protected areas.” (Sandberg, 1979)  | “ . . . easier to paddle and better equipped to cope with wind and waves.” ( <i>Turist</i> , 1998) |
| “ . . . tolerates wind and waves more poorly; is not suitable for outer areas.” (Lönn, 1993)      | “ . . . comes closest to nature.” (Sjögren, 2007)  |
| “The canoe is a craft for . . . lakes, streams and turbulent rapids.” ( <i>Turist</i> , 2002)     | “ . . . ideal for nature studies.” (SvD accent, 2011)  |

seas particularly well. It cannot be paddled speedily and is hardly suited out in the archipelago rim. . . .” (Alexis, 2006).

On the opening, facing page of the Alexis article is a photo of a solo canoeist stroking in the Småland archipelago of the Baltic Sea. No comment is offered on this paradox.

**Wind:** A common point of discussion in the canoe/kayak comparison is vulnerability to wind. The judgment of STF’s Jan Lönn (1993) exemplifies a frequently expressed view: “The canoe is sensitive to wind due to the heightened bow and stern.”

Swedish wilderness survival expert Lars Fält (2004), on a trip in Ontario’s Northwoods, appears to be of another opinion: “We rented a canoe of Canadian make, Souris Canoes, that was both light and stable, even in very strong sidewinds.”

In fact, tripping canoes do not have marked bow and stern upswings, whereas many sea kayaks do, negating their supposed streamlining from all wind directions. This kayak feature is not traditionally common, but seems to have resulted from the design modification enabling launching a kayak off steep British shorelines while sitting aboard.

**Seaworthiness:** In this criterion, so critical for big-water paddling, the kayak appears at first hand to be clearly superior. Craig Zimmerman (1996), in his writing on Lake Superior travel, noted as follows: “Remember a canoe cannot ride a breaking wave. If waves are crashing, watch calmly from shore.”

Prominent Canadian canoe writer James Raffan (1999) appears to differ, however: “In practiced hands a canoe can negotiate stormy seas and cranky whitewater with ease, with grace if it is done right.”

Swedish texts confirm this; the experience of Olof Thaning (1947), legendary 27-year editor of the STF Yearbook, offers an illustration: “It stormed on Lake Femund. . . . Never did I believe that canoes were such capable craft. Like corks they floated softly and pliantly over meter-and-a-half waves.”

Femund is Norway’s third largest lake (201 sq km), and I can personally substantiate the turbulence induced by its mountain setting.

A rarely mentioned factor in the kayak’s seaworthiness is its nearly ubiquitous rudder. Having it means that the kayaker never learns to paddle, as Ruuska (1987) noted above. Attempting to rudder-steer leads to a loss of firm body contact with the vessel, without which the kayak cannot be controlled properly. Moreover, the two paddlers described above who hesitantly headed out into the Baltic from Stockholm (Expressen, 1996), complained that despite rudders “. . . the kayaks have a turning radius like an archipelago ferry.”

This is understandable when taking into account the length of vessel waterline in conjunction with a solo paddler sitting in the vicinity of the middle. A tandem canoe, on the other hand, has the two paddlers placed close to bow and stern. Peter Alexis (2006) writes of the result: “Quick turn: Georg and Magnus paddle in separate directions each on their own side of the canoe. The result is that the canoe turns on a dime.”

It goes without saying that the capacity to make rapid directional changes is *sine qua non* in the sphere of seaworthiness.

**Safety:** This dimension is closely related to seaworthiness. There are, however, additional considerations to be taken. Matt Broze (1997), another prominent Seattle kayak builder and writer, cautions as follows: “Sea kayaking is so easy to learn that anyone with a few minutes’ practice can unknowingly paddle into a hazardous predicament.”

Why might they “unknowingly paddle”? Ruuska (1985) suggested that the industry deludes them: “Unlike other outdoor sports where hazards are obvious . . . sea kayaking doesn’t look the least bit dangerous, especially in promotional photos.”

Steve Grant (2008) directs us to the crucial factor of stability: “And while inattention can easily result in a capsizing in a single kayak, this is much less likely in a canoe.”

In addition, Grant leads the reader yet further into the canoe safety quest: "We approach capsizing as backcountry skiers regard avalanches. The consequences of either are so serious that virtually all the effort has to go into avoidance."

A major part of avoiding capsizing is the skill development, attained through practice, that is so necessary for water travel safety. Because good canoe paddling is the result of long-term, focused practice, this is a major reason why big-water canoeing can be said to be safe. It is simply very unlikely that a canoeist, without well established skills, can manoeuvre into hazardous conditions.

**Rain/Spray:** A less central, comfort-oriented variable in the vessel debate is the degree of protection from moisture. Here the jury seems unopposed in favour of the kayak. The Swedish Canoe Federation (2002) phrased it as follows: "Well down in the kayak, and with the sprayskirt on, one sits delightfully dry and comfortable for hours, well protected from cold wind, rain and breaking waves."

On the other hand, the Magnusson (Alexis, 2006) brothers were not so convinced: "In a canoe...there is less splash and spray, so a spraycover is not needed. In this way one can sit and enjoy without needing to sweat under a tight synthetic hood."

Of special interest is the Magnussons' final phrase. My personal experience confirms it; the spray skirt locks in perspiration as well as other moisture brought into the vessel when entering the kayak. Rest stops and even overnights rarely offer enough opportunity for the craft interior to completely dry out.

Whether in a decked or an open vessel, the paddler needs to be dressed to cope with moisture, so here there is no difference. Concerning baggage, this also needs to be waterproofed regardless of deck/no deck. After all, in the kayak the load needs to be taken out from time to time, particularly when making/breaking camp, so here again, waterproofing against rain is needed

regardless of vessel type. And is water-protection a big issue today? The answer is clearly "no"; waterproof clothing and packs are widely available.

**Flexibility:** In terms of multi-functionality, it is difficult to compete with the canoe. The craft is a sterling example of, as Buckminster Fuller puts it, "Doing more with less." The canoe is simplicity itself, while the kayak has increasingly been burdened with an assortment of apparatuses, much of it attached externally since internal space is limited.

For the Magnusson brothers, "it is simply freer to paddle a canoe. The packs can just be placed in the middle of the canoe" (Alexis, 2006). Kayak packing and unpacking, on the other hand, are projects.

The Bengt Bengtsson trip (1946) referred to earlier is of interest for the present topic in that it is the only writing I have located so far that addresses both canoe and kayak in operation on a longer journey: "the kayak did not load very much, while the canoe could in that event compete with an Italian donkey."

Finally, since sea kayaks are a specific category of kayaks, are there also specifically designed "sea canoes"? Generally, this latter term finds no resonance. The explanation may be found in the versatility of the canoe. Steve Grant (2008) reflects in the following way: "People use all sorts of canoes on the ocean. . . . Not having exactly the right design is no reason to stay home."

Personal experience confirms this. My wife and I have paddled many makes, models, and lengths of canoes, made from a variety of materials, in the big waters, and always with pleasure. The basic design is so sound that it has never failed us.

**Speed:** It is remarkable that speed should come up in any form of friluftsliv discussion. Though the term is often found in kayak advertising, it rarely finds its way into canoe promotion. Dan Ruuska (1984) waxes perplexed over his kayak culture when he

quoted a client: “Top speed is the LEAST important consideration. . . . I didn’t buy a kayak to go fast. . . . If I wanted to go fast over water I’d bicycle fast over a floating bridge!”

But, given that there may be some speed-loving recreational paddlers, what of the quite uncontested claim of the kayak’s speed edge over the canoe? Steve Grant (2008) has pondered and researched the question. His findings: “Will the canoeist suffer a speed penalty? Basically, no. A modern tandem tripping canoe actually is faster than a single sea kayak. A double sea kayak is faster, but not over marathon distances.”

Be that as it may, the last word here on this topic goes to Bengt Ohrelius (1972): “Speed — just a doubtful joy: To travel quickly in the archipelago just for entertainment appears in some way wrong and in opposition to the laws of nature. One shall not be in a hurry in paradise.”

## “Take-out”

### Return

The words of William James (1981) sum-up the consequences of the striving embodied in a quest: “ . . . there are lessons learned through the trials of afar that are brought back home for the betterment of all.”

This journey has uncovered contradictions, disjunctions, and paradoxes. Proposals and hypotheses have often been found to have been presented as facts. Empirical evidence is glaring in its omission.

I have met vigorous resistance in many quarters over my elucidation of the merits of the canoe vis-à-vis the kayak:

- “If it were true, we would know about it.”
- “The experts do not agree.”
- “People do not want to change.”
- “You are insane!”

However, Susanne Hoffman of the Swedish Touring Club (2010), in a lucid

communication may be right on the mark: “ . . . the following thesis (no truths but just reflections): We Swedes are quick to pick up everything, and if many say that ‘kayak, that’s the thing’ then we jump. Without discernment! We want to test our limits, we want to be first, and many want to be adventurers like Ola, Göran, and Renata.” (Ola Skinnarmo, Göran Kropp, and Renata Chlumska are renowned Swedish adventurers/explorers.)

Yes, but is there any strategy that can protect us from what is, in essence, a collective behaviour tsunami, regardless of whatever good intentions may drive it? Of course there is. It rests on the personal examination of all claims made for friluftsliv equipment, activities and policies. In this way contributions are made to ensure that friluftsliv and its advocates are in charge of their own destiny.

This cannot be more vividly expressed than in the words of philosopher and dissident Victor Serge: “to always think yourself and not rely on either authority or majority.” Surely this wisdom should extend to all realms of life.

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Nils Vikander is a scholar of friluftsliv and nature sports who now looks forward to more doing and less reading/speaking/writing about it all! This article is based on his opening keynote at the 2011 COEO conference and was crafted at his Trondheim fjord basecamp.



# The Perceived Life Impact of a University Outdoor Education Course

By Jennifer Wigglesworth

Learning in the outdoors provides lasting educational experiences. Most students retain information best when *doing* an activity, and the outdoors allows for these opportunities. Outdoor education (OE) is a large, multi-disciplinary field cultivated from many roots. Since OE offers such vivid learning opportunities, it is an important area for research initiatives.

The study I am discussing in this article is part of my Master's thesis at the University of Ottawa, which I am completing under the supervision of Dr. Paul Heintzman. It is patterned upon research by Daniel (2007) on the life-significance of a university wilderness expedition. There is currently relatively little research on the life significance of OE and I am hoping to fill this gap in the literature. The research is retrospective in nature and it takes a lifespan perspective; therefore, it seeks to understand how experiences that may have occurred 20 or 30 years ago continue to influence people's feelings or behaviour.

The purpose of my present investigation is to discover what participants in a university summer outdoor education course remember about their OE experience and what they learned during and as a result of the course with respect to their *intrapersonal*, *interpersonal* and *environmental* relationships. Furthermore, I am exploring whether lessons from the OE course play a subsequent role in participants' lives and which components of the course have the most impact. Therefore, I am studying two aspects of the OE course: the life significance of the entire OE course, and the life significance of its individual components.

For my Master's thesis, I am completing two interrelated studies. The first study consists of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with University of Ottawa alumni who were enrolled in a two-week summer OE credit course held at the University of

Ottawa's camp. So far, I have completed 11 interviews and I hope to interview a few more participants. The purpose of this part of the study is to explore the significant life experiences of the OE course. The findings from this study will then help shape the final version of the web-based questionnaire for the second study.

I expect that the research results will have critical implications for field-based programming with an emphasis on the outdoors as a classroom. Therefore, the findings have the potential to inspire Canadian professional practice and demonstrate the need for outdoor education in university settings. For instance, if we can isolate and understand the processes and conditions that enhance opportunities for personal growth from outdoor experiences, then we can prescribe conditions and program activities more effectively to match the potential for growth (Daniel, 2007). Furthermore, an enhanced understanding of the transformative potential of outdoor experiences could have many implications for land management practices, including the importance of protecting and preserving wildlife areas, forests, and provincial and national parks.

In addition to practical implications, the research findings hold promise for contributing to scholarly literature. First, the study seeks to understand the long-term impact of the experience. Second, it explores an area of research that is still very much in its infancy, including the processes that link an OE course to a significant life experience. It is evident in the OE literature that there is a need for more process-oriented research. Therefore, the proposed research seeks to answer this call; this will be done by establishing links among course components and outcomes through analysis of the semi-structured interviews that will aim to understand *why* the participant found his or her OE experience to be significant

and what parts of the outdoor course led to this discovery. Third, the findings have the potential to advance significant life-effect research, as the research questions will explore the role an OE experience has on someone's life over 20 years after the experience occurred. In line with this, the research findings may contribute to Dewey's theory of personal meaning that maintains that learning must derive from making meaning of what is being taught. It is hoped that the research will document how an outdoor experience becomes increasingly memorable, and, ultimately, leads to a significant life experience. Finally, the research findings may advance the learning theory of experiential education if they are able to demonstrate the importance of learning through direct and genuine outdoor experiences.

Since many of the OE studies have been conducted with youth, the next logical step is to explore OE processes with new populations. My present study seeks to fill this gap in the literature. The current research explores how *university students* come to understand whether an outdoor experience is significant up to 20 or 30 years after participation in the OE course. Although the proposed research will be

patterned on Daniel's (2003) study, he explored the significant life effects of a wilderness expedition, not an OE course. Therefore, my research fills this gap in the literature by focusing attention on a particular OE program.

I am currently in the process of transcribing and analyzing the interview data. I plan to disseminate my research findings in later article submissions.

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*Jennifer Wigglesworth is currently completing her master's thesis at the University of Ottawa. Hiking, snowboarding, golfing and dragon boat are her favourite outdoor activities.*



# Taking a Balanced Approach to Risk in Childhood: Why and How

By Tim Gill

Where was your favourite place to play as a child? Chances are it was outdoors, and out of sight of adults. A place where you felt a sense of freedom and possibility. Where you could follow your impulses and your imagination, even if that led you into situations that were scary, challenging, perhaps even downright dangerous.

It is not mere nostalgia to revive these memories. Of course, we should not fall for the myth that there was a “golden age” for growing up. But if we all agree that a taste of freedom and adventure are vital ingredients of a good childhood, then surely we should see to it that children today are able to enjoy similar experiences.

Sadly, these experiences are under threat. When people say that children grow up faster today, they are confusing appearance with reality. Children may be avid consumers of adult culture. They may adopt adult mannerisms and styles. They certainly get to grips with new technology far more easily than we grown-ups. But when it comes to everyday freedoms — like walking to school alone, or meeting friends in the park — a very different picture emerges.

The fact is that for the last 30 or 40 years or longer, across the developed world, the horizons of childhood have been shrinking, and adult control and oversight is becoming the norm. For instance, Hillman, Adams & Whitelegg (1990) found that in the United Kingdom, in 1971 almost 90 percent of eight-year-olds went to school without their parents. By 1990 it was just 11 percent.

Why has this happened? As I argue in my book *No Fear* (Gill, 2007), the causes are many and varied, and cannot simply be blamed on parents. Neighbourhoods are more dominated by cars, and families are more dependent on them. Changing family working patterns mean fewer parents are around to watch over children, and more

children are in formal childcare. In many areas, people don't know their neighbours, and there is greater fear of crime. All these factors, and others, reinforce the logic of containment.

However, some parents are actively resisting the pressures to overprotect. In the USA, journalist and mum Lenore Skenazy was inspired to write her book and blog *Free-Range Kids* (2009) after finding herself at the centre of a media storm for letting her nine-year-old son travel alone on the New York subway.

What motivates Skenazy, and me in my own work, is the conviction that “battery-rearing” children does not help to prepare them for the ups and downs of everyday life. Childhood is a journey from dependence to autonomy. At the heart of this journey is a transfer of responsibility from adult to child. So we have to give children some opportunity for freedom and exploration, not least because children themselves want to get to grips with the world on their own terms.

One of ways we do this is by creating environments for outdoor play. Play spaces are a fascinating arena for exploring ideas about risk and responsibility. On the one hand, they need to engage and stimulate children: to give them challenges and the chance to test themselves through their play. On the other, they should not be places where children are regularly coming to serious harm. A balanced approach is needed.

The idea of balance has come to the fore where I live in the UK, but it was not always so. Ten years ago, schools and municipalities were becoming preoccupied with safety. Many believed they had to eliminate risk. Some of the resulting playgrounds were very dull indeed.

Those of us involved in play safety at the national level felt we had to take action. We went back to first principles, and had a long, hard look at what playgrounds were for in the first place. We argued for a more balanced approach to risk. What is more, we got support from the UK government's own Health and Safety Executive. This work has been the catalyst for a sea change in professional attitudes about play safety.

The climate around play safety is continuing to improve. In 2008 the UK Government published *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide*. And it is ripping up all the old rules. Instead of conducting risk assessments, providers are encouraged to carry out risk-benefit assessments. This simple yet far-reaching shift means that for the first time, providers will be able to take into account the benefits of giving children challenging, risky experiences.

In the wake of this work, some of the latest playgrounds are genuinely exciting, engaging places to play. For instance, sand pits have been included in several new play areas in the London Borough of Islington, even though the municipality was initially worried about the risk of contamination from broken glass or animal feces. Using risk-benefit assessment helped to think through the pros and cons leading to revised maintenance regimes and reduced costs.

The idea of balancing risks and benefits is spreading beyond the public playground into educational settings, and has reached the highest echelons of power. The UK government-sponsored Young Review into health and safety gave risk-benefit assessment a ringing endorsement, and called for the approach to be developed more widely. The report's recommendations were supported in full by our prime minister.

None of this means that we simply abandon children to their fate, or complacently shrug our shoulders when they come to harm. History teaches us that children have suffered all too often because of the failings of adults. But history — in the form of our recollections of our own childhood memories

—also teaches us an invaluable lesson: that giving children the chance to learn from their experiences, and learn from their mistakes, is part and parcel of a good childhood.

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# Adventure into the Woods: Pathways to Forest Schools

By Kelly McKinney

“Go outside and play.” These words from my parents, and parents of another generation, fuelled my abilities for adventure. These words got my brother, my sister, our dog and me out of the house to roam, learn and discover in the woods.

From a socio-economic standpoint, my childhood could be considered disadvantaged. However, I grew up with privileges that are becoming ever more precious, valuable and controlled. When I was young my parents divorced but I feel that positive benefits and experiences happened in nature as a result. Both of my parents moved to houses that backed onto the Red Hill Valley in Hamilton, Ontario. My dad joined a divorce support group where fathers decided to do regular activities together with their kids. We went on picnics in nature every weekend. We gathered regularly at Christie Conservation Area, Confederation Park, Gage Park or the Valley.

As a child I had the ability to roam and adventure in green space. Every day as a child I had the ability to lead myself in the 700 hectares of forest that was my backyard. (In 2007 the Valley was greatly severed by the construction of the Red Hill Expressway).

The ability to explore in nature alone is not a common activity for children today. A telling study from Sheffield, England (Derbyshire, 2007) highlights the way our capitalist, corporate and industrialized societies have limited the roaming abilities of children. Take a moment to reflect on your own “roaming radius” as a child. How far were you allowed to go, or how far did you allow yourself to go, acting as your own guide, making your own decisions and leading yourself on your own adventure? Ask a grandparent or elder how far they could travel as a child and what their landscape looked like.

**“Have you ever heard of Forest Schools?”**

This question was asked of me several years ago by a woman of Latvian heritage, Dr. Astrida

Neimanis; this query initiated a personal learning adventure. I was watching this woman’s children some afternoons after my undergrad and she appreciated that we spent a lot of our time in the forest along Hamilton’s Rail Trail. Before that, I had never heard of forest schools, forest kindergartens or nature preschools, but the idea was instantaneously welcoming, somehow familiar and certainly appealing. (I will use the initials “FS” in referring to forest schools; this primarily relates to specific early years programming for ages two to six).

Subconsciously this question reconnected me to the happy learning and play outside in the forest of my childhood. Her descriptions of forest preschools present in and originating from Scandinavian countries caused yearning within me. From here I began an adventure to become familiar with FS models to learn how to implement them in the urban community that I am part of.

During teacher’s college last year in the Queen’s OEE program, I ventured to the UK for an alternative practicum, taking a Forest School Practitioner Course through Archimedes Training. I will complete the course in May, and I have spoken with people learning about and leading forest schools in several different ways. There is eager conversation about the potential of growing forest schooling in Canada; Carp Ridge Forest Preschool & Forest Kindergarten outside of Ottawa presents an inspiring example.

Definitions of FS can be debated, and practitioners have different expressions to defining what these are. Sara Knight, a Forest School Practitioner and academic researcher in the UK, mentions that at an emotional level, practitioners and participants know what FS is, and because it is so special, people feel very protective of it. “To put into words and try to describe it is to threaten the magic” (Knight, 2009).

### Forest school reconnects children with ability to roam outside in nature.

Imagine a learning environment where children are prepared to be outside for the majority of the day, and where they are entitled to play and make (a majority of) their own decisions. Trained practitioners ensure for safety, considering a variety of factors, to create an environment of trust so children can explore to develop their capacities.

Some cultures mainly fuelled by capitalism have greatly severed connections to nature; many parents and educators can simply not imagine a forest school. In contrast, *friluftsliv* is a term that expresses Scandinavian cultural traditions and legal rights of spending time outdoors with family and friends for recreation but also to restore a personal balance with the aid of nature. Translated the term means, “open air life” and it promotes and preserves that every family has easy access to natural landscapes with a right to roam in them (Knight, 2009).

Unfortunately, I cannot think of a similar, encompassing word in our culture. Fortunately, *friluftsliv* does resonate with the intentions that dominant memories of my early years — experiences that are so powerful in shaping identities, behaviors and attitudes.

Forest schools have gained popularity throughout Europe and the UK. There are schools in other parts of the world that share FS principals, although some might not call themselves a forest school. The FS learning environment happens in a special place. It doesn't necessarily have to be in a forest or wooded area, but it is an outdoor place that is specific for the school and known to participating children as the site for child-led activity, experiential learning, respect for the environment and trust. Play and learning on the site happen on a regular basis but firstly the location has to be assessed for appropriateness of human usage. More children in the UK experience FS in addition to national curriculum throughout the Foundation Stages or elementary years. Participation could happen every day

depending on parents' needs and wants for preschool care. There could be great potential for this type of learning as a part of Ontario's play-based, full-day kindergarten program. However the program happens, it has to occur consistently and at a minimum, kids should participate once a week. When children attend FS in this way, they adapt to the uniqueness of the program and gain comfort in the forest. Practitioners can then make informed assessments about growth and development in children.

I have facilitated an informal FS program with a group of children in a “high-risk,” urban neighbourhood since August 2011. Luckily, we are a short walk to our site. We don't even cross a road to get to a four-acre woodlot owned as city park space. The lot is surrounded by three local schools and 34 acres of sports fields, black walnut trees and a playground.

The first time I encouraged the youth to show me around their neighbourhood forest (although really, I had already thoroughly assessed the forest, contacted the city staff about our presence there and noted some hazards), a young girl, with wide eyes said to me, “We can't go in there; there are killers in there!” I could tell that she was slightly nervous but also curious and excited about the possibility of exploring something new. With the safety that we provided, she quickly forgot her warning and felt confident about adventure.

In a few weeks the kids developed a rapport with the forest that has grown stronger. They became aware of their surroundings, the pathways and obstacles. We organized a community-wide cleanup of the park before leaves began to fall. At “forest school” or “Fridays at the Forest Park,” we share stories and pictures in the soil, we make mini shelters and play our favourite hide-and-seek games. Youth have come to identify, understand and respect the diversity of species that live in the mini forest of their urban environment. These “at-risk” youth are engaged, cooperative, content and honest personalities and their talents have emerged. Even in “bad weather” there is little reluctance to spend time outside.

On days with heavy winds we won't go into the forest, but rather to the open sports field, a perfect atmosphere for kite flying.

**There are many child-led adventures that happen at forest school. Children's and practitioners' experiences are vast and dynamic.**

Activities in FS can include imaginative play, shelter-building, construction and crafts with materials in the environment. Children inquire and learn about species identification and can record and document in a journal. There are hide-and-seek games, scavenger hunts and art in various forms, including visual art, music, storytelling, drama or dance. Depending on experience and setting, practitioners may include fire-building, cooking, wood carving projects and use of tools in everyday FS activities. These same activities are seen as unfathomable for school boards constantly imagining lawsuits and liability issues. But still, introductions to formal curriculum — literacy, math, science, etc. — can be made in all activities and the practitioner can encourage this while keeping activities child-led.

**The early years are a time of natural discovery** when little bodies want to gain greater understanding of their capacities and their environment. Exploring may pose risks, but experienced and trained caregivers/practitioners control harms and mitigate risks in order to maximize learning. Young people form thousands of connections in their brains and bodies during this time. These learning circuits, so tied to emotion, can certainly affect us for our whole lives. Doctors, educators and addictions specialists tell us this and they also tell us that symptoms associated with health disorders can be alleviated with access to relaxing, nourishing green space and exercise.

As a child in the woods and in nature with my family I — and therefore my brain — experienced being happy, smart, brave, intrigued, successful, silly, helpful, cooperative, caring, in awe, encouraging, respectful, lost, confused, capable, creative. I learned how to take appropriate risks. My physical body enjoyed exercise as I learned

how to be speedy, how to balance, climb a tree, cross a river and swing on vines. I formed these connections in my early years in nature and I am able to work from and with such feelings today.

At a very young age, without assistance, I knew how to travel up and down a long, steep, hill. My siblings and I had regular practice ascending and descending because we had to travel on this hill to enter or exit the Valley. (Sadly this place, now only a memory, became an on-ramp for the expressway.) We could travel on the hill if it were totally slick, muddy, slippery or frozen. Legs bent and engaged . . . digging feet in sideways to find their footing. In the last few years, working with urban youth who have little access to the forest, I have come to realize that my body and brain were trained at an early age to be agile. It is initially difficult for some youth to be successful with hill-climbing or hiking because they have not practiced so they might not have strong connections with these actions in their brains. There is a learned technique to walking on ground that is not flat or concrete.

In a classroom setting there is no lesson or grade for "hill climbing," but physical ability and agility are assessed as knowledge. The walls of an early-years classroom greatly restrict children's abilities to roam, learn about their bodies and engage in nature and our communities with our many senses. These are privileges that we have had for thousands of years.

But also, outcomes and studies of preschoolers engaging in forest school do show smooth transitions into classroom settings. A variety of studies and experience from Europe show that children who participate in this type of early-years program have higher retention and success rates with formal curriculum, less occurrence of attention deficit/behavioral disorders and obesity and greater cooperation with classmates. Overall, FS is a place for learning and adventure, to safely test one's boundaries and abilities while continuously building upon new skills and invigorating oneself with quantifiable and often immeasurable knowledge.

A Forest School instructor I spoke with in the UK commented on some critiques of Forest School training bodies. We discussed how some communities have traditionally and continually raised their children outside and in the forest. Why should they be trained or receive a certification to do “preschool” if they have inherently always done this?

But with urbanization and global shifts away from and against nature, so many of us have lost historic abilities to survive in, play in and enjoy the forest, the beach or the wetland, especially as children. For many cultures, colonization has eroded this traditional ability. So there is a need for FS training. Training ensures that participants are protected from the real threats of the forest and that the forest is protected from the threat of human presence. Foresters and practitioners learn to thoroughly and continually assess the environment, looking for hazards and ways to neutralize and avoid human impact. We need to keep an ecological balance of our enjoyed green spaces if we expect to benefit from them in the future.

**Overall, FS presents an opportunity to reconnect with green spaces and a roaming, adventurous, childhood so near becoming extinct.** There are a variety of factors necessary for forest school to happen and varying definitions and implementations of how it can occur. The learning connections that we make in the early years can affect us in formal education settings, in our relationships and in our life. Friluftsliv or regular time in nature such as at forest school would likely alleviate some of the problems associated with my urban area. Kids would at least be more likely to “go outside and play,” providing the opportunity to learn the measurable and immeasurable ways that nature can provide for us.

Additional Benefits of Forest School:

- Increased self-confidence and self-belief for freedom, time and space, to learn, grow and demonstrate independence.
- Increased awareness of the consequences of their actions on other people, peers and adults, to work cooperatively.

- More sophisticated written and spoken language, prompted by children’s sensory experiences at FS.
- A keenness to participate in exploratory learning and play activities; an ability to focus on specific tasks for extended periods of time.
- Improved stamina and gross motor skills through free and easy movement and by making things.
- Increased respect for the environment, interest in natural surroundings; observational improvements.
- Teachers and other adults see children in different settings, which improves their understanding and helps identify learning styles.

(Archimedes Training, 2011)

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# Leadership Styles

By Carlin Val and Jess Kemp

The intent of this study was to examine how a group's dynamic changes under the influence of different leadership styles, and to determine what leadership style works best in a large group expedition. The main question identified was "What roles can a leader play in affecting the dynamic of a large group while partaking in a field expedition?"

The following research questions were addressed:

1. How can a leader create a positive group dynamic while facilitating an outdoor experience?
2. How does leadership affect group dynamics?
3. How does leadership and decision-making interconnect within a positive group dynamic?
4. Which leadership style works best for various situations in the field?
5. What are the barriers and pathways for each leadership style?

Data was collected to draw a connection between leadership styles and their affects on the group dynamics of large groups during outdoor expeditions.

### The Research Context

Field Explorations I is a third-year course that is offered as a mandatory credit to Outdoor Recreation students at Lakehead University. Students of the 2007 class had the option to choose from three different field trips: crown of the continents (hiking), dogsledding, or a voyageur canoe trip. These courses help to teach theoretical and applied topics that relate to outdoor leadership, parks and tourism. The voyageur canoe trip was the only course that was free to take. As a result, a high number of students enrolled on this trip. It was because of this high number that researchers chose this expedition to conduct research. The high enrollment of students

offered researchers the highest diversity in data when comparing leadership styles to group dynamic. The voyageur canoe field explorations course contained the following themes:

1. Leader of the day: experiencing different kinds of leadership each day.
2. Voyageur Heritage Interpretation: learning about the day-to-day lifestyles of the voyageurs.
3. Land Heritage Interpretation: learning about the history of the trip's route.
4. Teaching Heritage Interpretation: teaching children in the surrounding communities while on the canoe trip.

### Leadership Styles

Leadership is the ability to move a group towards a common goal that would not be met if a leader had not been there (Graham, 1997). Researchers of this study categorized leadership styles into three main styles of leadership, which helped to organize the observations into more simplified data.

#### *Autocratic (authoritarian) leadership*

When faced with the need to provide a decision, an autocratic leader is one who would come up with a solution for the entire group on their own. The autocratic leader would generally solve an issue and make decisions for the group using observations and what they feel is needed or most important for the majority of the group members to benefit at that time (Dessler & Starke, 2004). While recording the research, these were the leaders that would decide for the group when they would wake up and depart, and exactly how far they should go for that day. If the group came across any conflicts or barriers within the expedition, these leaders would also make the decisions on their own, inquiring feedback from the three hired instructors to ensure that their decisions were okay.

### *Democratic (participative) leadership*

The democratic leaders were those who took a very relaxed yet in-control approach to leading the group. Participative leaders, more often than not, would consult the group when approaching an issue and consider their suggestions, but the leader retains the final say in what particular approach is taken (Dessler & Starke, 2004). Within the expedition setting, many of the participants displayed this kind of leadership by obtaining suggestions from other members of the group to come to a group consensus when trying to solve a problem or an issue. These leaders would then talk amongst themselves and come to a decision as to what the group would do.

### *Laissez-faire (abdicratic) leadership*

The laissez-fair approach to leadership is the idea that the participants should be able to work problems out and make their way through an expedition without too much extra guidance. These kinds of leaders would provide very little guidance when dealing with group issues on the expedition and would allow group members to come up with decisions on their own. The abdicratic leader would take an extremely “hands-off” approach to leading in order to encourage group problem-solving and critical thinking, without allowing participants to depend on the leader for the final word (Dessler & Starke, 2004). This approach was seen when suggestions would be made to the leader to take a certain approach and the leader would just respond with a simple “sure, let’s do it,” and decisions were made without a lot of consideration.

It is important to note that in the real world it is highly improbable to have a completely democratic or completely autocratic leader (Martin, Cashel, Wagstaff, & Breunig, in press).

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The research took a qualitative approach in order to gather all of the necessary information to answer the main research

questions. The approach taken to this research was the Grounded Theory, in which a concept is exposed through continuous data collection and assessment (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The research began with a look at generative questions that helped to guide the research, but were neither static nor restricting (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Most of the research was gathered while participating in the field of the expedition. The research was gathered in three different methods: a self-diagnosis of individuals’ own leadership styles, daily field notes by the researchers and finally, a focus group held at the end of the trip. Answers to the main questions were developed and from those answers, common themes as well as theories resulted.

### **Conflicts**

Before the voyageur expedition took place, researchers had created a list of possible conflicts that would arise. Conflicts were considered prior to the voyageur expedition as a method to foresee skews in data collection.

#### *Assumed conflicts*

The following is a list of possible conflicts:

- Weather (wind days, rain, cold)
- Portages
- Equipment malfunction
- Students’ level of comfort
- Distance covered
- Personality conflicts

#### *Actual conflicts*

After the voyageur expedition, the researchers found the following to be actual conflicts that had the ability to alter data collection:

- Credibility of Myers-Briggs
- Weather
- Distances that had to be made up
- Personality conflicts over extended time period in close living space.

Depending on a specific conflict, the group dynamic could change as a direct result. As a result it would not matter what leadership style was being administered.

### Observations

There were three occurrences on the trip where leadership had a clear effect on the group dynamic.

On the voyageur canoe trip there were three instructors and two student leaders of the day, for each day. One night while the students slept, the tarps failed and certain individuals got wet. Since all instructors were sleeping in a separate shelter and there was not a set leader for that day (previous leaders had completed their obligations at bedtime, and the leaders for the next day were not to begin leading until the following morning), the students were leaderless, and therefore an emergent leader was needed. Findings here suggest that in the case of an emergency, if no person is declared the leader, an emergent leader is better than no leader. The emergent leader was able to organize fellow students in sharing sleeping bags in a way that kept everyone dry, warm and as comfortable as they could be.

One morning on the voyageur canoe trip there were wind conditions that normally students would not paddle on. Due to the sail that the students had built, the instructors (actual leaders) decided to proceed. The strong winds allowed the group to make up an unscheduled rest day (due to wind) and as a result lifted the spirits of the group. The instructors (leaders) demonstrated a dynamic leadership style when they made the call to proceed even though it was not recommended in the liability guidelines. The guidelines say it is not safe to paddle in choppy waves; however it does not state anything about sailing through choppy waves. In this case it was safe to do so, and as a result of the dynamic leadership the group dynamic was high and had positive energy.

When forced to make a decision on doing a night paddle, the leader of the day tried to demonstrate a democratic leadership style

and facilitated a group discussion. The group had reached a perceived consensus when one student spoke out and said that they did not want to complete a night paddle. The group discussion then turned into a 17-on-one verbal argument. What happened was the argumentative student had been holding the boats down and felt like they were not involved in the group decision-making process. As a result, this student felt like they had to make their opinion heard. The only way to do so at that time was to demonstrate a conflicting argument. When the leader of the day saw this conflicting argumentative student, he then instinctively apologized for not recognizing that she was not involved in the group decision making process. After this apology the student lost the stubborn attitude and the group was able to find a consensus. It is evident that in this situation a complete group decision (completely democratic leadership style) was needed to uphold a positive group dynamic.

### Conclusion

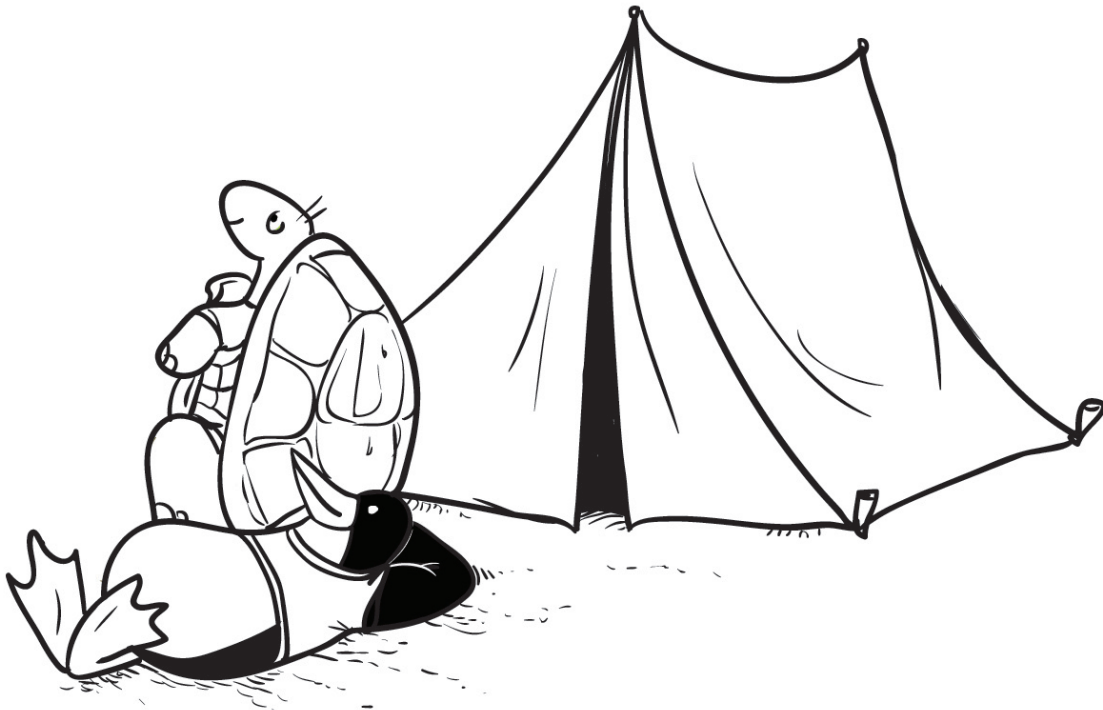
Findings suggest that the Myers-Briggs personality test was not the most appropriate tool to use when determining personality/leadership traits in the participants of this study. Though the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is a popular method of testing personality types and has been used in a variety of settings, some researchers have found that the test is unwarranted in an applied setting (Pittenger, 1993). Findings indicate that there were too many inconsistencies in the personality self-identification test. Perhaps the personality/leadership identification tool should have more distinct groupings.

Findings conclude that it is close to impossible to determine the exact leadership style that would work best in a large group expedition. Groups of any size are incredibly diverse and unique. It is hard to classify and even harder to satisfy those needs and wants. The leadership style that would work best in upholding a positive group dynamic would be a dynamic leadership style. A leader should be able to mould to the group given to them, demonstrating the ability to

choose from a number of leadership styles and then applying it appropriately to the group.

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- Jess Kemp is a Queen's University graduate and a true adventurer at heart. She has recently biked across Canada while conducting research along the way and is now back at the drawing board, planning her next big adventure.*



# Your Brain Outdoors

By Zabe MacEachren

### Introduction

Adults readily note that today's youth encounter different experiences from when they were young. To discuss these differences popular culture has grouped various ages with designated generation titles: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, Millennium Child, and so on. Each group becomes understood by the major cultural ideas that influenced their childhood and the dominant technology that shaped perspectives during formative years. The way technology influences a person's cognition is seldom recognized, but is of increasing interest among brain researchers. Outdoor educators tend to pay attention to the way different activities offer different perceptions of an environment. When natural spaces can no longer be accessed, we adapt and simulate natural activities in available spaces. As electronic technology becomes ubiquitous even in the outdoors, we must learn to attend to its influence on us and those we teach.

Advertisers and computer programmers increasingly entice us into desiring their products by taking advantage of what is known about the way our brain functions. They catch our attention by carefully manipulating our sensory abilities with such things as colour, motion, scent and pleasurable tastes designed to trigger positive memories. For people raised and imprinted on nature through time spent outdoors, it can be difficult to spend time watching images on a screen in order to analyze a device's appeal. It is extremely difficult to explain why technology impacts (and alters) the evolutionary path that human brain development has followed through countless generations. Our evolutionary brain development was informed by time spent outside doing activities that directly provided a form of survival, as opposed to responding to

images on a screen as a means of surviving school and work. It is easy to be drawn into the enhanced constructs that information technology allows and encourages. We need to be aware of what we are missing in order to make informed decisions concerning technology's use. Like a naturalist, we need to see beyond the camouflage layer to determine if what is approaching is friendly or fierce.

Surprisingly, today's technology is actually helping us to understand such things. Brain research is beginning to track the influence of technology on our brain development. In this article, similar to my conference workshop, I share highlights of a journey I took that lead into reading forages about technology and brain research. It arose from my frustration at trying to teach across generational divides. As I read I reflected on the activities and outdoor skills needed in today's technological time to encourage a shift away from the attraction of the screen and back to the rapture of nature. My aim here is to share highlights of my examination into the way our brain development evolved through outdoor-based experiences and today is influenced by information technology.

### Distraction and Concentration Skills

To relate to today's youth, teachers and parents need to understand what influenced their own generation's perception of the world. My professional obligation includes not only knowing how to use media and technology in my work, but also critically examining the way technology can influence us. Backpacking and canoeing both condition a person to determine the value of any item brought on a trip because energy must be expended to carry each item. This means campers (from a generation that grew up tripping with similar values) can readily attend to such questions as "Do I really need this item? Will this item aid my goal of relating well to the place I travel or will it

detract and cause hardship in my experience with nature?" A person who has no or little experience camping may think that many devices are necessary to bring along; such an individual lacks an embodied understanding of how such devices can weigh them down on a portage or actually interfere with establishing a healthy relationship with a place. I recall hearing a story from a solo traveler who once listened to music on his iPod every evening around camp until the day he looked up and saw a bear nearby. This person quickly realized how listening to music was detracting him from noticing the very sounds and things he had wanted to notice when camping. In her book, *Distracted*, Jackson (2008) discusses how children are frequently told to pay attention, but don't really know what that means (p. 258). Creating a common language concerning what it means to pay attention is key and must become "recognized as worthy of life from moment to moment," because we don't get back the time spent noticing other things (Jackson, 2008, p. 259). Examining the reasons why people are distracted from or attracted to a certain technology allows us to make informed choices about whether that technology is worth using.

When outlining the pros and cons of technology I try to use nature metaphors that concern survival skills. Many birds, like loons and killdeer, use the tactic of faking a broken wing to catch the attention of potential prey and thus lead them away from a nest. This tactic is effective only up to the point when the prey discovers that the bird's behaviour is nothing other than a purposeful distraction. Once people are aware of the intentionally distractive behaviour, they can then make informed choices. They can choose not to focus on the distraction and instead concentrate on finding the nest. Jackson (2008) provides an excellent starting point for understanding how modern technology creates distractions in our lives that can lure us away from what we value most in life.

As I became aware of the way technology is designed to distract me and to draw my attention away from chosen tasks

to potential advertisements, I began to apply the skills and language I acquired in tracking awareness courses. Similar to playing a survival game in which an individual is asked to rank order the items they would take to survive in a particular scenario, I might ask students what they require to pay attention to something, or conversely what causes the most frequent or significant distractions that are hard to ignore (e.g., cell phones). In *Brain Rules*, Medina (2008) outlines how memory, interest and awareness all play a role in what we choose to pay attention to. I had my flashing incoming email messages turned off on my computer, once I realized how this visual flash capitalized on my primal wiring to readily notice small movements, yet resulted in me wasting time distracted on off-task details that ultimately added stress to my life. In accessible language, Medina explains how detractors affect the executive portion of the brain required for thinking and problem solving. He offers useful data to de-bunk the popular idea that we just need to learn to multitask better. As he reports, "Studies show that a person who is interrupted takes 50 percent longer to accomplish a task. Not only that, he or she makes up to 50 percent more errors." (Medina, 2008, p. 87) Some generations may be more adapt at task switching, but generally our brains require sequential-based processing to work well (Medina, 2008, p. 87).

Turkle (2011) elaborates on the way her research encourages students to realize they are poor multi-taskers and that they are losing their ability to communicate face-to-face because they are developing a preference for texting and other virtual forms of communication. Turkle describes research concerning the way technology shifts or interrupts our attention and creates a virtual world that the young increasingly prefer over the real. Many of her examples come from researching the effects of virtual pets on the young, and of robotic/virtual companions on adults.

While considering both Medina's and Turkle's ideas, I recalled some advice from Tom Brown Jr., author of *The Tracker* and

many other nature-based field guides: Brown discussed when to use focus or peripheral vision when traveling outdoors. Until this time I felt I was primarily conditioned to use focus vision, such as when reading or looking at a blackboard. Brown mentioned that a person should use their peripheral vision 95% of the time when outdoors. The ability to shift between focus and peripheral vision is important during the playing of a game like "Survival," just as an animal needs to focus on food sources and shift to peripheral vision to become aware of danger. Outdoor educators can offer explanations concerning the way many animals benefit from their particular unique visual ability. By becoming more aware of the way our own human vision works, we can make better choices concerning the visual demands of technological devices and their tendency to aid or detract our attention.

Outdoor travelers are well served by being aware of the benefits of both focal and peripheral vision in various situations that require full or partial concentration. In *Smart Moves*, Hannaford (2005) describes movements that require low levels of concentration yet aid overall concentration. Hannaford describes the physiological basis of the way many movements, especially the movement of the eye, can aid cognitive development. She uses many examples to describe the benefits of various movements and the hazards that may result when movements are stifled. For instance, she describes the hazard to children's eye development when asked too early in their development and for too long a period to focus their eyes, as well as the hazard of spending too much time in rooms where focusing on a distance is not possible. She writes, "Before entering school, three-dimensional and peripheral vision allow the greatest environmental learning" (2005, p. 116). As Hannaford published her book before the development of e-readers, she does not describe any concerns using these technologies. The outdoors with its many non-uniform surfaces provides the richest learning environments. Hannaford helps us understand this so we can use it to rationalize what we do.

### Connecting Brain Research to Outdoor Activities

An overarching theme that every brain researcher seems to mention is the role of fitness in proper brain functioning. Medina, who structures his entire book on explaining 12 rules that convey how our brain works, begins with the most influential rule: "Rule #1: Exercise boosts brain power." His book provides a great overview of recent brain research with a wide range of examples and rules in a format suitable for teachers. Ratey's entire book, *SPARK: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain* (2008), provides in-depth details concerning the link between fitness and cognition as well as examples of alternative gym curriculum. Ratey provides new ideas for schools on ways to establish gym curriculum (e.g., mandatory square-dancing class for freshmen, kayaking activities that "serve as social lubricant" and are "crucial to this kind of learning" because they reduce anxiousness" (p. 30)). The emphasis of both Ratey and Medina on fitness as a key to learning inspired me to improve my own personal fitness level while also increasing opportunities for my students to move during my periods of teaching. The rationale they offer expands upon how the oxygen intake resulting from aerobic exercise acts like a brain fertilizer for neuron synapses to prosper. While good explanations of this process is offered in both books, I suggest that Ratey's description of the PE4life program, started at a US high school, should be mandatory reading for all physical education instructors.

If you are interested in learning more about the connection between fitness and the brain I suggest the following: Read Medina's *Brain Rule* (2008) as an introductory text. Use Ratey's *Spark* (2008) for ideas on shifting a standard physical education program that focuses on sports to a fitness program in your class or school. And if you are interested in rationalizing any movement or "alternative outdoor" experience in your curriculum, then use Hannaford's text *Smart Moves* (2005). Hannaford's work provides a more physiological understanding of

the benefits of a wide array of fine-motor movements. She will aid you to rationalize to parents and principals why you allow knitting in class, sitting on physio-balls instead of chairs and climbing trees instead of stairs. Hannaford also describes in details the importance of midlines and the role of using both sides of your brain to access better cognition. *Smart Moves* can serve as a bible for any climber that wants to justify the superior workout involved in the subtleties of their activity.

At the COEO conference I demonstrated an experience of Drums Alive® adapted to an outdoor setting as a possible fitness activity suited to a campfire ring. The aerobic, rhythmic crossing of midlines and group work required in this activity make it an ideal holistic activity (see sidebar for more information). I have become a firm believer that all teachers need to increase students' opportunities to engage in physical activity throughout the day beyond designated gym periods. Our ancestors' brains were developed while walking an average 10–20 kilometres a day (Medina, p. 11). We do not really know what is happening to our brains when we sit for hours behind a screen. The sedentary lifestyle developed through screen watching needs to be addressed, including introducing fundamental changes in school scheduling that allow for more natural movement. The benefit of brain research to outdoor curriculum is that it offers an optimum physical and brain development opportunity that we can use to rationalize what we do.

### **No Googling = Solo Experiences = Storytelling and Journaling**

It was the subtitle of Nicholas Carr's book, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, that captured my interest. The book follows his examination into the fact that he and many of his peers, who use the Internet for a living, were noticing their own decreasing ability to concentrate deeply. They no longer read long passages and frequently described themselves as being scatterbrained. Carr's description of why he self-imposed a retreat from all media sources to write his book sounded similar to the

reasons solo experiences are offered as part of many wilderness programs, and even the new tourism market that limit opportunities for electronic engagement. His book provides accounts of past historical reactions to new technology. For instance, initially people were concerned with the way the introduction of the alphabet shifted intellect from an oral to a literary place that could reside on a page versus in a body through the act of storytelling and dialogue. People were also concerned that too many people would reside just within their own thoughts due to the proliferation of silent reading that resulted once the printing press made books readily available and in turn decreased the need for public and family reading with a single expensive, and thus shared, text. Carr's book sets out to answer the question "Is Google making us stupid?" — the same question he posed in an article of the same name that appeared in *The Atlantic* journal. His answer, *The Shallows*, should be mandatory reading for all teachers because it provides examples and test results that outline the distractions programmed into most computer-based activities. These distractions consistently interrupt the development of deeper thinking skills so people operate daily on a much more shallow level (hence, the book's title). Carr's writing offers to outdoor educators a rationale for oral storytelling experiences to be offered after engaging in outdoor activities that require prolonged periods of concentration and awareness.

### **Conclusion**

Trying to connect my reading about brain research to outdoor education has been a very informative experience. At times I have had to slow down to concentrate on fully understanding the new ideas being presented to me as I also reconnect to past physiology lessons. My own daily habits have shifted as I used myself as a big experiment. Frequently I noticed that I was more mentally alert on days I ate well and got some exercise. The more I became in-tune with an awareness of this healthy state the more I encouraged this same awareness to be reached in the teacher candidates with whom I work. I want future teachers to recognize the lifestyle offset a

that promote healthy brain development and role model this in their classrooms. The outdoor environment is a much richer environment for our brains to learn in than any wired classroom, and learning about the brain can help us articulate this. In short, my instructions to “turn off computers and cell phones” in my classes has become synonymous with embedding my lesson with nature awareness skills.

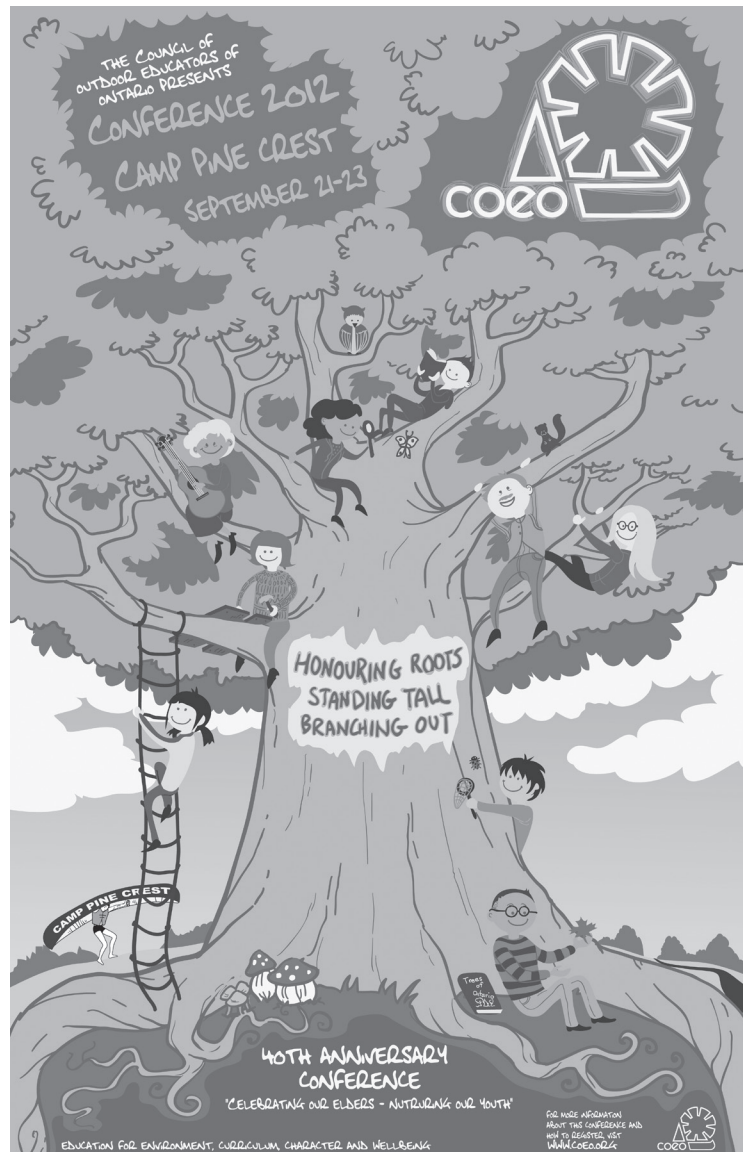
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*Zabe MacEachren coordinates the Outdoor and Experiential Education program at Queen's University. She has been known to drum on the side of her canoe late into the night on still, quiet lakes throughout the northwoods.*

Activity: Drums Alive® is a fitness program that offers a one-day instructor's workshop on leading drumming and movement sessions using large physiotherapy balls (propped up on step-up blocks). Basic drumming sequences are combined with aerobic dance moves to create a dynamic cardio workout. It was designed by Carrie Akins, a dancer who had to overcome a physical setback. I took this workshop at my local YMCA after watching a promotional video clip and imagining what this activity would be like done outdoors around a campfire. As I do not have access to a class set of large physiotherapy balls, I experimented with Ensolite pads tied to trees and large sponges on desktops. The fundamental movements involved in this activity, the powerful rhythm of drumming, the opportunity to cross midlines to stimulate new neural pathways in the brain and this activity's adaptability to an outdoor environment make it a euphoria for outdoor education. For further inspiration see <http://drums-alive.com/>



## The Gathering

It's true! COEO is 40. Join us — your Conference Committee — for the celebrations. Our conference theme is Honouring Roots, Standing Tall, and Branching Out. Yes, we will re-work the tree metaphor with a special COEO history tree energizer. We will explore both our roots and the new edges of our practice. We will share in musical moments by COEO pal David Archibald (rumour has it that David is writing a COEO 40th song). There will be a COEO “through the decades” slide show before a “decades dance.” Come on everybody, do the twist. Three conference keynotes will carry us from 1972 to the present and beyond.

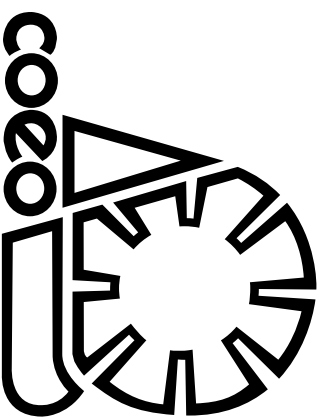
Concurrent sessions will do the same and word has it that COEO luminaries such as Mark Whitecombe, Cliff Knapp, Clarke Birchard, Bud Wiener and Clare Magee are among the folks returning to the COEO fold for the celebration of learning, friendship and . . . that certain COEO conference magic.

Your Conference Committee,

Ruthie Annis  
Kyle Clarke  
Tammy Hand

Bob Henderson  
Mike Lavin

Jena Oxenham  
Ron Williamson



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