

International Explorations in Outdoor
and Environmental Education 9

Glyn Thomas
Janet Dymont
Heather Prince *Editors*

Outdoor Environmental Education in Higher Education

International Perspectives

 Springer

International Explorations in Outdoor and Environmental Education

Volume 9

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This series focuses on contemporary trends and issues in outdoor and environmental education, two key fields that are strongly associated with education for sustainability and its associated environmental, social and economic dimensions. It also has an international focus to encourage dialogue across cultures and perspectives. The scope of the series includes formal, nonformal and informal education and the need for different approaches to educational policy and action in the twenty first century. Research is a particular focus of the volumes, reflecting a diversity of approaches to outdoor and environmental education research and their underlying epistemological and ontological positions through leading edge scholarship. The scope is also be both global and local, with various volumes exploring the issues arising in different cultural, geographical and political contexts. As such, the series aims to counter the predominantly “white” Western character of current research in both fields and enable cross-cultural and transnational comparisons of educational policy, practice, project development and research. The purpose of the series is to give voice to leading researchers (and emerging leaders) in these fields from different cultural contexts to stimulate discussion and further research and scholarship to advance the fields through influencing policy and practices in educational settings. The volumes in the series are directed at active and potential researchers and policy makers in the fields. Book proposals for this series may be submitted to the Publishing Editor: Claudia Acuna E-mail: Claudia.Acuna@springer.com

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Editors

Outdoor Environmental Education in Higher Education

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The editors have brought together leading thinkers from university outdoor environmental education (OEE) programs around the world. The book is the first to focus entirely on tertiary sector OEE programming, which has such vital educational, socio-cultural and environmental aims, yet struggles to thrive within the challenging educational setting of neoliberal institutions and populist politics. The chapters are creatively organized around ‘threshold concepts’ collaboratively developed by the Australian OEE in higher education sector. This work promises to make an important contribution to shaping university OEE programs’ curricula, policies and practices globally.

Professor Simon Beames, Norwegian School of Sport Sciences

Using the framework of threshold concepts is a novel approach to defining the interconnected ecosystem of outdoor and environmental education, within the context of higher education. Thomas, Dymont and Prince are to be highly commended for compiling such an impressive group of international scholars to contribute. The varied contributions from Canada to Iceland, Sweden to Australia, combine to create an exceptional resource for students and scholars alike. Each chapter offers a lens on one or more critical aspects of the field as it matures and diversifies in the twenty-first century.

Patrick T. Maher, Ph.D., Dean of Teaching and Professor, Physical and Health Education, Nipissing University, Canada

An excellent publication containing a wealth of knowledge. This editorial team has brought together a truly international group of researchers, providing readers with current key thinking in developing outdoor practitioners. It is underpinned by leading theory and social and environmental ethic. A must read for outdoor environmental educators, educators more broadly and outdoor re-creationists.

Dr Barbara Humberstone Professor (Emerita) Bucks New University, UK

If the out-of-doors touches your professional life, read this book; it is poised to transform not only the preparation of university graduates for their profession, but your own practice, and the field itself. The theoretical and applied breadth of the vital concepts found within make this book a critical research, practical and pedagogical gem.

Tom G. Potter, Ph.D., Professor, School of Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Tourism, Lakehead University, Canada

Glyn would like to thank his partner Tracey and work colleagues at USC for their patience and support whilst editing this book.

Janet thanks her Australian and Canadian colleagues as well as her family and friends (near and far) who gifted inspiration, support and joy during the preparation of this edited book.

Heather would like to thank her family, Ivan, Angus and Hal Walsh, for their support and encouragement.

Series Editors' Foreword

In his Foreword to an edited collection of essays on experiencing the outdoors, Pete Hay (2015, p. vii; italics, capitals and punctuation in original) writes:

Outdoors. Not, Therefore, Indoors

Here is one of the great binaries of lived experience, and it is a binary replete with portent. Step outside and you cross one of the great divides of daily existence...

Phenomenologically speaking – experientially – the contrast between the being of outdoors and the being of indoors could hardly be more pronounced... This being so, it is puzzling why the multi-faceted nature of the ‘outdoors’ should have been so little explicated in the literature extant.

Hay’s assertion reminds us that the multi-faceted nature of the *indoors* has been explicated exhaustively in the research literature on *classroom* environments, much of which has been led by our Australian colleague Barry Fraser (1998) in the context of school science education. Hay also reminds us that *outdoors* is a much less ambiguous term than *environment*, a point to which a contributor to this volume, John Quay (2016, p. 1), also alludes when he writes: “In all of its guises, the influence of the ‘environment’ in outdoor education is tangible, no matter how this term may be defined”. We doubt if anyone would disagree with this assertion, but cannot say that the influence of the outdoors in environmental education has equivalent status. As we observe elsewhere (Noel Gough & Annette Gough, 2010, p. 340), Arthur Lucas’s (1979) “model for environmental education as being education *in*, *about*, and *for* the environment...has become a mantra for the field” and has been a persistent focal point for deliberations and debates about how the field is, and should be, conceptualised. For example, in the first issue of the *Australian Journal of Environmental Education (AJEE)*, Ian Robottom (1984, p. 11; italics in original) quotes the coordinator of the Australian Curriculum Development Centre’s Environmental Education Project as endorsing the view that “the essence of environmental education lies in its education *for* the environment dimension”:

We can talk about education *in* the environment, education *about* the environment, education *from* the environment and education *for* the environment, but only the last can be called environmental education (Annette Greenall, 1981, p. 4; italics in original)

In the same issue, Max Walsh (1984, p. 14) pointedly disagrees with Greenall's and Robottom's positions:

Such statements give little encouragement to the teacher who is genuinely concerned about the deteriorating world environmental situation and is striving to do his/her own thing about it, albeit through an education *about* and *in* the environment approach. The implication is... that such approaches are inadequate, and insufficient recognition is given to the possibility that education *for* the environment may need to be preceded by an education *about* the environment component.

Walsh's comments suggest that a number of environmental educators are likely to agree that environmental education might at least partly (and perhaps quite substantially) be constituted by an emphasis on education *about* and *for* the environment without venturing out of the classroom (or laboratory) very often. However, we are confident that most outdoor educators would agree with the position taken by another contributor to this book, Andrew Brookes (1989, p. 15), namely that outdoor education is distinguished from other educational pursuits, including environmental education, by "its physical and conceptual isolation from schooling. Conceptual isolation provides the opportunity to construct powerfully affective forms of de-schooled environmental education". Brookes reasons that "conceptual isolation can provide different situational constraints from those existing in schools or other institutions", but also warns that "a technocratic rationalisation of the field associated with its increasing institutionalisation threatens to negate that potential" (p. 15). Quay (2015, p. 22) takes advantage of this physical and conceptual isolation in research that seeks "to better understand life in school as experienced by the young people who live it". He probes beyond what Philip Jackson (1968, p. 1) calls "the ubiquity of classroom phenomena in both time and space" by juxtaposing young people's experiences of life in academic classrooms with their experiences in outdoor education, specifically their participation in an 8-day school camp. Quay (2015, pp. 1–2) writes:

Life in school is ordinary, so ordinary in fact that students (and teachers) become oblivious to much of the routine. The subtitle I have given this book – *From academic classroom to outdoor education* – points to a juxtaposition aimed at addressing this difficulty. To raise this ordinariness to awareness, one must see it against a somewhat contrasting background. For much of academic life in school, outdoor education offers such a background, and vice versa, academic classroom life offers a contrast to life in outdoor education, enabling nuances to be perceived.

This is not the place to discuss Quay's research in further detail, other than to affirm that it supports Jackson's comments about the ubiquity of *classroom* phenomena, but we are a little surprised by his endorsement (Quay, 2015, p. 1) of another generalisation: "there is some truth to the notion to that 'school is school, no matter where it happens' (Jackson, 1990, p. xxi)". We interpret Quay's research as providing further evidence that *academic classrooms are academic classrooms*, no matter where they are, but we doubt that any outdoor educator would suggest that *a school camp is a school camp, no matter where it is located*. To some extent, we are stating the obvious, but the significance of *place* (or rather, of *particular places*) has not always been taken for granted in the research literatures of outdoor and

environmental education, although readers will find many notable exceptions among the contributions to this volume.

The first paragraph of the editors' introduction to this book returns us to considering how it exemplifies another aspect of the "multi-faceted character of the outdoors" to which Hay refers, namely, the "demanding set of knowledges, experiences and skills to be able to provide outdoor, experiential programs that prepare their participants for the challenges that lie ahead". Their assertion that there "has never been a stronger need for outdoor environmental educators ...who understand the ecological crisis confronting our planet and its peoples" is hardly an exaggeration, and the editors have set themselves a formidable task, "to provide and provoke emerging outdoor educators with an understanding of how outdoor environmental education can be part of the transformational process" through elaborating threshold concepts for outdoor educators. It is much to their credit that they have assembled such an outstanding group of academics and other practitioners from around the world to contribute their expertise to this project.

While threshold concepts may be new to the field of outdoor education, the structure they offer to the profession and to this book makes them well worth engaging and discussing in multiple contexts, not only in Australia, as testified by the diversity of the chapter authors locations and experiences.

Acknowledgement

We edit this series on the unceded lands of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung peoples of the Kulin Nations; we respectfully acknowledge their Elders, past, present and emerging and what they have taught us about this land and sea.

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Chapter 1

Preparing Outdoor Educators to Be Transformational Teachers and Leaders



Glyn Thomas, Janet Dymont, and Heather Prince

There has never been a stronger need for outdoor environmental educators (hereafter termed 'outdoor educators') who understand the ecological crisis confronting our planet and its peoples. These outdoor educators require a demanding set of knowledges, experiences and skills to be able to provide outdoor, experiential programs that prepare their participants for the challenges that lie ahead. The purpose of this book is to provide and provoke emerging outdoor educators with an understanding of how outdoor environmental education can be part of the transformational process. An outstanding group of academics and practitioners from around the world have contributed chapters to this important tome. The foci of the six sections of this book have been informed by research conducted in Australia on the threshold concepts that a graduate from a university outdoor education course might be expected to acquire (Thomas et al., 2019).

In 2015, a small group of Australian academics recognized that there was a lack of clarity about the knowledge, experience and skillsets of university outdoor education graduates. In comparison, outdoor leaders who were educated through the vocational education and training (VET) pathway in Australia have a much clearer curriculum and assessment processes. Previously, Martin (1998) noted how the ideological differences between the VET pathway and university pathway shaped

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the educational process for outdoor educators. The curriculum uniformity in the VET pathway, achieved through a National Training package, does not exist within the university pathway. Consequently, there is often uncertainty for some employers about university graduates' knowledge, skills and experience levels. This led to an ongoing research process that has attempted to resolve this lack of clarity using threshold concepts. This process has included:

- Clarifying the nature of threshold concepts and how they might serve university outdoor education graduates (Polley & Thomas, 2017),
- Using a Delphi Research Method to develop a draft set of threshold concepts (Thomas et al., 2019),
- Conducting a broader survey of outdoor educators in Australia to refine the threshold concepts (Thomas et al., [Under review](#)),
- Identifying how assessment tasks might be used to measure attainment of the threshold concepts (Polley et al., [Under review](#)),
- Identifying how the practical fieldwork skills of outdoor educators might be best described and measured (current project).

The use of threshold concepts in professions can be a slippery and elusive process to describe what graduates are able to do, and there have been detractors and those who have critiqued their use (Morgan, 2015; Rowbottom, 2007). It is also grounded in one country and has not yet gained traction in the global context to which this book pertains. However, for this book, the threshold concepts have served to provide a loose, organizing structure for the content that we as editors think university outdoor education students need to engage with. Figure 1.1 shows how the sections of this book align with the threshold concepts in the aforementioned research (Thomas et al., 2019). Before previewing these sections and their respective chapters, it is important to provide some clarity around the emphasis that we have felt appropriate in this book.

The book centres on outdoor environmental education to highlight the importance of focusing on the more-than-human features of our planet, and the relationships that we have with those features. Unapologetically, the book takes a socially-critical approach to thinking about outdoor environmental education. Martin (1998) argued that a socially critical outdoor educator

does not believe in the mandated authority of the teacher, does not believe in the immutable nature of knowledge, the certainty of assessment, the predictiveness of future behaviour. Most importantly, the socially critical outdoor educator recognises that the natural environment in which she or he operates has been ill-served by the reproductive educational beliefs of the past, and a fundamental change in the way Western society relates to the earth is both called for and compelling. (p. 19)

This socially critical ideology clearly distinguishes this book from other texts that focus on outdoor adventure education, adventure programming, outdoor recreation, or outdoor pursuits. The reader will also note that there is a strong focus on decolonizing outdoor education practices and approaches, a focus that we deliberately seek in recognition of the current focus on this important work in broader society. We also acknowledge, as do the book contributors, that not all outdoor

Book Section Focus	Corresponding Threshold Concept/s
Theoretical and philosophical foundations	#1 An outdoor educator creates opportunities for experiential learning
Pedagogical approaches and issues	#2 Outdoor educators use pedagogies that align their program's purpose and practice
Outdoor environmental education as a social, cultural, and environmental endeavour.	#3 Outdoor educators are place-responsive, and see their work as a social, cultural and environmental endeavour
Advocacy	#4 Outdoor educators advocate for social and environmental justice
Safety management	#6 Outdoor educators understand safety and apply a strict aversion to fatalities
Professional practice	#5 Outdoor educators continue to develop their skills, knowledge and expertise #7 Outdoor educators routinely engage in reflective practice

Fig. 1.1 Book section alignment with the outdoor education threshold concepts. (Thomas et al., 2019)

environmental education occurs in schools; other educational contexts are valid and purposeful settings.

This text targets the emerging outdoor educator, meaning those students engaged in a formal program of study in a university program. However, there is excellent, thought-provoking content for seasoned outdoor educators, university academics, program administrators and other outdoor educators participating in other training pathways. It is hoped that the book will challenge and confront readers and encourage them to wrestle with their own thoughts, opinions, and ideas across the range of topics. Each chapter includes five reflective questions that encourage deeper engagement. Quite deliberately, there are rarely right or wrong answers to these questions. There is also a list of up to five sources in each chapter that provide recommended further reading for someone who wants to go to a deeper level. In the remainder of this chapter, each section of the book is introduced by the respective section editor.

1.1 Theoretical Foundations and Philosophies

The first section of the book is focused on the theories and philosophies that underpin outdoor environmental education (OEE) practice. We argue that the theoretical and philosophical foundations of outdoor education practice are not always made explicit by outdoor educators. This section provides a sample of some of the concepts, theories, and philosophies on which students can draw to inform their

practice. Of course, this is not a conclusive list, but rather a taster of the kind of thinking and writing that can provide a useful grounding for explaining why outdoor educators do what they do. John Quay from Australia starts the section by emphasising the importance of philosophising for outdoor educators. He argues that the process of questioning can lead to a deeper understanding of practice and opens up possibilities for change and improvement. He draws on Dewey's idea of occupations as a way of organizing or thinking about ways of being, ways of knowing, and ways of doing. According to Quay understanding these things helps to understand the relationships that exist between self, others and the environment.

In the third chapter, Kathleen Pleasants and Noel Gough provide a critique of the common worldviews that are employed in tertiary outdoor environmental education programs such as anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism. They argue that considering some broader perspectives and assemblages such as post-humanist and new materialist strategies can allow for a more distributive agency and the exploration of how humans are imbricated through the material and the cultural. In the fourth chapter, UK authors Jamie McPhie and David Clarke challenge emerging outdoor educators to think more critically about the concept of human-nature relationships. They highlight the political nature of the term, and expose some of the political positions that inform Western environmental thinking. They encourage readers to consider how the political ramifications of knowledges of nature may inform our pedagogies.

The fifth chapter introduces the concept of sense of place. Mark Leather and Jakob Thorsteinsson present their understandings of the concept based on their shared place-responsive teaching experiences in the UK and Iceland. They encourage emerging outdoor educators to critically consider human relationships with culture, time, and nature. In particular, they share ways to give space to experiential, aesthetic, and mindful embodied fieldwork experiences as they encourage us to view nature as hyperreal. Heidi Smith contributes the final chapter and calls for a more inclusive and contemporary theory of leadership which embraces gender diversity, minorities and reciprocity for the more-than-human world. She identifies three levels of leadership success as effective, exemplary and extraordinary and presents four key elements of extraordinary leadership. She calls for a new breed of earth leaders who can acquire a nuanced mix of characteristics, values, skills, and behaviours that will allow outdoor education to make a difference.

1.2 Pedagogical Approaches and Issues

The second section of this book brings together nine chapters that focus on the pedagogical approaches underpinning the work of outdoor educators. What is striking in this section is the diverse ways in which outdoor educators can inform and frame their pedagogical practices – in some chapters, readers are invited to dig deep into theoretically dense material that helps explain why we teach how we teach; in other chapters, frameworks, tables, and charts are presented to help articulate our

pedagogical approaches; and in other chapters, pragmatic case studies are presented to help us make visible some of our pedagogical decisions.

In this section we hope that readers will be called on to think deeply about their teaching practices and to be open to re-thinking pedagogies that may no longer be optimally serving the outdoor education profession. Some of the chapters invite readers to re-think how some of the historical foundations of outdoor education need to be challenged; other chapters call on readers to re-position themselves on the margins of learning environments and allow specific places to feature more centrally; still other chapters urge emerging educators to be far more intentional in the big and little decisions they make in the day-to-day realities of being an outdoor educator.

This section begins with a critical examination of two of the foundations of outdoor environmental education pedagogy: experiential education as well as adventure and risk. Although the chapters are very different, there is a similarity in their shared call to challenge, critique, reexamine and re-imagine these long-held foundations of outdoor educators' pedagogies. What is heartening, however, is that both chapters move beyond critique and end in offering helpful ways forward with a reconceptualized framework for these foundational concepts. Leading off, Americans Joshua Meyer and Jayson Seaman's chapter on experiential education invites readers to challenge some oft-held assumptions about the cyclical nature of experiential education. They begin with an overview of the evolution of experiential learning theories before turning to a critique of the conventional mechanistic models, such as Kolb's experiential learning cycle. They conclude their chapter with an invitation for educators to move beyond conventional experiential learning cycles and provide a number of strategies for doing so. The next chapter, Mike Brown and Mark Jones, from New Zealand, also challenges traditional pedagogical practices that emerge from simplistic or reductionist views of adventure and risk. Their chapter begins by unpacking the terms adventure and risk – and in doing so, Brown and Jones highlight some challenges in the ways these terms have been interpreted and enacted in many mainstream outdoor environmental programs. They provide helpful alternatives that invite readers to reframe adventure and risk, and in doing so, prompt different activities and outcomes that are more authentic and support learners to develop an ethic of environmental care.

The next three chapters are, interestingly, written by primarily Australian authors who prompt readers consider how the actual outdoor environment can feature far more prominently in the pedagogy of outdoor environmental educators. The authors use three different framework/theories to argue for the important role outdoor spaces can play in the delivery of outdoor environmental education – and as such, there are important shared but distinct messages. Brian Wattchow introduces us to the notion of place-responsiveness and helps readers understand the historical foundations of place-based education. Marcus Morse and his colleagues present their work on wild pedagogies and introduce practical touchstones that can help educators become wild pedagogues. Both chapters seek to position place more centrally in the teaching and learning processes and this requires educators to de-centre themselves from traditionally held views of what it means to be an OEE teacher. Both chapters are