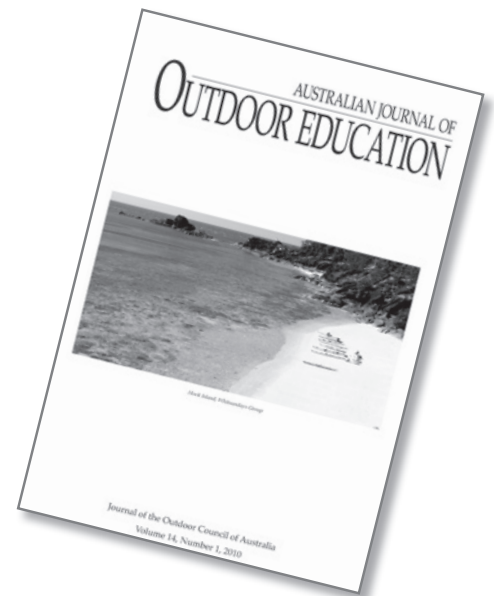


The Australian Journal of Outdoor Education

by Glyn Thomas

The Australian Journal of Outdoor Education (AJOE) aims to provide a balanced and in-depth investigation of outdoor education practices and theories in a variety of educational and recreational contexts. The journal seeks to promote a better understanding of outdoor education and recreation issues, by examining and applying research and providing a forum for outdoor education and outdoor recreation professionals to exchange and discuss ideas and practices. The AJOE was first published in 1995 with a strong practitioner focus, and it was not until 1998 that it became a peer-reviewed journal. In the ensuing fifteen years the journal has published 142 refereed papers across 27 issues. Recent editors have included Tonia Gray (1998–2002), James Neill (2002–03), Glyn Thomas and Almut Beringer (2004), Glyn Thomas (2005–10), and Robyn Zink (2011–13). Currently, the journal publishes two issues per year and has a five member editorial board from Australia and New Zealand, and 16 other regular reviewers from Australia, New Zealand, North America, and the UK who participate in the double-blind peer review process.



An analysis of the 142 refereed papers published in AJOE between 1998 and 2012, following on from previous analyses of outdoor experiential journals (Thomas, Allison, & Potter, 2009), reveals a number of interesting trends and patterns. The authors of the AJOE papers have been predominantly Australian (67 %), with UK writers contributing 10 %, New Zealand 11 %, USA 5 %, Canada 4 %, and Europe and Asia/Middle East 2 % and 1 % respectively. Although the journal is published in Australia, and the 700 paper copies produced in each issue are circulated to subscribers predominantly in Australia, the journal welcomes submissions from international authors. The availability of the journal through online publishing houses has significantly internationalized the readership for the journal and also increased the accessibility of author's work.

The refereed AJOE papers have been a mixture of what I call position papers (45 %) where the authors draw on the literature to contribute to an improved understanding of practice or theory of outdoor education; or research reports (54 %). Of these research reports, only a small proportion of the papers were classified as literature reviews (4 %) or research methodology papers (2 %). Of the 77 papers classified as research reports, only 11 papers were classified as research within the positivist paradigm, with 55 papers

in the constructivist paradigm, and six papers reporting on action research.

The contexts of the papers published in the AJOE papers reflect the range of interests in the broader outdoor education field: 15 % of the papers focused on generic outdoor leadership, 45 % focused on outdoor education, 11 % on outdoor environmental education, 12 % on adventure/wilderness therapy, and 11 % on adventure education. The most common categories used to classify the focus of the papers were program design and facilitation (26 %), outcomes, effects, and participant experiences (12 %), profession and professional issues (13 %), and theoretical foundations (9 %). One of the characteristics of outdoor education in Australia, which has been fostered in part by AJOE publications, is the connections between





the overlapping fields of environmental education, sustainability education, and place-based learning. These connections are not always simple and sometimes they must compete with the foci of adventure, risk which tend to interest most (but perhaps not all) adolescents. compete with This is a significant difference between AJOE and other journals with an outdoor or experiential focus.

According to the "Harzing's Publish or Perish" software (Harzing, 2007), two AJOE papers have been cited more than fifty times: "How are adventure education program outcomes achieved?: A review of the literature" by McKenzie (2000) with

102 citations; and "Does outdoor education really work? A summary of recent metanalyses" by Neill and Richards (1998) with 68 citations. It is not altogether surprising that papers focused on outcomes would attract the most citations. The next nine highly cited papers, with more than 20 citations, tended to focus on program design or curriculum issues. High citation data is very difficult to achieve for a journal that services a small field.

The AJOE faces a unique challenge of publishing well-research academic papers for a subscriber base that is predominantly made up of practitioners. This is one of the delicate tensions that the journal editor and advisory board must manage. Currently, a balance is struck by encouraging all authors to consider the implications for practice from their research. Occasionally, non-refereed papers are also published in the journal that can be focused more entirely on issues pertinent to outdoor education practitioners.

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