



Outdoor Outlook

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Volume 1 Issue 2

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The Way Forward
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Outdoor Education
delivers?

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RESEARCH: THE WAY FORWARD

How do we know that outdoor education delivers?

Drama, music, sport, debating – most of us are convinced that these activities should be part of the central educative experience of every young person. To this list we should add outdoor education. Once seen as largely extra-school experiences, then extracurricular, then co-curricular experiences, they are now regarded by many of us as vital parts of an holistic curriculum. We make considerable claims as to the developmental and learning advantages to students of these non-classroom programmes.

In the independent schools sector, at least, education has long since moved out of the classroom. We make no attempt, for example, to separate off the pastoral care of students from their schooling. For many years we have acknowledged the character building potential of team sports. Increasingly we have come to recognize the enrichment, which comes to students from the whole co-curriculum (for want of a better word) and specific benefits, which originate in each separate programme. We are now in tune with the concept that education is like a great symphony with major and minor themes, contributed to by a vast variety of instruments, playing their own separate parts, but in harmony with one another; all the themes entwined into one massive work. The central theme and core purpose of all secondary education remain the development of adolescents into complete, purposeful, well directed, self-motivated, community minded adults, whose physical, intellectual, aesthetic, social and spiritual lives make a complete whole.

We know that the co-curriculum achieves these things, in partnership with the classroom, because we as teachers and leaders recognize the changes, which occur in individual young people. We see them for ourselves. Parents, who observe their children, know it also. Often even the students know it.

Increasingly education has become outcomes driven. There is no point in undertaking an educational activity, if the subject has not changed for the better at the end of it. Outcomes range from gaining university places to enhanced awareness of others, to increased sensitivity, to greater self-knowledge, to an increased ability to work in teams, to personal resilience, to enhanced spiritual awareness, to ongoing physical fitness, to an increased awareness of responsibility and duty. In its own sphere the Outdoor Education Group sums up these outcomes under the headings of self, others and the natural world. There are thirteen specific competencies in the area of self, nine in the area of others and three in the area of the natural world. Each of the competencies, for example personal responsibility, emotional resilience, self-confidence and empathy interact on and interrelate with the others. Each has a description, and all OEG activities and programmes, in partnership with schools, are assessed against these desired educational outcomes.

In all of this the idiosyncratic approach of the Outdoor Education Group is in step with the rest of the educational world. The academic world, however, is not satisfied with “knowing” desired outcomes. Increasingly research is undertaken to assess outcomes as

objectively as possible. What are the desired outcomes of students' undertaking Year 12 studies? Are these outcomes realized? In recent years the desired outcomes of the middle years of schooling have been questioned. Research has revealed in sharp clarity that desirable outcomes have not been realized. Where research has shown that literacy and numeracy levels have actually declined in many schools in the middle years of schooling and student dissatisfaction and disillusionment have increased, clearly the outcomes of the middle years are not positive. It is not enough to rely on "what we have always thought to be true": research has to demonstrate that the outcomes are what we say they are and want them to be.

In the co-curriculum we have not always thought through clearly what we want the outcomes to be. Where we have, we tend to rely on "gut feeling" and subjective personal observation as to whether these outcomes are being achieved. This is not good enough. Drama and music programmes, to say nothing of sport and outdoor education, are expensive in their use of financial and human resources. The colossal expenditure involved in maintaining, for example, a rowing programme, to say nothing of the disruption involved to other school programmes, can hardly be justified, if the only outcome is the feeling of euphoria when the school wins the Head of the River once every ten years or so! We are rightly convinced that there is much more to rowing than that, but we need to be able to demonstrate this conviction objectively.

It is for this reason that the Outdoor Education Group has begun an extensive research programme into the effectiveness of our programmes in delivering positive outcomes to students.

The research is being co-ordinated by Dr Lorraine Smith, National Director of Educational Development and Head of Curriculum and Research, who is profiled later in this journal. OEG has contracted from the University of Canberra the services of James Neill, a lecturer in the Centre of Applied Psychology. He has worked in the area of outdoor education research for twelve years. The Australian Council of Educational Research also will be assisting in part of the research programme. There is a lack of a body of professional research into outdoor education, despite some constructive work at Latrobe University Bendigo and at Outward Bound. The current academic community, however, still tends to talk at the philosophical level, rather than tunnelling down to the practical application. As yet the research, which has been completed, has done little to inform practice in schools. There is also a tendency for outdoor educators to be stuck at the environmental impact end of the spectrum. Schools on the other hand relate to the impact on personal development. Schools take young people out of their comfortable urban environment and put them into the bush, believing that this enables them to learn

The research aims to establish first the effectiveness of specific courses in delivering desired outcomes and second, the comparative value of different kinds of courses.

more about themselves and others. The Outdoor Education Group is committed to the idea that outdoor education contributes to the whole person. It helps young people to consolidate the way they think and how they solve problems. It is part of a thinking curriculum.

Initially the project will take three years, but out of it also will come a longitudinal study. Pilot studies are being run at St Michael's Grammar School and Whitefriars College in Melbourne and Kambala Anglican Girls' School in Sydney – a co-educational school, a boys' school and a girls' school. The research aims to

Alice Sloan



The Chairman, Mr Scott Chapman, and all the members of the Board of Directors, the Chief Executive Officer, Mr Tony Pammer, and all the staff and friends of the Outdoor Education Group join with the Toorak College

community in expressing our strongest feelings of distress and our deepest sympathy to Mr and Mrs John Sloan and their family on the tragic death of their eldest daughter, Alice, in the early morning of Wednesday 31 August at McKillop's Bridge, Victoria.

Year 10 student, sixteen years old Alice loved outdoor education and on the first night of her group's planned journey down the Snowy River had already begun to exercise a leadership role. She was also a keen sportswoman and was proud to represent her school in rowing. Given the opportunity she took part in any sport she could. She was immensely popular with other girls, especially those in Year 10 and in her house. She had an active social life, when she was able to fit it in around her many school and out of school activities. She was cheerful and full of fun and always the first to be involved. She loved her School, and her School from the Principal down was united in loving her.

Her fellow students chose to honour her in death as in life in a number of ways, which showed their deep affection for her. Some filled the Chapel with candles. Others decorated a condolence tree. A group of senior students made a banner and strung it on a bridge across the Nepean Highway: it read Keep Smiling for Alice. The members of her house, surrounded by the rest of the School on the oval, each released a balloon in her honour. A great crowd of her family and friends, members of the School community and OEG staff farewelled her at a Gathering of Love on the School oval, at the end of which a tree was planted in her perpetual memory. ■

establish first the effectiveness of specific courses in delivering desired outcomes and second the comparative value of different kinds of courses – journey based expeditions versus static programmes, unhutted versus hutted programmes, hiking versus activities such as canoeing and rockclimbing and so on. Hopefully the research will point to the relative effectiveness of short and long courses, and the value of a sequential programme during a student's secondary school life as opposed to one off experiences. As a side benefit the research will provide also rapid feedback on the impact of a course on individual students to those students, parents or schools, who desire it, and this service will be available on-line from February 2006.

The initial thrust of the research will be quantitative, but it will move into a qualitative stage, when individual students will be asked to comment on their experiences. The quantitative evidence, which is gathered, will inform OEG's practice internally and will enable schools to assess what OEG achieves, and can achieve, for them. It will also inform schools of the value of their own practice in partnership with OEG and will provide hard data to school governing bodies and parents concerning the effectiveness of their programmes and ways in which they can be changed to achieve ends more in line with the school's policy. It will be of great value to the outdoor education profession as a whole and will reinforce OEG's belief in the need for the highest standards of professionalism in outdoor education practice. Furthermore hopefully it will be of value politically, perhaps persuading government that the drift of outdoor education to the very edge of government schooling over the past thirty years should be reversed by government action.

James Neill and Lorraine Smith will work over the next six months to validate the tool to be used in the research. James Neill has already developed the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire, which uses 8 of the 13 competencies under "Self". OEG has expanded the competencies from 8 to 23 – the Educational Outcomes Framework. The competencies include issues such as decision making, personal responsibility and personal resilience. ACER has been asked to validate the 23 competencies, deciding whether they are relevant in the context of contemporary curriculum around Australia. They are being tested in terms of national and state curricular guidelines. ACER will validate the descriptors of each of the five curricular strands in keeping with contemporary curricular structure. As a result of ACER's work it will be established that the version of the Educational Outcomes Framework, which eventually emerges, is a framework of quality, relevant to contemporary needs.

Around each of the competencies, a set of questions, psychometrically tested, are being designed. Students will answer these questions in a questionnaire delivered before and after the course, in which they will respond on a scale of five choices from very high to very low. A great deal of the work will go into establishing that the questions mean to the young people answering them what the researcher wants them to mean. They can be delivered on-line. The data is then analyzed. Obviously the outcomes will not be right, if the courses are not right. Schools will be able to see that one course has brought about, say, a 3% positive change, while another has brought about a 20% change. The school and OEG can then work together to adjust the courses accordingly.

There are some competencies, such as respect, responsibility and judgement, which OEG considers part of the core curriculum, and so they will always be present, but schools may wish to emphasize other specific competencies, and the programme will be adjusted accordingly. There may be competencies, which are especially

relevant to a particular student. To reiterate what has already been stated, for individual students James Neill is developing a reporting mechanism, which is web-based and immediate, an important service to students, their parents and schools.

Thus the research is being conducted in seven studies:

Study 1. "The Main Study". This revolves around student based outcome reporting and action (as opposed to purely academic) research. The framework will be validated. Courses will be aligned in accordance with the validated framework, and data will be gathered on student change in the competencies chosen as especially relevant to them. Students, parents and schools will get immediate feedback on the competencies chosen for the course. OEG will be able to report to schools on the effectiveness of the programme. A significant fund of data will be amassed for use in Studies 2 to 7. It should be stressed that it will be entirely voluntary for schools to participate and there will be no additional fees charged by OEG to partner schools.

Study 2. This will involve a thorough literature review.

Study 3. There will be two longitudinal studies in selected schools, one over four years and the other over ten years. There will be qualitative studies – interviews with selected schools and students to gather data and put it alongside the results of Study 1. There will be 50 students involved in each study. There will be a control group. Some of the more interesting long term qualitative studies may well be with past students well into adulthood.

Studies 4 to 7. These will assess the different types of courses – wilderness versus hutted, sequential versus one off and so on. This will be a major academic project, supported hopefully by an Australian Research Council grant.

OEG is only too aware that accountability is at the centre of modern schooling. Schools are themselves increasingly assessed, and they quite rightly want assessment, before plunging into a highly costly co-curricular programme. There has to be transparency of performance. Very many members of the educational profession have always had difficulty in facing up to the reality of their own effectiveness, witness the dislike of teachers to others entering their classrooms and the ongoing suspicion of teacher appraisal. It is confronting, but it is necessary.

To sum up, this research will:

1. Assess the educational value of outdoor education.
2. Assess the effectiveness of specific outdoor education courses.
3. Allow schools to measure their desired outcomes from their outdoor education programme, and from the individual parts of it, and to assess whether these outcomes are being met.
4. Report back to schools, parents and students on individual student development as a result of experience in the outdoors.
5. Assess the relative effectiveness of different kinds of outdoor education programmes.
6. Provide data to inform the decision making of government and school authorities.

Some might say that this kind of self-analysis – because that is what it largely is – is dangerous for OEG. OEG does not think so, because it is confident in what it does and what it stands for. But if it were to prove dangerous, so be it! All integrity is lost, when we deviate from seeking the truth and facing up to it.

There is much in the old saying:

"If you can't stand the heat, don't enter the kitchen".



INTEGRATING OUTDOOR EDUCATION *into the curriculum*

An Interesting Innovative Programme at Toorak College, Mt Eliza

There are many Outdoor Education Group (OEG) partner schools, which have integrated their outdoor education programme into their curriculum. Toorak College, a 130 year old girls' P – 12 day and boarding school in Mt Eliza, 45 km south of the centre of Melbourne on the shores of Port Phillip Bay, is one of them. Toorak is non-denominational and has about 900 students. It has a strong commitment to girls' only education and a tradition of co-curricular involvement. Its outdoor education is of special interest, because of its place in the overall curriculum of the School, but also because of the way it has been designed by groups of staff in conjunction with appropriate staff from OEG. Furthermore the School has been able to offer challenging outdoors experiences, linked for those who want it with traditional touring experiences attractive to some parts of the School community. Outdoor journeys and the classroom curriculum have been designed to complement and extend each other.

This article was prepared before the tragic death of Alice Sloan. The School was keen that it still be included, slightly modified. Alice Sloan was killed when a tree trunk split and part of it crushed her tent during a brief, but tumultuous, wind storm in the early morning of Wednesday 31 August at McKillop's Bridge on the Snowy river in far eastern Victoria. The close working partnership between OEG and Toorak College was tested and found true as OEG and the School staff worked as one to return the remainder of the party safely, to care for the Sloan family and to cope with the terrible consequences for individuals at the School and within the OEG organization.

The Principal, Mrs Margaret Webb, has said that this terrible and tragic accident has strengthened her faith in the OEG/Toorak College partnership and her confidence in OEG as an organization. Mr and Mrs Sloan, Alice's parents, have also emphasized the continuance of their belief in outdoor education and their confidence in OEG and were adamant that Alice would have wanted the School's 2005 Outdoor Education programme to continue.

The initiative came from the Principal, Mrs Margaret Webb, who is committed to the concept of holistic education, where out of the classroom, co-curricular activities are seen to stand alongside academic learning as essential components of the total education of young women. She wanted an outdoor education programme, which had an integrity of its own, and which could take its place alongside other elements of the learning experience, rather than a “time out” school camps experience. At Toorak College the School is organized in years with the Head of Year having considerable autonomy in pastoral and curriculum matters. They own their own programmes, but they work with teams of teachers, who are committed to the students at their particular year level. These teams were given the brief to work out goals and design outdoor education courses appropriate to the needs of the year level and directly related to the goals, which had been set. The desired outcomes relate directly to the OEG Educational Outcomes Framework, but as the make-up of year groups change from year to year so the goals and outcomes are reviewed, while the major thrust remains much the same. Work in the classroom is also reviewed to ensure the full integration of the outdoor education programme into the total curriculum of the year in question.



The students keep a group reflective journal. Reflection and times of silence are important parts of the journey.

Out of this has emerged a sequential programme from Year 7 to Year 10, co-ordinated by the School's head of outdoor education. There is also a programme for Year 11 students at the end of their year, which is increasingly being transformed into an outdoor education based activity. The Year 7 students begin with an introductory programme at the Buxton Outdoor Education Centre. Year 8 students undertake a week long river journey. In Year 9 there is a choice of three journeys and in Year 10 a choice of six.

All 100 Year 7 girls go out together and sleep in tents. The activity is early in the year, and so one of the prime core values is safe socialization, while the others are teamwork, self-reliance, risk taking and an appreciation of the environment. The activities are various, including an overnight bushwalk and canoeing. There is a paleontological artist on the outdoor education staff, who shows students how to draw fossils and leads them to study leaves closely and to replicate them. The Year 8 programme is more demanding and sophisticated. It aims to inculcate an appreciation and respect for the environment, to give opportunities for safe risk-taking and for meeting new challenges. It also attempts to show girls the value of simple living without dependence on technology and to teach them how to reflect and how to develop social skills. Girls learn team work – tolerance for others, recognizing the strengths of others, while developing leadership skills. They also develop self-reliance. Central to the journey is learning an Australian perspective – historical, cultural, geographical – which links directly into the classroom curriculum. From the beginning of the year there are elements projected into the academic curriculum in humanities, science and English relevant to the work, which will be done on the journey based expedition. There are also special activities, including role plays, teamwork exercises and physical activities.

The journey begins in the Barmah Forest on the Murray River. Camping out on the way, the students canoe, bicycle and walk

in the region, finishing with a paddle steamer ride into Echuca. Along the way they examine environmental issues with the focus on the river system. They make a study of river ecosystems and the salinity of the Murray. They make a comparison with the Yarra, which they have investigated beforehand. They learn about the threat to the Murray Cod and the danger of introduced species. This unit is later assessed as part of their geography studies. They

study birds and bird calls as part of their science curriculum. While on the river they are introduced to Aboriginal culture, and they look at the history of the river. When they get to Echuca they make a study of the history of the town. All this academic curriculum integrated into a challenging outdoor education exercise has been designed in conjunction with OEG. They keep a group reflective journal, and indeed reflection and times of silence are important parts of the journey. Back at school the learning initiatives taken on the journey are further developed in class. The students have opportunities to present their work and to share their experience with one another. What needs to be stressed is that the adventure component of this Year 8 exercise is as challenging as any other OEG assisted Year 8 programme and more challenging than most. What makes it different is the carrying of the classroom experience into the outdoors and the carrying back of the outdoor experience into the classroom.

This is taken even further at Year 9, where what is called “Links” is timetabled, that is classroom time is set apart specifically to develop the connection between classroom work and adventure in the outdoors. In addition to other goals, the Year 9 staff team has listed the following: “to respond and positively adapt to changing circumstances, to be exposed to alternative cultures, beliefs and practices, to participate in programmes consistent with the School's environmental, physical, cultural and global awareness programmes, to contribute to making a difference to others and the environment, to be moved beyond existing comfort zones and to experience and move through semi-wilderness without technological distractions”.

Year 9 students at the end of Term 3 have a choice between a 22 day experience in India, or 10 days on a Whitsundays journey or 10 days at the OEG site, Bioloela in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. All the girls undertake physical fitness programmes and preparatory hikes in Terms 1 and 2. Because school policy is to include the basic cost of outdoor education in the tuition fee, the extra cost involved in the three week India expedition is not beyond the means of most families. For four days the girls are tourists, visiting Delhi and going on safari. For ten days the girls are engaged on a relatively gruelling wilderness experience, trekking in the Himalayas. Much of the rest of their time is spent in visiting and working in schools and orphanages.

The group which goes to the Whitsundays is involved in a journey, which includes sea kayaking, bush walking and snorkelling. The students interchange through three campsites – one on North Mole Island and two on South Mole. The walk across South Mole is very demanding. A marine biologist from OEG accompanies the group and leads the girls in studying coral bleaching. The students collect data, which is made available to the University of Queensland. Those who go to Bioloela travel there and back by

especially then, and it was here that she taught future colleagues at OEG, Brendan Smith, Sue Crichton and Greg Calleo.

Her experience at Footscray convinced her that her future was in tertiary education. She went back to the United States and looked for a university with a reputation in outdoor education and a strong doctoral programme. This she found at the Indiana University. There were 30 Ph.D. students. The degree required a combination of compulsory course work and a thesis. Her thesis was on Work Sustainability within the Outdoor Education Industry. It was one of the first pieces of qualitative research into outdoor education in America. She was able to secure a teaching stipend at the university, which is rare in the United States for foreign students. At the same time for two and a half years she ran an outdoors programme through the student union. She graduated in 1985 as the first Australian to obtain a doctorate in outdoor education. She was awarded a teaching fellowship in Oregon for a year, and while there took groups to places such as Alaska for the Wilderness Education Association.

In 1987 she returned to the Victorian University of Technology, as the Footscray Institute had now become. She was heavily involved in curriculum development, especially for the new Victorian Certificate of Education studies in outdoor education as a senior secondary subject. During that time she was the President of the Camping Association of Victoria and a Board member for the Victorian Outdoor Education Association. After 3 years she was invited to Bendigo to teach outdoor education at the University College of Northern Victoria. It was already a campus of Latrobe University and it became Latrobe University Bendigo. There she stayed for 9 years and for 7 of these she was Head of the Department of Outdoor Education and Nature Tourism, within the School of Education. She was responsible for the development of the curriculum in the B.A. (Outdoor Education) degree. At first there were 20 students in each year level. By the time she left there were 120, 80 in Outdoor Education and 40 in Nature Tourism. It is the only university Outdoor Education school in Australia. All other courses are embedded in Physical Education or Recreation. A graduate diploma was also developed. The fight to retain Outdoor Education

at tertiary level has been critical: there are those who would like to relegate it to the TAFE level. Lorraine entered into this fight with gusto. The department at Latrobe Bendigo has a remarkably low drop-out rate, and there is an increased awareness within the university setting of the professional standard of the staff and its graduates.

Lorraine for long had had contacts with the Outdoor Education Group, and these increased while she was at Latrobe. OEG had provided work experience to Latrobe students, but there were also many personal as well as professional connections. She had come to be fascinated by the OEG vision. Thus when she was invited in 1997 by the CEO of OEG, Tony Pammer, to take on a new role as Executive Director of the New South Wales Division, she jumped at it. OEG's purchase of the small company, Adventure Education, and decision to move into New South Wales was momentous, and Lorraine was given leadership of a very difficult project. The strength of OEG in New South Wales, the exciting development of Biloela and the number of partner schools, of individual courses and of student days in the bush bear witness to the dedicated work of many people, but not least to hers. When OEG was reorganized on a national basis at the beginning of 2004, Lorraine moved to her present national job. She is responsible for the huge task of integrating OEG curriculum into schools, of developing the Educational Outcomes Framework and guiding research.

Her primary commitment is to the young people of this nation. She is enthralled by the personal and social growth, which comes from outdoor education. She sees young people learning about themselves and other people. Outdoor education provides a level playing field for young people. They can use their outdoor experiences to look back to what they have been in the past and forward to what they can be in the future. She recognizes in this the special value of journey based activities. In a noisy world, which forever presses down on the young, she sees young people meeting their spiritual side for the first time in the wilderness.

Dr Lorraine Smith is a remarkable educator. ■

Our second issue

We are grateful to all our readers, who made comments and suggestions relating to Issue 1. Outdoor Outlook is published four times a year by The Outdoor Education Group, the largest provider of outdoor education to schools in Australia with 135 staff serving 20,000 young people in partnership with 70 schools. OEG plays an important role also in the training of outdoor educators. It is privileged to operate under the Patronage of His Excellency the Governor-General of Australia, Major-General Michael Jeffery AC, CVO, MC.

Our readers are the educational leaders of schools throughout Australia. We aim to promote discussion on educational issues. Some articles relate directly to outdoor education, some indirectly and others perhaps not at all. This issue is firmly orientated towards outdoor education with the lead article discussing a large and exciting research project at present being conducted under the auspices of OEG.

We trust that you will find this edition of Outdoor Outlook both of interest and of value.

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