

Editorial

# Outdoor Adventure Education: Trends and New Directions—Introduction to a Special Collection of Research

Nina S. Roberts

Department of Recreation, Parks, & Tourism, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA 94132, USA; nroberts@sfsu.edu

## 1. The Origins of Outdoor Adventure Education: From the Field to the Classroom

This special issue on “outdoor adventure education” contains seven articles focused on varied topics in outdoor adventure education (OAE) from the impact of COVID-19, creating a mobile App and girls outdoors to urban programming, systems of privilege and more. Outdoor adventure education is characterized by a wide range of features such as outcome uncertainty, compelling tasks (e.g., involving relationship building), state of mind and completion of a journey, the search for excellence, and the expression of human dignity, all of which encompass action and intensity [1].

OAE has a rich and rewarding history and has played a vital part in human development. The roots of our current OAE date back to the philosophical work and scholarship of John Dewey, Aldo Leopold, John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, Kurt Hahn, Willi Unsoeld and others. Plato in the 1920s, for example, spoke about how physical skills have a higher educational value yet embracing moral values far outweighs those physical skills [2]. Although women have often gone unnoticed and unrecognized, they have also contributed to the philosophy, theory and program implementation of OAE for many decades [3]

Furthermore, while elements of real or perceived risks are an essential ingredient, OAE has moved beyond the concept of personal survival to one of thriving and contributing to quality of life and providing extraordinary opportunities for growth [1]. While Ewert and Sibthorp define OAE using an integrated approach, others have described this field simply as people with or without disabilities sharing the rewards of experiencing nature and meeting challenges with a group of supportive peers [4].

With experiential learning at its core, there has been an extraordinary increase in the number and type of OAE programs during the past 70+ years and research has followed with a broad spectrum of topics and studies. The origins of OAE are evident as early as the late nineteenth century when opportunities such as organized camping, and scouting became available and the first Outward Bound center was established in Wales during World War II. Fast forward to the 1990s, when Schleien noted that this is “a discipline in which the participants develop an understanding and appreciation of the natural environment and a recognition that such an understanding contributes greatly to one’s quality of life. It is education in, about, and for the outdoors. It may be a process, a place, a purpose, or a topic” [4], p. 20. Subsequently, “high adventure” became an additional feature of organized excursions in urban environments and wilderness areas, leading participants through a series of often risky activities and ultimately leading to personal growth, satisfaction, self-fulfillment, locus of control, leadership development, and other assets. It is beyond the scope of this brief introduction to offer a more in-depth history or discuss the more modern facets of OAE. Interested readers are encouraged to explore the plethora of literature available on this topic.

## 2. Contributions to This Special Issue: Overview

Contributors to this collection of seven essays reflect on outdoor adventure education using case studies originating from the United States, Italy, Greece, and the United King-



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dom. Their articles address the following questions: What is the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on Italian nature-based programs in the educational, therapeutic, training, and leisure areas? How can a mobile app (complemented by a web application and a database) establish a system that enables teachers to create educational treasure hunt activities for their students and monitor their performance? How can a recreation intervention created with a focus on introducing middle school girls to outdoor recreation increase participants' self-efficacy and self-empowerment? What are the challenges and opportunities for urban outdoor education centers with regard to partnership and programming? Can outdoor adventure education really play a role in learning to see and affect systems of privilege? How are the different purposes of school-based OAE approached internationally regarding earning might best be supported to achieve particular outcomes, and what are the most frequently reported forms of outdoor learning practiced in schools across different countries? Additionally, what are typical outdoor adventure education instructors' inclusive praxis and the conditions that influence their praxis on their courses and in their instructing experiences?

The discussions on outdoor adventure education in this collection contribute to our understanding of how complex variables such as gender, privilege, school-based programs, operating under a pandemic, technology literacy for students, enhancing programming through partnerships, and fostering inclusive group cultures on courses can support the intersection of environmental sustainability and human relationships. This research is an international collection of studies focusing on the connection between education, the natural environment, use of technology, instructor/teacher abilities, power dynamics, and the challenges of partnerships. The contributors examine how a wide range of OAE programs and services have influenced participants' worldview and enhanced their quality of life through reflection, personal growth, social and physical challenges, and beyond.

### 3. What's Next for Outdoor Adventure Education?

The future is ours to create so what will it be like? As the Earth is on the edge of ecological devastation, the future of outdoor adventure education must contribute to greater sustainability for the ecosystem as a whole, including the human dimension as an integral part; we cannot separate us from nature. OAE must respond to the challenges we are experiencing. As noted by Mitten, "Through thoughtfully designed programs that support, encourage, and model healthy relationships with the nature, participants experience healthier ways of relating with themselves, others, and the environment." [5]. Maybe we need a new model of outdoor learning to spark a cultural revolution in educational philosophy, connecting children to nature in new ways, and promoting community action on a level currently unimaginable so we can build the sustainable future we all desire?

One thing is for sure. Outdoor adventure education is a perfect channel for transforming young people into well-informed and globally responsible citizens. We need to develop inhabitants who are more ecologically literate with well-rounded values and a change-maker mindset on nature-based sustainability issues; this must be coupled with a wide range of dynamic skills that are useful for supporting youth and adults in creating social, environmental, political, and cultural change for an optimistic future.

In conclusion, this leaves us—academics, educators, and learners—with a daunting challenge. This special issue, although just a few select studies, is a call to action for teachers, youth and their parents, outdoor educators, and even software developers to make all this possible. Once we build the momentum to move beyond our current status, changes in environmental stewardship and sustainability are more conceivable; schools, governments, institutions, nonprofit organizations, and even corporations around the globe will be forced to become more "woke" and act.

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