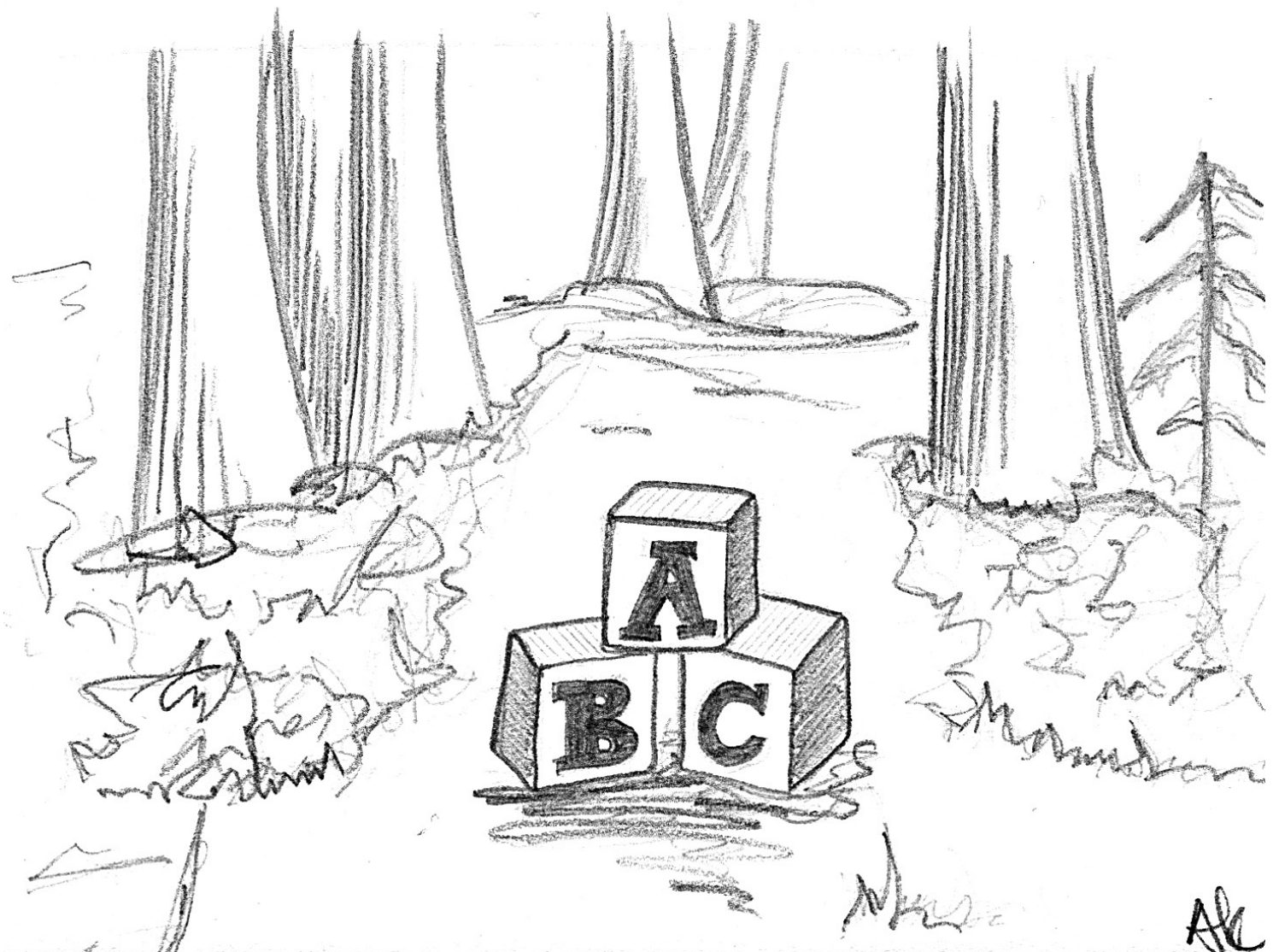


# Pathways

THE ONTARIO JOURNAL OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION  
Fall 2015, 28(1)



# 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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*Pathways* is always looking for contributions. Please contact the Interim Chair for submission guidelines.

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I can celebrate my last issue as Chair of the Editorial Board of *Pathways* with a joyous spirit. Looking over this issue, I see three former students who have contributed—Simon Beames (1990), Natasha Turner (2010) and Emily Gray (2015). All have completed exciting graduate school outdoor education. In fact, Simon, a regular contributor to *Pathways* and recent keynote presenter at our annual conference, was also a supervising professor for Natasha. He is at the Faculty of Education, University of Edinburgh and is a longtime friend of *Pathways* and COEO.

David Segal, Duncan Taylor and Hartly Bannock are all what I like to call *Pathways* friends. These are people I have met either through *Pathways* or generally at events or conferences whereby *Pathways* has served as a catalyst to maintain a friendly connection.

Of course, the same goes for Wild Words columnist Connie Hendry. While Moyra Bell et al. and I also meet through professional circles, *Pathways* has inspired further interaction. Allison Karakokkinos, our featured artist, is a family friend.

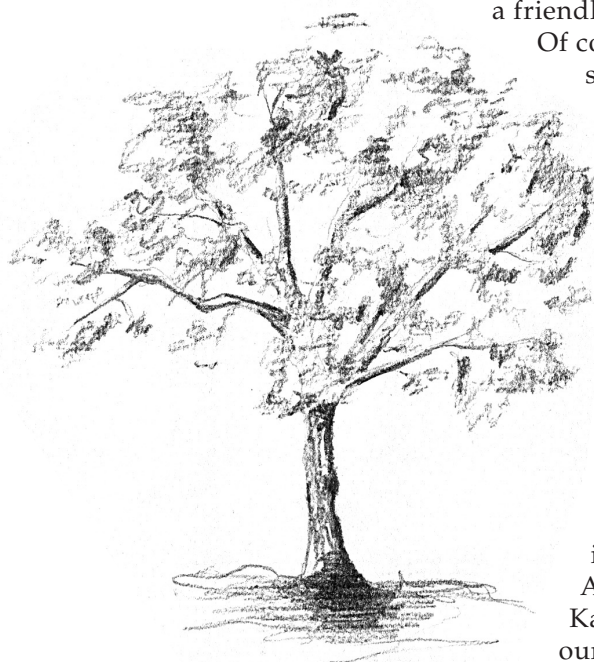
Not all contributions to *Pathways* involve such a friendship/family affair. But this shouldn't be a surprise. I, like many COEO members "hang" in an outdoor education circle. The point is *Pathways* issues can often become a celebration of collegial friendship and professional interaction. Indeed, *Pathways* itself is this catalyst. It is fitting, then, to inform COEO members and the *Pathways* readership that Kyle Clarke will soon step into the *Pathways* Chair role and I will move into the role of Resource Editor. I will be more a gatherer and Kyle more a creative and administrative force. Kyle has served in many roles for COEO, including the as organization president. Kyle stands out as a guy who gets things done in a charming manner.

It will be a pleasure to work with Kyle and others. I must thank all those guest editors and editorial board members over the years and particularly thank Randee Holmes, our editor-in-chief, and Greer Gordon, my friend behind the keyboard. Both can really make that thing swing.

I look forward to continued work with *Pathways*. Anyone reading this who is thinking of getting involved with *Pathways* and, in fact COEO overall, should not miss the message here: involvement = friendships and celebrations aplenty. I have been truly blessed to have had a leadership role in *Pathways* over the years.

---

Bob Henderson  
*Pathways* Editorial Board Chair



**Sketch Pad** – Allison Karakokkinos currently works as an artist instructor and has substantial experience leading children's art classes at both galleries and museums in Durham and the Peterborough region. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in art history and a diploma in recreation and leisure. Allison loves inspiring children to be creative and always looks for ways to involve nature in the process. Her work appears on the cover and pages 2, 3, 7, 9, 11–14, 17–18, 25 and 26.



As I sit down to write this, I am heartened once again by the connections made, ideas sparked and synapses fired by our fall conference at Camp Kandalore. I know that all of you value the opportunity to feel part of something larger, and to connect with "our tribe" of like-minded people. On behalf of all of our members, I wish to extend a heartfelt thank-you to our committed conference committee: Romanda Simpson, Andrea Donnell, Doug Jacques, Don Kemball, Lindsay Kemble, Julia Martini and Kyle Clarke. I have already put some of the ideas I gained to use with school groups, as I'm sure many of you have!

This year's AGM saw the election of a very talented slate of new directors. We welcome new board members Ben Blakey, Nazreen Subhan, Kristen Alderson and Emma Brandy. We welcome back Allyson Brown, Minka Chambers, Bill Schoenhardt, Shawn Stetson, Karen O'Krafka and Liz Kirk. On behalf of COEO, we extend our deepest gratitude to Ryan Essery, Kevin Lindner, Justyna Szarek and Chris Ockenden for their contributions to the board last year. As your COEO president, I look forward to working with our talented team of directors to continue to move forward the projects initiated by Allyson Brown as part of the strategic planning process. We will be calling on membership to help very soon. Please watch the January e-newsletter for biographies of our board members, and the projects they will be working on.

We always welcome the input and contributions of COEO members. Karen O'Krafka has stayed on as our volunteer coordinator, and she would love to hear from you if you wish to help out with any of our projects. Karen is also our fearless leader for January's Make Peace With Winter gathering, slated for Camp Pine Crest, January 15 – 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Spaces are limited. Register soon at [www.coeo.org](http://www.coeo.org)! Karen would love to hear from anyone interested in planning this conference with her and the organizing committee.

We are pleased to bring you this latest installment of *Pathways*. Bob Henderson,

who has steered the way for *Pathways* for a number of years, is moving to a role of Resource Editor, and we are grateful to Kyle Clarke for taking the helm after the release of the Winter 2016 issue and for the rest of 2016. We are excited to see what comes with Kyle's fresh ideas and Bob's wisdom. What a team!

Finally, Minka Chambers, our membership secretary, is looking to boost our membership. Our Facebook pages are over 700 people strong, and we would love to see this reflected in our membership. If you have not sent in your membership renewal yet (hey, how are you reading this if you haven't?!), or if you know of someone else who still needs to, please renew on our website before Christmas to take advantage of all COEO has to offer. Minka's contact information is on the inside cover of this publication. COEO memberships make great Christmas presents for friends!

I'm looking forward to what this year will bring for COEO. Send us your ideas, and get involved!

---

Deborah Diebel  
COEO President



# Environmental Education that Engages the Head, Heart and Hands: The Relevance of Applied Systems Theory in Times of Uncertainty

By Duncan Taylor and David Segal

This paper addresses the contemporary relevance of applied systems theory for university level courses in experiential environmental education. It aims to demonstrate the transformative nature of an integral approach – often helping students shift from a state of underlying despair and cynicism to one of hope and engaged activism. In turn, students learn how to become agents of positive change by identifying ecological and social tipping points and ways to constructively intervene.

## Introduction

Beginning in 2009, we embarked on designing and delivering an upper-year university course in environmental studies, which continues to this day. The main intention of the course is to allow students to address and transform the despair they may be experiencing as a response to social and environmental collapse. This highly experiential three-week course draws on the fields of systems theory and ecopsychology, allowing students to integrate head, heart and hands. When students are afforded opportunities to both study and engage with living systems and observe their cycles of growth, collapse and transformation, they quickly understand how these systemic change processes are not only found in nature, but are also mirrored in their everyday lives. We have found that students who complete this course emerge with a greater sense of awareness that these current times of crisis are also the very prerequisites for meaningful and positive transformation. By examining the change processes and tipping points, both at personal and larger social and environmental levels, students are better equipped to become midwives in the birth of a more resilient

and life-serving world. This paper outlines a few of the key concepts and practices used in the course and, we hope, allows for further dialogue regarding ways to cultivate hope and positive action in times of global uncertainty.

## The Relevance of Systems Theory

Almost a decade ago in 2006, Thomas Homer-Dixon wrote *The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity, and the Renewal of Civilization*. In this book he refers to five tectonic stresses that are interlocked and currently destabilizing the world's social and biophysical systems. These stresses are the widening gap between the world's rich and poor both within and among nations; the growing instability of the global economic system; the increasing loss of biodiversity and damage to land, water, forests and fisheries; climate change uncertainty; and mounting energy scarcities (Homer-Dixon, 2006). The reader is soon left with the prospect of a global industrial civilization that is becoming less and less resilient to these stresses and that may well be on the verge of a cascading series of social and environmental catastrophes.

As environmental educators at a Canadian university we are all too familiar with this narrative. It is another version of the unravelling of the Earth's ecological systems and, in turn, social and economic systems. It is one of loss and even of despair and powerlessness. Students entering their first courses in environmental studies have usually already been exposed to parts of this narrative. In the first few classes of an introductory course students will often say that the reason they want to major or minor in environmental studies is so that they can do something about species loss,

climate change, loss of productive farm land and so on. These initial sentiments are noble, and yet by the time they reach their senior classes their early idealism has often become bruised and battered by a range of courses that have reinforced this picture of a world coming apart. Indeed, at this stage, many environmental students are experiencing a deep sense of anxiety, fear of the future and even hopelessness.

Yet in Homer-Dixon's book (2006), the current pessimistic scenario is only part of the story he portrays. He uses the term "catagenesis" (from the Greek "cata" meaning "down" and "genesis" meaning "birth") to suggest that complex social and biophysical systems can oftentimes reorganize in new and highly creative ways during times of major collapse and breakdown. In other words, we may be witnessing a time of breakdown to be followed by a period of innovative breakthrough. A similar theme is found in works by a number of other authors. Specifically, ecophilosophers Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, in their recent book *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in Without Going Crazy* (2012), characterize our current historical period as that of the "Great Turning," which includes a time of breakdown and systemic collapse they refer to as the "Great Unravelling."

### **Panarchy: Tending the Backloop**

It is perhaps noteworthy that both Macy and Homer-Dixon are systems theorists who recognize that all systems, be they biophysical or social, have periods of inevitable breakdown and collapse. It is precisely this vulnerability of the status quo that brings forward the potential for reorganization or systemic self-transcendence. Another version of the ability of natural systems to undergo reorganization following times of collapse is found in the emerging field of panarchy theory (Gunderson and Holling, 2002). This theory shows that all natural systems, be they human or environmental, undergo a growth phase (front loop)

as well as an inevitable collapse and reorganization phase (back loop).

In our course, students are shown how forest ecosystems as well as economic and socio-political systems all move through a cycle of growth towards a climax or conservation stage, followed by a collapse and reorganization stage. By seeing how these cycles manifest in forest ecosystems, students quickly see how these same systemic stages also operate in their own lives. For this part, participants are invited to do a journaling exercise in which they divide their lives into seven-year segments. They then draw out in terms of panarchy stages times of major personal collapse, backloops and reorganization experiences. Indeed, this exercise allows students to view their own personal growth patterns, as well as setbacks and chaos states, as natural processes that are universal both to other people and to the larger social and biophysical systems in which we are all embedded. Physical, emotional and psychological backloops become seen not as something to fear, repress or feel ashamed of, but rather inevitable phases that are necessary for meaningful growth and change. As with the example of fire suppression, attempts to prevent systemic collapse often result in catastrophic unravelling. These concepts and models that examine systemic self-transcendence, non-linearity, discontinuities, synergisms and backloops all became part of the individual and collective lens for a new understanding of the dynamics of the change processes going on in both individual as well as larger biophysical and social systems.

### **An Integral Approach**

The integral approach to using systems models includes and yet also transcends a more traditional systems approach insofar as it recognizes that living systems have both an interior and an exterior dimension. Indeed, there is a growing appreciation that our individual and collective "mindscapes" have a profound impact on the landscapes in which we are

embedded and vice versa. Integral systems theory has articulated a four quadrant model (Esbjorn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009) that consists of interior and exterior dimensions, as well as individual and social dimensions (Figure 1). The four quadrants can be seen as a map of reality that captures all possible perspectives inherent to any natural system. It has been argued that dominant perspectives in mainstream Western education and science focus on the external dimensions,

or the objective and quantifiable, creating a “flatland” or a world that downplays the subjective interiority of all systems (Esbjorn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009). Hence, a central goal of our course is to include an investigation into the interiority of natural systems, and facilitate both an inquiry into the often-overlooked subjective aspects of our environmental crisis, as well as the interior journey of the students themselves.

	Interior	Exterior
Individual	Subjective Individual thoughts, memories, emotions, perceptions, values and so on	Objective Any individual system that can be observed or measured (e.g., the physical body, a tree, a cell)
Social	Intersubjective Collective interior experiences: E.g. human meaning-making, social norms, languages, cultural narratives, worldviews, etc.	<b>Interobjective</b> Interacting systems that you can observe: E.g. the systems larger biophysical context, the social environment, technologies and infrastructure.

**Fig 1. Four Quadrant Model adapted from Esbjorn-Hargens and Zimmerman (2009)**

### Experiential Activities: Learning through Embodiment

Over the three weeks of the course, students meet on a daily basis for a few hours. Each class begins with a group check-in, journaling exercise, and then an outdoor experiential component. The class has two simultaneous focuses: i) to develop and enhance a shared sense of community among students and also with the larger social and biophysical worlds, and ii) to deepen students' own sense of personal agency and insight into their emerging vocations or callings and ways they can become positive agents of change.

The following experiential activities, while familiar to many in the outdoor education field, are used to help students have an embodied understanding of the theories being discussed. Further, they serve to

build group cohesion, community and trust. This allows participants to move out of their “comfort zone” and tolerate the edges of their “challenge zone,” leading to a greater sense of capacity to confront disequilibrium and grow. In doing so, there is the recognition that meaningful growth takes place through periods of collapse, uncertainty and reorganization (Taylor, Segal & Harper, 2010).

**Rope Exercise:** Students construct a small circle from found objects (e.g., leaves, twigs, cones). A larger rope is placed around the circle of objects creating two concentric circles representing a “comfort zone” and “challenge zone.” Beyond this is the “danger zone.” Following a discussion and exercise examining the different zones, specific situations, and the implications of moving from one zone to another, students lift up the rope forming the outer circle. At this point, the rope serves as a



metaphor of the interconnections between a system or the whole (the class) and its subsystems, the parts (the students). With increasing difficulty, students progress from leaning back on the rope to various sitting and standing tasks, demonstrating how systems have to adapt to feedback processes and reorganize at times of stresses and perturbations (e.g., a student letting go of the rope, moving from seated to standing, and so on).

Other exercises used to embody these principles on both an individual and collective level:

**Trust leans and falls:** Allows for a personal account of “letting go,” surrendering and trusting the larger system.

**Spider web:** Facilitates group self-organization and the emergent properties of creativity to solve a challenge.

**Body percussion:** Allows for a transgression of inhibitions and an example of the whole having emergent properties not found in the sum of the parts.

**Fox tails tag:** Fosters a sense of agility, aliveness and joy while students explore keeping themselves “alive,” or systemic self-maintenance/preservation.

**Bucket of fear:** Students anonymously write down fears they have regarding being a part of the group, which are then read out loud. This exposes the social constitution of “individual” fears and both normalizes and universalizes these so-called personal doubts.

**Community service component:** Students volunteer for community projects such as permaculture design and urban agriculture, ecoforestry and local housing initiatives.

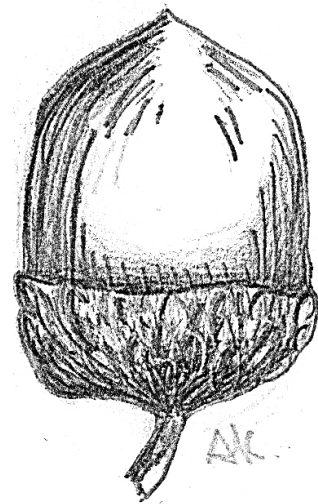
These are a few of the exercises used in the course to serve as metaphors for how one’s own potentials emerge through challenge,

disequilibrium and a supportive and trusting group. Further, the community service component recognizes how one’s own deep learning and education comes, not so much from rote learning, but from the engagement of one’s interior and exterior selves within a community/nature context, highlighting the four quadrant model and importance of active hope.

### Ecopsychology Practices

An integral framework requires that perspectives from all four quadrants are included in any inquiry of a given phenomenon in order to achieve the greatest depth of understanding possible. This rationale was applied to the class topic of ecology and specifically being agents of positive environmental change. One of the prominent perspectives that includes left-hand quadrants is ecopsychology, and that is why it is included.

The interdisciplinary field of ecopsychology emerged largely in response to concerns over a lack of recognition for the inextricable connection between humans and the more-than-human world (Roszak, 1992). Individualized and skin encapsulated notions of the self are replaced with notions of an ecological self, where nature is viewed as an extension of oneself and the cultivation of one’s ecological identity becomes a central feature. Ecopsychology includes much more than tree hugging romantics and formal academic researchers and psychologists. It involves all those who are concerned for the well-being of life and who recognize the destructive role that current human–nature relationships



are having on future prospects of a life-serving world.

Ecopsychology calls into question the problematic logic of an expansionist worldview, the naturalization of industrialized capitalist economies, and the rampant individualization and separation of humans from the more-than-human natural world. It calls forth alternatives and provides insights and practices regarding what they may look like. Ecopsychology celebrates the deep interconnection among all living beings and holds that there is a mutual interest in reviving severed relationships between the human and non-human natural world. A common thread running through ecopsychology practices is that nature is regarded as a crucial co-facilitator and cultivating human-nature relationships is a central component of the healing required to bring about a sustainable world. It is thought that once one's ecological identity is cultivated, the natural world can no longer be seen from an I-It perspective, but rather is changed to an I-Thou relationship. Further, people are able to resource with nature as a powerful ally in their life and deconstruct notions of individualism and separateness.

## Mirror Walk

Nearing the completion of the course is the mirror exercise. Following a brief lecture regarding the central tenants of ecopsychology, students are invited to participate in an exploratory activity. The intention is to encourage students to let go of commonly held constructs of nature as "other" and "inanimate" and open themselves up to the possibility of nature as both an ally and extension of themselves. They are reminded of Henry David Thoreau's journey into wildness and how he followed his internal compass to guide him.

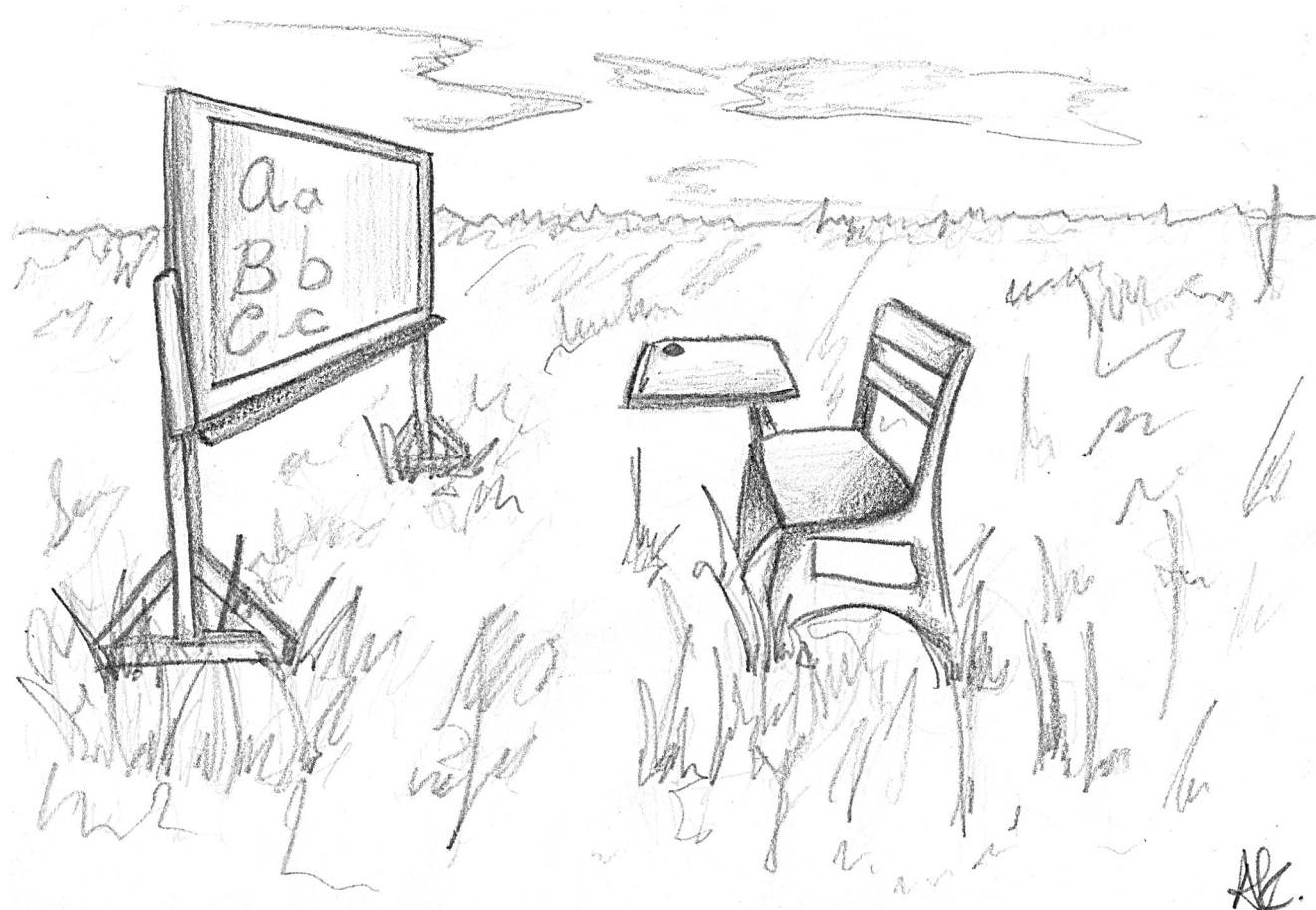
Students are then asked to wander within the given boundaries (a large forested space) and hold a question in their consciousness: "What is it that I need

to do in the next six months to better actualize my unique potential and gifts?" Students are then instructed to begin to walk and notice what they are drawn to, being conscious of their desire to direct the process. They are asked to stop when they feel they have arrived at a spot that seems right. After asking for permission to visit with the beings around them (rocks, trees, birds, frogs, wind, etc.), they notice if any insights emerge in relation to their question. For example, are they at a crossroads (crossed branches), or needing to let go (a dying leaf)?

In essence, this is a free association exercise where the students are invited to make meaning through interaction with the more-than-human-natural-world and in doing so support the development of their own ecological identities and ability to resource with nature. At this point, students are called back and form small groups to debrief their process. Facilitators emphasize that there is no "right" way of completing this exercise and that commenting on their own experience through verbal or non-verbal means is all that is required.

## Conclusion

This course complements the traditional compartmentalized and fragmented approach to education most students have become accustomed to. The application of a systems perspective allows for a wide-lens orientating map of the world and the students' own embedding in it. Students end this course by completing an exercise in "discovering one's unique passion(s)." They imagine the year is 2040 and that they are being celebrated for being agents of positive change during a very tumultuous period in world history. The students imagine this scene in 2040 as if it has already happened and write out at length what they have done, what they have become, and the way they have lived. This is shared and barriers to this vision are discussed with their classmates as a way to guide them in going forth from the course with hope and engaged activism.



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## An Environmental Autobiographical Experience

By Emily Gray

*To make an impact, our audience wants to know who we are, first and foremost.*

— Annette Simmons

During the summer of 2013, on the quiet but intellectually vigorous Royal Roads University campus grounds, I participated in a short medicinal plant walk with a Coast Salish Elder of the local Salish peoples of Vancouver Island. As an introduction to my fellow cohort and me, this Elder told a story about his youth. He was the only child in his village to go to a residential school. At school, he would be bullied and beaten because he was an Indian. Back on the reserve, he would be bullied and beaten because he attended a white person school. “Now I do not tell you this story to have you pity me,” he told us. “This story is simply a part of who I am and, as a newcomer to this group, I wanted to share a piece of myself with you.”

Whenever I think of that moment, I feel reminded of the value of grace and openness. Sharing that story with us was a simple and brief gesture but one that has greatly impacted and stayed with me. The story that was part of him is now also part of me. The threads of the stories we tell weave complex webs and amount to fascinating connections. Perhaps so do the stories we do not tell; those deeper pieces of ourselves stored away that shine through our actions rather than our words. Stories help us to make sense of our world and to attempt to share that understanding with others.

I recently completed my Master in Environmental Education and Communication degree. My thesis, written in two separate pieces, included a narrative piece: an autoethnographical book that I wrote entitled *From One Outdoor Child*. I wrote the book for my daughter, Evelyn, although my hope is that others will want to read it too. The book introduces the personal impetus that inspired me to

write stories pertaining to my connection with nature as a child and speaks briefly to the rationale of using storytelling as a tool to communicate with my daughter. My stories, which make up the main body of the book, are organized according to how they reflect different concepts within the field of environmental education and communication, and into what I call *environmental connective t(issues) (ECT)*. By way of its moral (or lesson), each story is connected to an issue or concept I identified and that has been previously described by academics in the environmental field. Much like connective tissues support and connect other issues or organs in our bodies, the environmental issues identified in my book connect to and support both other environmental issues and my stories.

The environmental movement demands action, both now and in the future. To tackle an environmental challenge as overwhelming as climate change, author and environmentalist Mitchell Thomashow emphasizes that each of us must “build a foundation of knowledge to which [we] can always return” as a way to ground ourselves. I believe that children and parents must be part of that process. If the next generations lack the essential bond with the natural world that allows them to foster respect for and place value in the natural world, then we have failed in creating a foundation that will last—one, as mentioned above, to which we can always return. We have a responsibility to be better ecological citizens, teachers and role models for the sake of our children and ourselves. As an environmentalist, an educator and a mother, I have come to recognize that my own story within nature is both powerful and an important part of the foundation from which my daughter and I can grow and learn. And in these roles, I also feel that a first step towards raising individuals that respect the interconnectedness of all life is for each of us to better connect with our own such understandings, our own love



for nature, and to capture this reflective experience in story.

The book, as a piece of my master's thesis journey, is a product of love, urgency and much needed earnest reflection. It is my own interpretation of what I can do within a society of people who are asking more and more often "what can I do?" when it comes to feeling helpless in the face of the challenges of climate change. I realize that I am but one person and my stories are unique to both my experiences and my perspective. But perhaps this very reality is what lends authenticity to any moral or lesson that can be garnered from them. I consider myself a person who recognizes the interconnectedness of all life and I work hard to be better informed about what choices I can make in my life to protect that bond, yet there are still moments when I feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information available about our current environmental situation. In my role as an environmental educator and as a mother, I rely on more than information to carry my message of hope. In the words of author Annette Simmons: "People don't want more information. They are up to their eyeballs in information. They want faith—faith in you, your goals, your success, the story you tell...Facts do not give birth to faith. Faith needs a story to sustain it." There are many stories to tell. But I think that when we find faith in ourselves to trust in both our memories and the receptiveness of others, we might be surprised at what wisdom we have to offer in our own story.

I was.

Let me share part of my story with you now and explain how I (at 29 years of age) came to be writing an article about autobiographical experiences.

In 2012, I began my master's journey. The wonderful and brilliant Elin Kelsey taught my first course. As our first assignment, she invited us to write our environmental autobiographies of hope. This was my first introduction to the concept of environmental autobiography. Embracing

the spirit of autobiography, Elin let each of us interpret the intention of the exercise. Here is an excerpt from my writing:

*It is often said that children have an innate sense of innocence and acceptance. Perhaps it is for this reason that children are drawn to the outdoors and to the wonder of discovery: spending hours whirling, splashing, imitating and listening. Their senses tell them: "You are home" and they accept that with their whole being. I have faith that we, as adults, still remember this sensation. If we could only find the right key, this memory would serve as a powerful reminder that people become engraved with the values, senses and experiences they surround themselves in and that the natural environments they visited as kids will always feel like home.*



*The wild, natural spaces with which I connected most as a child were quite out of my reach, but it was through incredible insight and love that my parents made those opportunities for exploration and growth happen. Looking back, I am filled with an understanding that, had they done things differently, I would likely not be the person I am today. For example, had we not trekked back to Nellie Lake after a near-drowning scare when I was seven, I might not have ever braved swimming again. For this, I owe a debt of gratitude to one very ordinary rock beneath the waves that my brother officially dubbed "Chicken Rock."*

*I once saw a man, in the place where the tide had been only hours before, delicately balancing large rocks on point. Sometimes, I feel like the rocks: precarious and rickety on my perch,*

resigned to the eventuality of the waves, but solid and firm whether under water or dry. At other times, I feel like the man: patient and steadfast, sure that there is a point to what I am doing, even if I am one of few who understands. I think, for this is how I felt too, that when you first see the man with the rocks, you are an intruder. You feel unsure and embarrassed for him, perhaps even a desire to judge, for what could he possibly be accomplishing? But then you come to realize that you and the others that are watching have become part of the moment; you are drawn in and wish for something—anything—to happen. It is at this point that you feel a part of something and if someone would only speak up and tell you what you can do to help, then you would. In that moment, you understand that the rocks can only truly balance if

everyone helps. I have hope that humankind is capable of taking notice of each other in this way. When we are focused together it is easier to realize that the inevitable tide is not something to languish or fear. It is, rather, a graceful, flowing force that can inspire us to shape things for the better.

With this assignment, I was already on the path toward writing a book of my stories for my thesis, even though I did not realize it then. In actuality, my master's thesis project idea slowly took shape over a



period of time when I was pregnant and later when I was enjoying the first few months with my newborn daughter. My research into story brought me insight into the worlds of intergenerational storytelling, identity and childhood. As I wrote, I reflected on the role of storytelling and storysharing in the field of environmental education and communication, and I came to believe one very important thing: there is a point to sharing our stories and I must speak out about it. As I once read: "One might make a good argument that storytelling is as fundamental to leadership as hotdogs are to baseball. It is memory, it is connection, it is essence and it is perhaps even...soul" (Chartier and Lapointe, 2007, p. 22).

Facilitating an environmental autobiography exercise is something that can be done with people of all ages. In fact, I believe that it is never too early and never too late. The idea is to inspire your audience to find one or more stories from their childhood that reflects an important connection they had to their childhood environment—likely to a certain space, place or person. Once they have done this, you can then help them learn to see a connection between their own environmental history and important elements of the environmental field. Finding this connection allows each person to value their own knowledge and their own story as part of the greater narrative of our world, placing them in a positive position of power in regards to changing that narrative.

Although the environmental autobiography process should be as organic as possible, you might consider laying out a few simple steps to help organize their thoughts. As an example, I began by asking myself two questions: "What stories do I want to tell?" and "Who do I want to tell them to?" Over the next several days, I jotted down any name or word that popped into my head, without any judgment about why it popped into my head. I then arranged those words into categories, like "canoe trips"

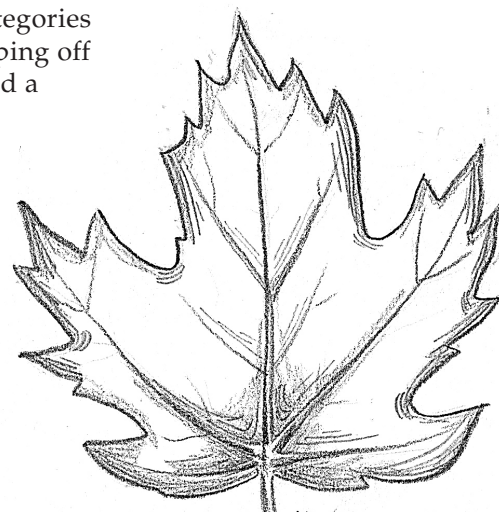
and "Nova Scotia." The categories inevitably became the jumping off point from where I followed a particular memory onto the page. As part of my thesis work, it was important that I did not try to analyze the point of the story before I wrote it. So instead, I simply wrote each story as my memory served. It wasn't until I had finished writing the narrative component of my thesis that I realized

how interwoven my own stories were with mainstream concepts of the environmental movement or research field. For instance, I wrote a story about my fondness for the cemetery that I played in as a child, describing it as a place to escape to for biking and daydreaming. I tied this story to the environmental connective (t)issue I identified as "unstructured play," a concept very familiar to environmental educators and many parents. The message for some individuals and organizations is quite clear: we must get kids back outdoors and give them time to play. Yet knowing that my own history is connected to that message and that I can contribute my own authentic voice—my own little story—to that greater narrative is empowering.

Whether we choose to share our stories with family, friends, students or a wider audience, the important part is that we do share them. We must reinvest in our connection to story. The environmental autobiography is a tool that we should embrace to enhance our collective story, to enhance self-narrative and to enhance ecological consciousness.

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Chartier, B., & Lapointe, S. (2007). *Get real: The art and power of storytelling in workplace communities*. National Managers' Community.





## Resources

For anyone looking to delve into the world of environmental autoethnography or narrative work, please consider these resources:

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Emily Gray is a mother, wife, environmentalist, educator and writer. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Geography from McGill University and a Bachelor of Education from Nipissing University, and has recently completed a Master in Environmental Education and Communication degree from Royal Roads University. Royal Roads University continues to draw in some of the most inspiring, passionate, and motivated people in Canada, creating a kind of fervour and community that strengthens the environmental movement. Emily is grateful to be part of this community and extends special gratitude to her cohort, mentors and instructors—notably her thesis supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Robert Henderson, and Royal Roads University Associate Professor, Dr. Rick Kool.



## Vacation or Learning Experience? Canoe Tripping with Adolescents

By Natasha Turner

I have been involved with Camp Wilderness (CW) (pseudonym) for 13 years. I spent six years as a camper, and seven on staff, including five as a canoe tripper. Over time I became disillusioned with CW's canoe tripping program and decided to change the program to reflect current outdoor education (OE) theory. Programming with insufficient theoretical foundations is a pervasive problem in outdoor adventure education (Christie, Higgins & McLaughlin, 2013; Allan, McKenna & Hind, 2012; Shellman, 2011; Nicol, 2003), and CW's canoe tripping program is a prime example of an outdoor adventure program that lacks a solid theoretical foundation.

CW offers trips of up to six days, with the stated aim of giving campers an arena to "develop leadership" and "an outdoor classroom where these future leaders practice their skills and develop memories" (Canoe tripping, n.d.). I felt that CW was not meeting these stated aims, thus I conducted a study seeking to heighten participant learning and autonomy on trips through applying current OE theory. My long-standing relationship with CW meant that improving their canoe-tripping program was personally significant; I wanted a place I care deeply about to have the best canoe-tripping program possible.

### Camp Wilderness' Original Canoe-Tripping Program

Campers aged 13–16 may sign up for a trip of up to six days; those aged 11–12 may go for up to three days. Traditionally, the trip participants had no responsibilities outside of carrying their assigned items on portages, setting up their tent (usually with staff help), and collecting firewood for making a cooking fire. Most days included a "rest hour" of at least one hour where participants were forced to stay in their tents while staff members relaxed.

The program did not give participants any responsibilities with consequences, or opportunities to make decisions.

### Method

My study considered participant learning as learning the hard skills of tripping (such as navigation and cooking). However, as participants learn these hard skills there were associated gains in soft skills such as confidence and leadership. Throughout this study I use Goold's (2014) definition of autonomy as having the ability and competence to create and pursue one's own goals.

Throughout the summer I worked with the other canoe trippers, counsellors, camp director and participants to re-envision and re-develop the social structures and norms of CW trips. My main method of data collection was unstructured interviews with participants.

### Roles on the Trip

The main change I introduced was creating daily roles that the participants rotated through in pairs. There were four roles: 1) portage leaders, who were in charge of organising everyone when we arrived at either end of a portage, and ensuring that all bags were taken in one trip; 2) navigation leaders, who navigated us to our destination; 3) cook team, who cooked the day's meals; and 4) leaders of the day, who made sure we left our site on time, organised when and where meals would take place, and ensured everyone was hydrated and happy.

Giving participants an active role in running the trip is consistent with Allison & Von Wald's (2010) educational pedagogy on expeditions that, for meaningful learning to occur, participants must have an active role in the expedition,

learning through challenges and choices that stimulate them. Consistent with Allison & Von Wald (2010), participants were able to renegotiate their relationship to the leaders because they were given real responsibilities that made them feel progressively more confident in their skills. This renegotiation helped staff feel more like mentors or friends to the participants, which Smith (2006) considers necessary for optimal learning to occur.

Many participants noted the difference between the trips they went on this summer and previous years where their opportunities for involvement were minimal. Kelly (age 16) bluntly remarked that, "This trip was a lot better [than previous years] because it was the first time that we were allowed to do things." On a different trip, Tania (age 12) expressed a similar sentiment saying, "We got to participate in a lot more. Counsellors used to do everything."

Reflecting on previous years Vanessa (age 12) remarked that she "liked this year better [than previous years] because it was more of a trip than a vacation." Her fellow trip-mate chimed in that, "you respect people more when they let you take initiative." The idea of trips being a vacation was brought up again later in the summer when Melissa remarked that trips "used to feel like a little vacation from camp and not a group activity with work." The idea of OE feeling more like a vacation than a learning experience is one that is gaining increasing attention in the UK (Christie et al., 2013).

Joanne (age 13) noted that, "in the past we hadn't realised what you had to do, and how much work goes into it. Next year we'll be more experienced." The original program clearly was not meeting its educational aims [to develop leadership and learn in an outdoor classroom] if participants felt they were simply on a vacation, and were not even aware of what work went into a trip.

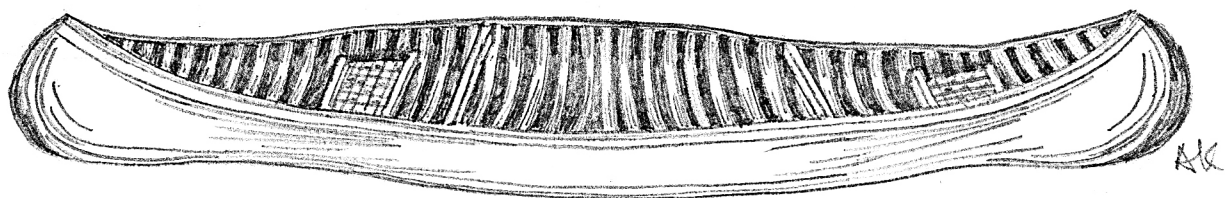
**Navigation leaders.** Navigation is rife with

learning opportunities for the participants because most of them have never used a physical map before. Cindy (age 13) thought that navigating was an important skill because it "made me feel like a leader because navigation is an important role... you feel like you're a part of it [the trip]." This sentiment was echoed when Kelly said, "knowing where you are or where you're going makes you feel in charge." The value of knowing where you are was a reoccurring theme over many trips. Mandy (age 16) said that she "really enjoyed exploring because it let me orient myself," and on a separate trip Louisa commented that "navigating let us not feel lost."

Feelings of belonging, leadership and understanding one's place are necessary to create an environment in which participants feel supported and able to learn (Dahl, Sethre-Hofstad & Salomon, 2013; Allison & Von Wald, 2010; Brown & Fraser, 2009). Furthermore, gaining map-reading skills is an important step towards autonomy for participants on trips. Goold (2014) argues that one cannot be truly autonomous until one has the "competence to pursue effectually one's self-given ends" (p. 271). Most participants had no prior exposure to navigation; therefore it was one of the single greatest competency-related barriers to participant autonomy on trips.

**Cook team.** Participants enjoyed cooking, as well as building and maintaining the cooking fire. In previous years participants were not allowed near the fire, nor did they help with food preparation; changing these rules had a powerful impact on them.

Charlotte (age 13) felt, "I really liked knowing that I had the ability to help you." One particular night stood out for Emily when she cooked her own pizza wrap; she stated, "letting us hold the pan made me feel empowered because I felt like we could actually do something... it made me feel equal." On a subsequent trip, food featured heavily again. Varsha (age 13) remarked, "I like the cooking because before we were never even allowed to cut the veggies because the knives



were too sharp." I actually think staff discouraged participants from helping because they thought they were supposed to discourage it, even if they were unsure of why. Varsha's friend Naomi (age 12) agreed that, "we're a lot more independent now, we know things—we can cook." The feelings of increased independence felt by the participants is supported by Allison & Von Wald (2010) who argue that power dynamics will shift throughout expeditions as participants learn and gain skills.

#### **Leaders of the day and portage leaders.**

The leader of the day and portage leader roles were difficult for the participants. Some participants, particularly older participants that had experienced CW's tripping program for several years, felt that they were overstepping traditional power divisions by assuming these roles. Kelly (age 16) thought the participants' difficulty with the roles was "more of an authority thing." In particular she felt that "leader of the day is a respect thing—I assume that snacks are when the tripper wants them." This sentiment was echoed by Mandy (age 16) who said the participants "don't want to overstep boundaries with staff."

Kelly gave a particularly poignant insight, stating that the new canoe-tripping program is a "shift in structure between responsibility and the campers, so it took a few days to realise that we could make calls." The leader of the day and portage leader roles bridged the power gap more than cooking or navigating. When participants navigated they were navigating to a place that had been predetermined for them by the staff. Likewise, when participants cooked, they had no choice about what to cook because

all the meals were pre-planned. Conversely, as portage leaders, participants were in charge of organising staff and fellow participants to effectively walk portages. This is an intimidating task due to the age gap between staff and participants. Furthermore, it inverts the camp's traditional power structures. Similarly, as leaders of the day, participants decided when and where to have lunch and how to pack up the campsite; these tasks also entail directing staff in what to do.

Despite these challenges, many participants enjoyed being portage leaders and leaders of the day. Reflecting on her day as portage leader, Louisa said she "learned much more about portages and learning to do it all in one trip...doing the portage made us way stronger mentally." On a different trip, being a leader of the day made Sydney (age 12) feel mature. She commented that for "all day planning [leader of the day] we had to make sure that we had sunscreen and water. We had to be mature." Ensuring fellow participants were hydrated and reapplied sunscreen was difficult for many of the participants, as they frequently forgot to do so themselves. Therefore, being leaders of the day required participants to heighten their awareness and responsibility for the day.

#### **Food Request Forms**

In previous years participants didn't have input into what food was brought on trip. As part of the new program, participants planned their own menus with the aid of a food request form for guidance. The tripper followed the participants' requests as closely as possible when packing the food.

Unanimously the participants enjoyed the advent of food request forms. Varsha enthusiastically remarked, "I loved being able to choose our food and knowing what we were going to have. If it's bad, then we can say something!" This remark was particularly interesting because it highlighted the open relationship between participants and staff that the new program created. The request forms allowed participants to feel comfortable expressing their opinions on the trip's food.

Melissa commented that she particularly liked "how with the food planning you let us plan it and then adjusted it and told us why you did it so that we could learn to plan better ourselves." Weiner (1979) states the importance of participants helping to plan their expeditions in order to feel in control on the expedition. Lydia's comment reflects Weiner's idea about the importance of participant involvement, and shows how participants can learn throughout the process.

## General Feedback

**Trust.** Tania noticed new levels of trust between staff and participants commenting, "you guys trusted us more. I would never have been allowed to stern before. Or go near the fire. Or stargaze alone. Or trust us to not go in the water [when we were unsupervised]." Katie felt similarly, saying, "it was really nice that you said that you can go to bed when you want to, you just can't complain [the next morning if you are tired]. That gave us so much freedom and responsibility." These small offerings of trust from the staff greatly affected the overall feel of the trip. Jennifer commented on this saying, "for me this CW trip is the one where there's been the most trust between campers and staff, and that has made this such a satisfying experience."

I think that Ann really summed up the whole idea when she said, "I really like that you gave us real answers to all of our questions. You just tell us. It means that you trust us...I mean, we're going to find out





eventually anyway!" I think that this quote perfectly sums up the illogical behaviour staff had previously been exhibiting—why should information that participants will inevitably find out be kept from them until the last possible moment?

**Responsibility.** Participants' heightened levels of responsibility had a big impact on them. Jennifer commented, "I think that this method [of trip] is so much better because I went on two overnights [in previous years] and the kids didn't get as much responsibility, and they weren't less competent, but they acted that way because they weren't as involved." This comment strongly impacted me because it perfectly summarized the relationship between expectations and behaviour. In previous years the staff's behaviour demonstrated to participants that they were considered incompetent. Riggins (1986) commented that students rise, or fall, to the expectations that a teacher sets for them. Through giving participants real answers to their questions, and encouraging them to take responsibility, an expectation was set that participants should act responsibly and challenge themselves.

On a separate trip, Vanessa expressed similar sentiments reflecting, "because we were treated like kids we didn't respect the adults as much." Not only did participants feel more respected this year, but they enjoyed having responsibilities that mattered. Speaking for her whole trip group, Katie commented "we liked that we had responsibilities with consequences." Having a responsibility with real consequences makes a big difference because it makes participants feel valued and useful. Furthermore, it forces participants to consider how a trip actually runs. Marcy commented, "giving us the responsibility to do things made me think about what happens" to make trips run smoothly.

Participants' increased responsibilities allowed them to feel equal to staff. Mandy commented on this change, saying, "this trip has been a lot more even than ever before... if you treat us like equals, we'll feel like

that." This is an important comment about the unequal power dynamics that used to exist on the trips. Kelly also noted that, "you rarely talked down to us like we were little kids, you just chatted to us." Louisa echoed this sentiment saying, "we were treated a lot more like adults." It is important to the participants to feel that they are being treated in an age-appropriate manner and that their abilities are being valued.

### Limitations to Achieving Autonomy and Implications for Practice

The greatest limitation of the new canoe-tripping program is that participants remain largely uninvolved in pre-trip planning (save for planning the menu). They were not involved in planning the trip prior to departure, so they could not set self-measured goals for the expedition. As such, participants were only able to regulate their process towards goals staff set for them. This reliance on staff undermines participants' learning as well as their autonomy.

Though the new program was successful, for it to remain successful both participants and staff must continue adapting it. It is imperative that the iterative nature of the program be retained so that the new practices do not become entrenched and unquestioned in the way that the old practices did. I believe this is the most important implication for practice, that the canoe-tripping program staff and participants engender a culture of programmatic vigilance for how the program can better achieve its stated educational outcomes. Moreover, I strongly believe that aspects of the vision of this canoe-tripping program are incredibly relevant to summer camps across Canada, as well as schools that run OE programs. I think that wherever possible it is imperative to allow participants to meaningfully engage with and determine their experience.

### Conclusion

In sum, the new program greatly altered CW's canoe-tripping culture by increasing

participants' learning and autonomy. In coherence with my participant-centred approach, I leave you with a quote from Jennifer who captured the ongoing vision of the new canoe-tripping program best when she said, "I think that this program is changing the trip culture from a party with food to one where you're learning new skills and building relationships with people through doing hard things. That's what trip should be about." To a canoe trip leader who was trying to do just that—challenge the participants and teach them new skills—this was music to my ears, and hope for the future.

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## Fractals of Outdoor and Experiential Learning: Interview Patterns with Dr. James Raffan

By Hartley Banack

Almost 20 years ago, in his 1996 COEO 25th anniversary speech, James Raffan declared that outdoor experiential learning (OEL) needed to be reconceived within notions of generally accepted “good teaching” if it were to avoid extinction as a “form” of education (p. 10). As we approach the 20-year-after marker, there continue to be downward trends for OEL programs and experiences, particularly for K–12-aged youth in Canada. Recently, and growing, there is a body of literature supporting Time Spent Outdoors (TSO) (Rickinson et al., 2004; Cleland et al., 2008; Bowler, Buyung-Ali, Knight, & Pullin, 2010; Thompson-Coon et al., 2010) and Risky Play (Gill, 2014; Sobel, 2014) as healthy and significant aspects of well-being and important to learning. In his address, Raffan suggested that OEL is essentially analogous to “good teaching” and, as such, OEL and general good teaching need to be aligned and integrated into all that education does (and, thus, educators do). This interview revisits OEL in relation to its recent history and present-day up-swelling.

So, as being outdoors often involves being prepared, let’s open our pack and read what lies within. The following questions were developed to reflect on a wide range of OEL themes relevant from Raffan’s experiences, and reflective upon present-day OEL currents. As the interview unfolds, I ask the reader to consider three questions:

1. What are inherent aspects of what OEL “is” (might some ontos exist, even descriptively)?
2. What might be “good” about these aspects (examples of practices)?
3. How might OEL-specific aspects (what Raffan calls “active” epistemology of OEL—time spent outside, inter-/intra-personal interactions, and teaching/learning

as active) be incorporated into teacher education and professional development for all teachers as foundational educational practices, towards improved personal/social health, balance for sustainable living, and ultimately illustrating “good teaching”?

### Questions and Answers

H.B.- What can you tell me about your reflection on who you are now and, looking back on your route, how you got involved in outdoor experiential education?

J.R.- I got into outdoor and experiential education initially because of the contrast of learning that occurred in school and (although I didn’t see it as that until much later) learning that happened while I was hammering around on the river, in the woods, with Boy Scouts and at summer camp. One was earnest, intentional, teacher-centric, fleeting and more or less disconnected from the natural world. The other was informal, serendipitous, kid-centric, durable and totally connected to the real world.

H.B.- How have the terms *outdoor education*, *experiential education* and *outdoor educator/experiential educator* changed over the past 20 years? Are these meanings different for you too, or from what you sense them to mean?

J.R.- My understanding is that outdoor education speaks to the historic connection between camping, guiding, scouting, faith-based camping and the notion that conventional school-based education could happen outside the classroom. If school was about education for the mind, in years gone by, outdoor education was about education for the mind, body (and possibly spirit).

Experiential education is a broader concept that begins when a teacher asks, as a central organizing question, not “What is it that I desire my students to know?” but, instead, “What is it that I desire my students to do?” Experiential education is about context, relevance, collateral learning, student engagement, student as teacher, teacher as learner.

H.B.- When you reflect, how would you describe the historical unfolding of OEL on the Canadian landscape?

Outdoor education came to life with the awareness that arose after the “second Copernican revolution,” which happened when those first images of “spaceship Earth” came back from the Apollo spaceflights in the late sixties. The Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO) was created shortly after that and that event was emblematic of a growing awareness that what had been happening in summer camps and in the schools that had school gardening or camping or other outdoor programs was significant in connecting people to the beauty and fragility of planet Earth.

The Club of Rome’s publication of the lily pond illustration of exponential growth (if pond lilies replicate daily then the day before the lily pond is choked with pond lilies it is only half full of lilies ...) helped to heighten a general awareness in the Western world of population growth, pollution and the effects of human’s on the Earth. Outdoor education came like a revelation to the white Western world, even though indigenous cultures and non-Western cultures throughout the rest of the world had been living and were living more or less in harmony with the Earth since God was in diapers. So outdoor education got going, mostly in the creation of nature centres and outdoor education centres in the 1970s and 1980s. Unfortunately, by calling it “outdoor education,” the practice was seen and often billed as an extension or rich experiential supplement or augmentation of the regular indoor curriculum. So when

the budget crunch came it was easy to cut. The bubble burst sometime in the 1990s and outdoor education has been in decline more or less ever since. The only bright spot in all of this was that it turned out that the experiential activities that outdoor educators used were very effective for engaging (controlling) kids who didn’t fit well into the mainstream and, as such, outdoor education got some new life because of its therapeutic benefits.

Nobody really took a good crack at asking, “If OEE is not a subject, then what is it? A method? An approach to teaching and learning? An educational philosophy?”

H.B.- Much of your writing is about cultural geography—your area of academic expertise. How has your cultural geographer’s lens affected and influenced you as an educator?

J.R.- I see myself as a learner first, a teacher second (I see writing fundamentally as teaching, although that’s another conversation) who is committed to understanding and communicating the connection between people and place. My perspective, my “lens” as you call it, has to do with my belief that people and place *should* be connected. And this goes back to the very beginning of my own bipartite education—school versus scouts or the river. The only learning that really mattered, the only learning that seemed to serve best in meeting the needs and answering the questions that presented themselves as I was growing up...was the learning that came from and in the natural world, or in experiences that were derived from or connected to the outdoors.

H.B.- Above you mention a key distinction between “traditional” education and OEL as being rooted in the difference between asking “what do you know?” and “what do you do?” What do you *do* in your teaching practice that you think could be considered definitive of an outdoor educator? How do you practice what you preach?





J.R.- I have knowledge of and about the real world, knowledge gained in and about the outdoors. I see myself, in every teaching situation, in every educational context *always* as a learner first. This means that no matter what the topic, no matter what the location or venue, no matter what the situation, if I am in any educational leadership role, I always have something fundamental in common with every student in the class—we are both learners. We have both come to learn.

H.B.- Do you think there is reason/rationale/sense/demand/want/need/and so on for an OEL teacher training program in Canada? Why and for what purposes? Who would this type of teacher training program appeal to? How might this fit into an “education system”?

J.R.- At its best, at its most pure, OEE is about creating dynamic, durable, powerful, adaptable knowledge—knowledge that drives action. And, without getting too sidetracked, I

believe that one distinction is critical in understanding how to achieve OEE at its purest. There is public knowledge (facts, figures, propositional knowledge that can be dispensed and called back at will). And then there is personal knowledge, which is the knowledge that is created when the facts and figures, the propositional knowledge, lands in the quivering bag of protoplasm called a human being. Personal knowledge is the knowledge that includes sights, smells, sounds, emotions, aches, pains, tastes and sensations. Public knowledge abounds. It is everywhere and it is doubling every five minutes (or something like that). With all that public knowledge kicking about, and if that public knowledge solved problems, we likely would not have any problems... right? Personal knowledge is rich and rare and much more finite, in some ways, than public knowledge because it is the knowledge that lives in each of us, it is the knowledge that makes us who we are. It is this knowledge that drives action. If there was ever a reason to create a new OEE teacher training program in Canada, it would be to embrace the notion that we need to be educating not to dispense and call back scads of public knowledge (which has a scarily short half-life in most cases) but educating to create personal knowledge—the knowledge that drives informed, ethical, reasoned, heartfelt ACTION. This means creating a teacher education program that helps teacher candidates ask first not, “What is it that I want my students to know?” (although this is surely important) as a first and central organizing question but, “What is it that I wish my students to do?” This is how experiential education begins. This is the foundation of building personal knowledge.

H.B.- There are programs around the world that have taken on more significance with respect to outdoor/experiential education. Which ones do you consider to be important and why? Would such programs work in Canada? Why or why not?

J.R.- I think part of the trick to getting it right is to dispense with “outdoor” as a descriptor. In my judgment, education that does not include the outdoors, the “real world,” the natural world is education that is likely irrelevant anyway. So why not find a way to integrate the world at large in all education and stop making the convenient distinction between what happens on either side of a school wall. Any program (and there are some) that situates its students and their learning in experiences that include real world contexts (and yes, they can and need to be controlled and risks need to be managed, just like teachers’ fears of losing control or, heaven forbid, becoming for a moment a learner alongside their students) is education that very likely builds personal knowledge.

H.B.- Non-school or -formal education-based outdoor/experiential programs have grown in leaps and bounds over the past few decades. We seem to have become more outdoor “adventurous” in some sense, and in others merely making the best to access dwindling outdoors natural spaces as they once existed. In your opinion, how does our current reality (with respect to commerce, industry, development and so on) affect the role and reality of OEL programs both for teacher educators and for students in schools?

J.R.-Adventure is a bit of a red herring, unless it is integrated into the bigger educational picture of the participants. Ropes courses and expeditions are “cool” and they do build personal knowledge, but too often they are add-ons to the education of the people who take part. This may be described as “throw away” education conducted by “experts” or technicians who float in and out of students’ lives in a context that often totally disenfranchises their regular teachers and what does it do to students, this floating? It would be different if you could take those “thrills and chills” and, through metaphor or whatever, help students understand how the learning in these contexts is building capacity for students that is not only

related but essentially (or at least it should be) connected to stuff they're learning in other aspects of their lives. But that doesn't happen very often at all.

H.B.- Where do you see OEL being in 10 years, or 20 years from now? Is this a hope or a reality?

J.R.- If OEL is to distinguish itself and take its rightful place, I think it needs to do some really hard thinking. AND I think it needs to start paying attention to the fascinating research that is being done and the startling findings that are emerging from the research into electronic gaming. Taking the public/personal distinction into that literature will result in some penetrating insights into what is happening to the democratization of learning and to the role of learners in their own education out of school. Education is changing in front of our eyes and I think there is a role for OEL to play, understanding that context matters, that facts and figures don't matter a wit if they don't help students answer the questions they are asking and the needs that are guiding who and what they are.

H.B.- Students graduating from secondary school systems seem disillusioned by many of the predominant influences (and distractions) driving and directing their lives. What advice do you have for this youth with respect to OEL and their day-to-day lives?

J.R.- The only mainline teaching I do with youth these days is on Arctic and Antarctic expeditions with Students on Ice. Yes, like the rest of us, these youth from around the world (usually about 25% indigenous) are distracted by news and technology, but when they get a chance to *participate* in creating plans for the future of the planet and acting on those plans, those distractions fall away, replaced in many cases by focus that is almost scary. I've worked with kids who have changed laws, changed minds, created manifestos—not pretend or simulated activity. They have stepped into the real world and gotten

involved. They've taken control of their learning and have spoken out, acted out and gotten on with things. They have made their voices heard. The sooner kids realize they have a voice and that they can make it heard, the sooner education becomes the most exciting thing in their lives.

The gaming literature talks about "epistemophilic desire" that is innate in humans—which is described as a biological search for knowledge similar in scope and intensity to lust.<sup>1</sup>

Imagine what would happen if we started creating schools and nurturing teachers with the express purpose of releasing epistemophilic desire and creating personal knowledge.

H.B.- You have many years' experience working in teacher training for OEL. What do you feel and know to work and be true about helping to develop exceptional OEL teachers and educators?

J.R.- The sooner you (the teacher of teachers) can make them agents of their own learning and get the hell out of the way, attending to the business of creating context and providing guidance to the travelers, the sooner you'll be creating exceptional educators.

## Notes

1. Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen describes epistemophilia in relation to gaming in his article, "Thoughts on learning in games and designing educational computer games" (<http://game-research.com/index.php/articles/thoughts-on-learning-in-games-and-designing-educational-computer-games/>). The concept of epistemophilia has roots in Freud, and was then developed by Melanie Klein. It is denoted as a psychological "instinct" associated with a child's desire to know her/his mother. Gaming literature (along with other

popular use of the term) has dropped “darker” aspects of epistemophilia, simply retaining the sense of “desire to know.” This is not dissimilar to the history of “biophilia” (Fromm, 1964; Wilson, 1984).



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## Place-Based Education: A Reconnaissance of the Literature

By Simon Beames

In September 2014, I had the pleasure of giving a keynote address at COEO's annual conference. The subject of my talk was place-based education. While I was delighted to be invited to present to the delegates, I was lukewarm on the subject matter—not because I don't believe in place-based education, but because I didn't think I had any thing to add on the topic. I figured that place-based education was widely supported by a fair amount of literature, and that educators should just get on with it. What could I possibly contribute to the discussion?

Over the last 20 years, conversations about place and education have seen increasing attention in books, journals, dissertations, blogs, magazines and conferences. Indeed, in outdoor learning circles in particular, place-based pedagogies and curricula are no longer uncommon. As I started delving into the place-based education literature in order to prepare my talk, I came to realize that, while the term "place-based education" was used by many, a deep understanding of how to teach through local phenomena was not so obvious. It seemed to me that educators needed a more nuanced understanding of place-based approaches to teaching, and therein lay the rationale for my talk, and this article which summarizes it.

In the pages that follow, I will first present a language for considering the degree to which our place-based education actually responds to place. I'll then propose and explain three levels of place-based education practice. Together, these will enable us to have more meaningful conversations about our place-based outdoor teaching.

### Foundational Literature

Place-based education finds its roots in four principal fields. In the 1970s, human

geography featured writers such as Yi Fu Tuan, Edward Relph and George Seddon. Henderson (2010) paraphrased place guru Tuan's central thesis in simple terms: "space is unstoried place" (p. 84). Eco-psychology was driven by luminaries like Theodore Roszak, as was deep ecology by Nils Faarlund, and philosophy by Edward Casey. As you can see, none of these four roots is in the field of education.

The birth of place-based education literature was in the 1990s, with the likes of David Orr, Gregory Smith and Dilafruz Williams writing about "ecological education," Stephen Haymes focusing on a "pedagogy of place," and Robbie Nicol and Pete Higgins highlighting the educational importance of gaining "a sense of place." Towards the end of the millennium, Paul Theobald outlined his view of "place-conscious classrooms and community-oriented schooling," while Frank Traina and Susan Darley Hill recounted the merits of "bioregional education" and Janice Woodhouse and Cliff Knapp championed "place-based curriculum and instruction." The 1990s also featured the first place-based education PhDs, which included works by Canadians James Raffan, Bob Henderson and the late Brent Cuthbertson.

The noughties was a time that saw the world of place-based education maturing and "instructing" educators; the literature focused less on what "it" was and more on how to do it. Gregory Smith's piece, "Place-Based Education: Learning to Be Where We Are," and David Sobel's *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms & Communities*, both provided digestible and convincing imperatives and guidelines for this approach, while David Gruenewald's oft-cited paper, "The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place," laid out a watertight theoretical argument for such teaching through place. Peer-reviewed papers in outdoor education journals

followed, with two examples being Alistair Stewart's explication of "decolonising encounters" through "place-responsive" education, and Molly Baker's "landfulness" approach to reconnecting with the land, which drew upon the conservationist Aldo Leopold's iconic writing. Two key books then followed: Smith & Sobel's *Place- and Community-Based Education in Schools*, and Brian Wattchow and Mike Brown's *A Pedagogy of Place*. With this growing corpus of literature (which includes many titles I haven't mentioned), place-based education had arrived and was here to stay.

A question that intrigued me was, "Why the recent interest in place-based education? What has brought about its rise at this time?" Wattchow and Brown suggest that its emergence has come from a "concern about the cumulative effects of modernity upon our ability to respect and care for the local places we call home and the remote places we encounter when we travel" (p. 51). Seen this way, place-based education (or place-responsive education, as many antipodeans prefer to call it) has come to the forefront because of the times in which we live; in pre-Internet, pre-globalized times, our parents and our parents' parents had much less need for place-based education.

## Some Key Assumptions and Limitations

Now that we've had a whirlwind tour of the seminal place-based education literature, some of its key assumptions can be summarized here:

- It's about education (not only "learning"—education involves an educator!)
- It involves the near and far, urban and rural (and everything in between)
- It considers the past / present / future
- It can be used across the curriculum
- It encompasses interactions between land, humans and broader ecosystems
- It requires a certain amount of "dwelling" and "responding"

If you accept these assumptions, then let us next examine just how place-based your teaching can and should be. Take a moment to consider the following topics and how they might best be taught:

- Biodiversity loss in the Brazilian rain forest
- 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature
- Monet impressionist art
- WWI trench warfare
- The Palestine / Israel conflict
- The influence of climate change on Bangladesh

The accepted wisdom in place-based education appears to be as follows:

*If a topic has to be taught without attention to place, it will lack real-world application, and thus reduce student engagement, and presumably learning.*

The million-dollar question then is this: Shall we only teach topics that can be taught through engagement with local places?

If so, we might not want to teach the six above topics and others like them. Seen this way, focusing exclusively on place-based approaches might actually limit student learning.

Clearly, we need a more nuanced understanding of the hows and whys of place-based education. This takes us to the next section of the paper, which deconstructs place-based education into three levels of theory.

For starters, it may be helpful to conceive of three kinds of place-based outdoor education: "Place ambivalent," which ignores place (e.g., doing a Shakespeare lesson outside because the sun is shining); "place sensitive," which pays some attention to local phenomena; and "place essential," which describes learning that is directly related to the exact location in which it takes place (e.g., learning about trench warfare on a field trip to Belgium) (Mannion, Fenwick, Nugent, & l'Anson,

2011). I can see how a dimension, with place-ambivalent practice at one end and place-essential practice at the other, could be helpful for teachers to better consider the degree to which their teaching is place-based. Employing this dimension as a tool for analyzing practice is the first level.

The next thing that place-based educators can do is to add a critical dimension to their work. Drawing on Paulo Friere and Henry Giroux, Gruenewald's (2003) "Critical Pedagogy of

Place" espouses questioning inequalities of power and opportunity; this allows places to become understood at a deeper, more political level, which in turn lays the platform for people to transform their places. This moves the discussion from simply learning about place to changing place. Gruenewald's two key concepts are decolonization, which involves learning to recognize disruption and "injury" to place, and reinhabitation, which focuses on learning to live well socially and ecologically in these places.

This all sounds wonderful, doesn't it? We have the knowledge and skills to use place-based pedagogies to bring alive all of our curricular areas. We also possess the capacity to question the way we live and travel through our places, and to consider how we might change them for the better. Is that all there is to it?

The short answer to this rhetorical question is "no, it isn't." The long answer is as follows. In my view, place-based education, while being a "child" or product of the late modern times in which we live, is also highly complicated by these same circumstances.

Countless social theorists have described contemporary society as being characterized by obsessions with minimizing risks of all kinds, increasing speeds associated with "hyper-modernity," people on the move who live "mobile lives," the impossible complexity of many "simple" everyday tasks, and the constant change that comes from living in

"liquid times."<sup>1</sup> Commercial influences and consumer culture is so pervasive that most of us aren't even aware of it—even when we're "buying green" (Soron, 2011). Borrowing from Pete Higgins' conundrum on learning for sustainability, one could be forgiven for feeling exasperated by the challenges posed by trying to educate for place, when the place is the Earth and Earth is in a constant state of change. This brings us to what might be called a "third wave" of place-responsive education.

Did you notice what I did there? I used the term "place-responsive." As Mike Brown explained to me, responding to a place implies active engagement; it is more aligned with Gruenewald's work, which seeks to go beyond merely learning about a place (which is still good) to transforming that place (which is even better). Let's kick it up a notch, though. What could be even better than even better? That's right, the third wave (as I have labelled it), which features something called "critical cosmopolitanism."

Getting beyond the fancy name, this approach features one over-arching goal. And that, according to Margaret Hawkins (2014), is to "create citizens of the world" (p. 97) by fusing locally situated practices and "global others." On the ground, this can happen through sharing our critical responses to our places with those in other parts of the world and vice versa. Critical cosmopolitanism shows students how the issues within their places are related to other places in a complex web of history, geography, politics and economics. This perspective argues for devising ways to help our students understand local issues "within the broader context of the global shifts that are reshaping the very nature of localities" (Rizvi, 2006, p. 21). Meanings that are constructed and arrived at by students can be sent and received through technology (e.g., videos, slide shows, interviews, podcasts, Facebook, Twitter and other social media). This kind of "techno cosmo" teaching is beyond my own current practice, but I can see how it could be my next pedagogical step.

This brings us to the end of our whistlestop recce of place-responsive education. We've acknowledged its origins, highlighted some assumptions and limitations, and then looked at how place-based education can be considered on a dimension that has ambivalent and essential at its two ends; we've seen how education for place can go beyond simply learning about it to helping to change it; and, finally, we've understood how it is possible to take this a step further and share one's critical responses to place with far-away others, while learning about theirs at the same time.

All useful papers in education theory need to help readers connect concepts to their practice. With this in mind, I propose that educators interested in teaching through place consider the following questions:

1. To what degree can (and should) your place-based education genuinely respond to the place in which it happens?
2. To what degree is your place-based education an emancipatory, place-transforming one?
3. To what degree is your place-based education linking participants' local, fluid lives with those of global others?

I know that I've got work to do on all three fronts and I wish you well as you develop your place-responsive teaching practices.

## Note

1. In order of concept: Beck (1992), Virilio (2000), Elliot & Urry (2010), Lewin (1993), Bauman (2007).

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## The Role of Outdoor Education in Ontario Public Education

By Moyra Bell, Hilary Pollock and Dr. Martha Barnes

In the last decade, there has been a growing concern that people, especially children, are spending less time in the outdoors and more time in the virtual world (Louv, 2005). On average, a North American child spends 90 percent of their time indoors, five percent of their time in a vehicle, and five percent of their time outside (Petrini, 2014). This is a problematic trend that is accelerating at an alarming rate (Petrini, 2014). Richard Louv, the author of *Last Child in the Woods* (2005), outlines that this growing problem is affecting youth worldwide. This dilemma, as Louv (2005) states, is a current undiagnosed disorder called Nature Deficit Disorder (NDD). Specifically, youth become more susceptible to developing anxiety, depression, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), among other issues. In Canada, 20 percent of children experience a form of mental illness (Statistics Canada, 2012). In contrast, Keniger and colleagues (2013) outline that people, and especially youth, who spend time in nature have increased mental, cognitive, behavioural and emotional well-being, improved physical health, and a better ability to learn and be creative. The dilemma becomes how to engage individuals in nature, which is where the education system has a critical role to play by enhancing and/or increasing nature immersion time through the delivery of outdoor education (OE) programs. OE has been a subject within the education system for approximately 30 years (Russell, Bell, & Fawcett, 2000).

There is growing concern that OE is not viewed as a priority in the eyes of the Ministry of Education (EDU) compared to other subject areas (Breunig & O'Connell, 2008). Stakeholders, such as educators, government officials and parents, are unaware of the benefits and outcomes that youth gain by participating in OE programs within the public education

curriculum. In response, we designed a mixed methods research project with the aim to understand the role of OE in the Ontario public education system. Our findings, based on document analysis and in-depth interviews with outdoor educators (n=3), are organized around key concepts including NDD, OE, risk, policy, funding, and OE curriculum.

### Nature Deficit Disorder

Benefits in connecting with nature include increased mental, cognitive, behavioural and emotional well-being, improved physical health, and a better ability to learn and be creative (Keniger et al., 2013). Specifically, OE curriculum is important because it helps to counteract nature disconnectedness and the development of societal issues (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005). Today, there is an increased need for OE programs to be recognized within the context of curriculum and funding decisions made by the EDU (Pedretti, Nazir, Tan, Bellomo, & Ayyavoo, 2012).

Our findings highlight that the concept of NDD has been understood in the OE world for some time. However, Louv was able to bring "an issue to light that sparked people's imaginations in a way that people are thinking more about" nature and our connection to it. Louv's term and society's cultural readiness help to inform future implications and implementation strategies in OE in public school systems.

### Outdoor Education

The objective of OE is to improve social, psychological and physical issues developed by society's reduced desire to connect with nature (Martin et al., 2006). Our research found that OE was understood as a dynamic and complex term. For example, the EDU (2007) defines OE

as a distinct and critical component of Environmental Education (EE), concerned with providing experiential learning in the environment to foster a connection to local places, develop a greater understanding of ecosystems, and provide a unique context for learning. (p. 6)

This reinforces the idea that OE is not viewed as a stand-alone subject but as a course that resides within the environmental studies program. Benefits, such as positive growth opportunities for students, were missing from policy documents yet clearly articulated by outdoor leaders highlighting the fact that OE tends to be undervalued and misunderstood.

### Risk

Many stakeholders perceive OE as a high-risk program, which deters the EDU from allowing students to participate in outdoor programs (Haras, 2010). As an example, Gleave (2008) found that parent's perceptions of risk are socially constructed and influenced by media. Reasons for this may be due to liability factors, funding, inaccessibility and teacher qualifications (Pedretti, Nazir, Tan, Bellomo, & Ayyavoo, 2012). Ultimately, this acts as a barrier to program delivery. Our findings suggest that although outdoor educators identify themselves as good risk managers, they often have to adhere to both OPHEA guidelines and school board policies, which can lead to confusion in the delivery of OE programs. The varying documents regarding risk management may be one reason why OE is difficult to implement within the education system.

### Policy

OE currently appears within Integrative Curriculum Programs (ICP), which have gone through a rollercoaster of support and cutbacks and resulted in OE programs struggling to stay afloat (Breunig and O'Connell, 2008). Policy development of OE has not been clearly established or identified

in the education system, and this has affected the implementation of OE programs (EDU, 2009). Our findings highlight that there is a miscommunication between administrators and all levels of the education system. An administrative role that often contributes to miscommunication is the role of system leaders or "superintendents"—those who are responsible for creating policies. Many of these policies are lengthy, which often creates confusion among lower levels of administration who are responsible for implementing policies. Furthermore, in some instances, superintendents fail to understand the value of OE and thus do not attempt to make changes to mandate OE in Ontario curriculum. The result is that outdoor educators must modify and/or reduce the experiential opportunities to remain consistent with policy directives of OE.

### Funding

There is agreement that OE programs lack funding (Breunig & O'Connell, 2008). Our analysis of the EDU yearly budget documents revealed a lack of consistent funding for OE programs. Furthermore, principals are key decision makers when it comes time to allocating budgetary dollars. Given that there is no specific funding allocation for OE opportunities, administrators are very influential in their ability to support or constrain OE programs. Our findings also revealed that funding for OE programs is often linked with external grants. However, this can be a problematic factor for two reasons. Firstly, educators applying for grants have to write a well-written document, which can be hard to do with lack of grant writing experience and lack of time and commitment. Secondly, the fact that many OE outcomes are difficult to measure and quantify does not support or maintain long-term partnerships with granting agencies.

### OE Curriculum

Upon review of EDU documents, it became apparent that the OE curriculum is outdated and that a gap within OE exists within the education system. Specifically,

the EDU (2007) highlighted “a substantial gap remains, however, between the current practice and a comprehensive approach to EE in Ontario schools. Evidence of the gap exists at every level of the system” (p. 2). On an annual basis the EDU reviews and revises curriculum and policy documents. However, these revisions and renewals to policy and curriculum documents are based on the EDU’s current visions and system priorities. Upon analysis of the EDU’s most recent vision goals document (2014), it was apparent that OE was not a priority for future curriculum implementation because OE was not mentioned in the document. Therefore, at the present time OE does not serve as a key priority based on the visions outlined in the 2014 document. The gap is recognized in relation to OE not having a solid and stable place within the Ontario public school curriculum, which further creates confusion for outdoor educators teaching OE programs.

In conclusion, our findings suggest that miscommunication between all levels of the education system is one of the primary factors hindering the delivery of OE in Ontario schools. Further factors hindering the delivery of OE as identified in our research are accountability in determining administrative roles, inconsistent allocation of resources, and the fact that OE is undervalued. Contributing to this miscommunication is uncertainty as to where OE fits within the present public education system, inconsistent funding models, and unclear goals. Based on these factors, four recommendations have been identified.

## Recommendations

### 1. Consistent policy documents at all levels of the education system:

Our findings suggest that miscommunication across all levels of the education system created confusion in development of policy for and subsequent implementation of OE programs. We recommend creating one risk management policy document that highlights clear policies, procedures

and expectations required of all educators.

**2. Partnerships:** We propose that partnerships with the higher education system, such as the Ontario College of Teachers, is a strategy for narrowing the gap between outdoor educators and schools. This partnership would establish training programs for current and future educators and serve to increase educator competencies in the field of OE, which the EDU highlights as a drawback to the current system. It is anticipated that the formation of partnerships at this level will enhance OE’s visibility and value within public education.

**3. Creating a common language that provides direction to all levels of the system:** Common language will ensure all stakeholders at every level of the education system understand the purpose of OE and its benefits. This will help to alleviate misleading and misinterpreted perceptions of OE and risk.

**4. Challenging the system:** Our findings help to inform an implementation plan based on the idea of “dancing on the periphery of the institution,” which provides outdoor educators with strategies to assist in sparking public interest in OE programs. Specifically, “playing smart” through presentation and preparation may make the EDU “sit up a little bit more” and help to spark the interest of the public about the value of OE. It is important for educators to question and challenge the governing bodies of the education system in attempts to create change.

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- Moyra Bell and Hilary Pollock are recent undergraduate students from Brock University. Moyra studied outdoor recreation and Hilary studied community recreation. Both continue to pursue their passions in their respective fields of study in Canada. Dr. Martha Barnes is an Associate Professor in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at Brock University.

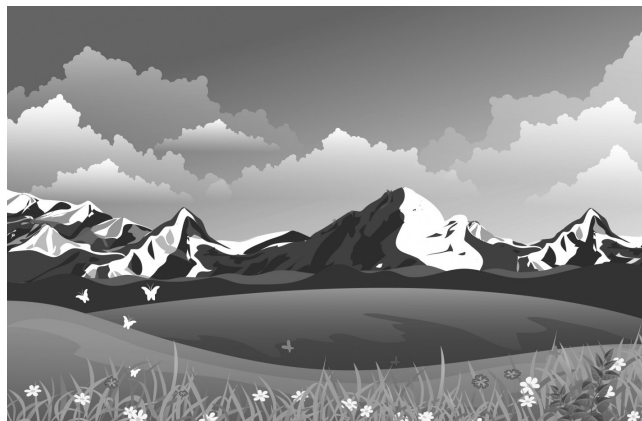


## Gemutlikeit

By Connie Hendry

You might hear Gemutlikeit as a German greeting between hikers on a mountain pass in the Alps. I spoke with the best source I could find—a Canadian woman born to German-speaking parents—to ask if she might help me understand a German word. Not being fully fluent in German, she initially hesitated, but when I said “Gemutlikeit” she smiled broadly and said, “Oh, Gemutlikeit,” and actually broke out into song. Apparently Gemutlikeit means something like “a warm cozy feeling between friends and family.” Picture a lively theme night at a COEO conference, and you probably get the gist of what Gemutlikeit is all about.

I must admit, however, that when I was first given this Wild Word to consider, it took some time to wrap my head around it. Although I’m descended from German stock from a few centuries back, more recent associations of Germany with World War II are a bit more difficult. My grandmother, who recently passed away at the age of 94, was a nurse in London in World War II. According to the rules of war, hospitals were not supposed to be bombed; however, a German plane did indeed bomb the hospital where my grandmother worked. She heard the tell-tale sound of the bomb’s approach, and bent over the newborn baby she was holding in her arms. She had just taken him from his cot by the window and was feeding him boiled water from a spoon. The bomb’s blast blew them across the room, under a marble table. The baby, his cot now filled with broken glass, was fine, but my grandmother had hit the back of her neck on the marble. Her supervisor came into the nursery and said, “Nurse Chase, what a clever idea, crawling under the table like that,” to which she replied, “Ma’am, I didn’t crawl here, we were blown here.” Decades later, when I came along, my grandmother still suffered, wearing a neck brace for driving. More decades later, my son listened intently to



her war stories; and Grandma, whom a doctor called “one tough cookie,” survived ten hours of surgery on Christmas Day (complete with heart attack) to have titanium rods implanted in her neck. She lived about another decade more.

After witnessing great suffering in the world, how do we convince our students and ourselves that the spirit of Gemutlikeit has enough strength to make a positive difference? I, like my Grandma, am a Christian, who believes in love and forgiveness. I once read a story of how a community garden brought together a surviving prisoner of a Nazi concentration camp and a former guard. Healing began as they sat and pulled carrots together. As we teach students to observe nature, conserve energy and protect the environment, we can demonstrate Gemutlikeit. We can demonstrate a world where friends and family gather together to celebrate life, and where strangers share a friendly greeting as they pass along life’s trail.

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*Connie Hendry is a member of the Pathways editorial board and a staff member at the Royal Botanical Gardens.*



SAVE THE DATE

7<sup>th</sup> International  
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July 4 - 8, 2016

Hosted at:  
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## 7<sup>th</sup> International Outdoor Education Research Conference

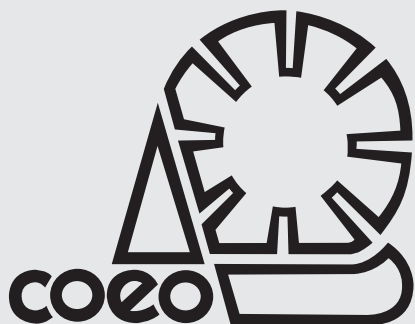
It is my pleasure to invite you to attend the 7<sup>th</sup> International Outdoor Education Research Conference, to be held at Cape Breton University on Unama'ki (Cape Breton Island) from July 4-8, 2016. Whether you're a researcher, practitioner or student, this conference will stimulate your thinking and empower your practice.

Continuing in the tradition of the previous six International Outdoor Education Research Conferences, the aim of this conference is to build on the social, cultural and critical dimensions of research and theorizing in diverse outdoor traditions, including: education (both learning and teaching), recreation, place, sustainability and therapy. Therefore, there is no specialized conference theme and the conference welcomes all abstracts that broadly enhance the understanding, practice and research of outdoor studies.

Please check the website ([www.cbu.ca/ioerc7](http://www.cbu.ca/ioerc7)) for registration costs and other specific details.

2016 is the first time this conference will be held in North America, and what better place than the dynamic heart of the Celtic, Mik'maq and Acadian culture.

Cheers,  
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*Cape Breton University*  
*Co-convenor of the 7<sup>th</sup> IOERC*



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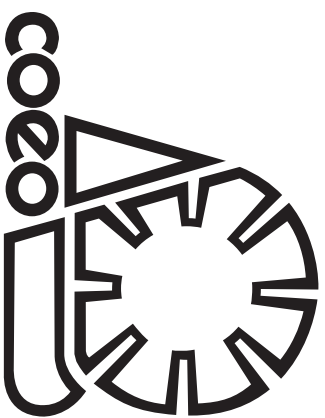
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