

Canada

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Canada is an enormous country with many regional differences in geography, climate, culture and history; consequently, providing a brief overview of outdoor adventure education (OAE) in Canada is a challenging task. Nevertheless, in this paper we will sketch an outline of the history, philosophy, and common practices of OAE in Canada. For readers unfamiliar with Canada, we first provide a brief introduction to Canada as a nation and place.



Description of Canada

Canada is the second largest country in the world by area; it has two official languages, borders three oceans, has four distinct seasons, spans six time zones, and has a population of 34 million, of which 83 % live within 300 km of its southern border with the United States (US). Canada is geographically diverse with a relatively small population density, making it a mecca for outdoor enthusiasts. However, growing natural resource development and urban expansion threaten many of Canada's natural areas while melting permafrost and Arctic ice are rapidly altering ecosystems and residents' way of life in Northern Canada (Fick, 2002).

Canada is a young nation with confederation occurring in 1867. Historically, Canadian governments have generally placed high value on human rights and social order as well as individual rights and freedom. Qualities such as respect for authority, hunger for security, a yearning for peace and order and strong parliamentary government (Berton, 1982) have united Canadians since confederation. However, while these values remain core to Canadian society, a recent changing tide in Canadian politics is beginning to erode other key values, such as our commitment to the environment, social justice and global peacekeeping; this political shift threatens our standing in the global community.

Canada has a rich First Nations, European explorer, and pioneer history and much of its strength stands upon its immigrants. Hence, aside from First Nations people, many Canadians have strong family roots in other parts of the world. Indeed, it is commonly understood that Canada is a global social experiment in celebrating ethnic diversity (Nelles, 2004).

History of Outdoor Adventure Education in Canada

Outdoor adventure education in Canada is found in many realms: elementary, junior high and high schools, colleges, universities, clubs and summer camps. In fact, there are an estimated 1,500 summer camps in Canada (Marsh, 1988). The roots of modern day Canadian OAE lie in the summer camp movement in the province of Ontario, which has the strongest tradition of children's summer camps in the country. Camps in Ontario's Algonquin, Temagami, and Lake of the Woods regions, spawn a national tradition of children's camps beginning in the early 1900's. Dimock and Henday's (1929) book *Camping and Character* explores this early development of Canadian outdoor education. Additionally, the Boy Scouts, Girl Guides and the YWCA and YMCA were early providers of outdoor education in the 1930's era. Also, by 1931, the Junior Forest Warden's Association had trained over 12,000 young people in forestry and

natural resource conservation. The first public school based OAE program was established in 1953 in Ontario followed by a similar program in 1957 in Manitoba (Passmore, 1972). In Canada, formal education falls under provincial or territorial jurisdiction; there is no national educational curriculum. As such, with 10 provinces and three territories, OAE finds itself differently valued and presented across the country.

Raffan (1996) identifies 1950–1980 as a period of strong growth for outdoor education and the 1970's and 1980's as their heyday (we intentionally distinguish here between outdoor education and outdoor adventure education because the early programs were primarily rooted in ecology and nature study). Outward Bound came to Canada in 1962 (Canadian Education Association, 1969) and the University of Alberta was among the first universities in Canada to offer academic credit OAE courses in the 1960's (Passmore, 1972). In the early 1970's, Queen's University, in



Kingston, Ontario, established the Open Country program specializing in outdoor education teacher training. This period also saw rapid development of both private and school owned residential and day use outdoor education and OAE centres, which advanced the profile of outdoor and outdoor adventure education across the country. In addition, during this era many summer camps began to expand their seasons of operation beyond the summer months to accommodate school programs. Concern for the destruction of the natural environment was a key motivator for the development of early outdoor education programs in Canada (Passmore, 1972).

However, in the past 25 years, there has been an increased use of risk and adventure and OAE is now more commonly used for leadership development, skills training, and the pursuit of adventure.

Key events that have influenced OAE in Canada include the publication of Aldo Leopold's *Sand Country Almanac* in 1949, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 and the well-publicized canoe trips of the self-proclaimed modern "voyageurs", including Eric Morse (1987) and Sigurd Olson (1972) in the 1950's and 60's. More recently, OAE is being influenced by increased environmental concern and a trend towards place-based learning (e.g., Orr, 1994; Wattchow

and Brown, 2011). However, political agendas, societal values, economics and the power and influence of advocates of OAE are the most powerful factors that determine if, how, when, and where OAE is presented within an organisation or curriculum.

Other influences include a number of tragic OAE and adventure tourism incidents that have had nationwide consequences. For example, the St. John's Boy's School Lake Tamiskaming tragedy in June 1978, where twelve boys aged 11 to 13 and one of their leaders drowned in a canoeing disaster, sent shock waves through the OAE community; this incident resulted in new safety practices and raised questions about the use of risk for character development (Raffan, 2002). In 1987, 12 people died in rafting accidents in the province of British Columbia which resulted in a review of Transport Canada Rafting regulations as well as an explosion of two-year college diploma programs aimed at training guides for the growing outdoor adventure tourism industry (Transportation Board of Canada, n.d.). Then, in 2003, seven high-school students were killed in an avalanche on a high-school OAE field trip, which resulted in tighter National Parks regulations and caused outdoor educators to re-examine the location and risk level of their programs (Cloutier, 2003). Tragic incidents such as these often provide school administrators with perceived justification to limit outdoor activities and the use of risk in education.

Because programs in OAE are so varied across the country it is difficult to state with confidence the current status of OAE in Canada. Nevertheless, in recent years some colleges and universities have reduced or closed their programs; however, at the same time some elementary and high school programs have reemerged after some difficult years. YMCA, Boy Scout, Girl Guide and camp programs appear to remain robust, although liability concerns threaten their future. Raffan (1996) suggests that during the heyday of outdoor education, too many expensive centres were built, OAE lacked strong integration into the public school curriculum, and it did not organize itself professionally, leaving it vulnerable during tight economic times. Today, the most successful programs are





those that have a critical mass of instructors and students, have strong connections to the classroom and excellent support from their administrative leaders (Potter, Socha and O'Connell, 2012).

Philosophy of Outdoor Adventure Education

Due to its size and lack of national curriculum, Canada does not have a unifying philosophy that links OAE, such as Norway (*friluftliv*) and the Czech Republic (*turistika*) do (Henderson and Vikander, 2007). However, broadly speaking, Canadian OAE is influenced by the ideas of educators such as Britain's Kurt Hahn (James, 2008) and Americans John Dewey (Hunt, 2008) and Aldo Leopold (1947). Indigenous knowledge, explorers and travellers such as David Thompson and Mary Schaeffer in the west, the Tyrrell brothers in the north, and Elliott Merrick in the east offer distinctive insight that have molded Canadian OAE. Similarly, early Canadian influences in education include the naturalist writers Ernest Thompson Seton and Grey Owl, the artists Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven and Emily Carr and, even more universally, the rich voyageur and fur trading traditions of canoe and snowshoe travel and early settlement at trading posts, many of which have grown into prominent Canadian cities today, continue to shape much

of OAE in Canada (Henderson, 2005). While Canadians generally prefer to remain autonomous from Americans, early Canadian OAE was influenced by and embraced the American L. B. Sharp's idea: "That which can best be learned inside the classroom should be learned there; and that which can best be learned through direct experiences outside the classroom in contact with natural materials and life situations, should there be learned" (Canadian Education Association, 1969, p. 8). While Canada is culturally distinct from the US, there is shared participation in organizations such as the International Association of Experiential Education and the North American Association of Environmental Education. However, Canadian outdoor educators have growing professional ties with colleagues in regions and countries such as Scandinavia, the UK, New Zealand, Australia and Japan.

Characteristics and Influences on Canadian Outdoor Education

Canadians Bob Henderson and Tom Potter (2001), suggest five characteristics and influences that make Canadian OAE unique: geography, a blended pedagogical approach, curricular integration, the travel experience, and non-professional status. Because of Canada's geographical expanse—5000 km from east to west—outdoor educators often live distant from one

another, may not know each other, and rarely gather together. In addition, nature-based experiences are relatively accessible to most Canadians. In fact, some schools can hike, paddle or ski right from their own campuses. Going out 'on the land' or 'into the woods' is a strong force in Canadian OAE and shapes almost all aspects of an OAE program. Regional geography and seasonal variations play significant roles and directs activity possibilities. For example, programs near coastlines typically offer sea kayak programs, those in the mountains utilize climbing, skiing and mountaineering in their programs, and those in the boreal forest focus on snowshoe and wall tent programs. One geographically unifying feature is the Canadian Shield, a band of granite rock, taiga forests, and blue lakes and rocky rivers that extends throughout eastern and central Canada from north to south; this region is ideal canoe country.

Canadians tend to blend pedagogical approaches. For example, it is common to combine the goals of OAE (people and self) with those of environmental education (nature and place). This often results in programs that develop both technical and personal skills while using stories of traditional cultural and local history to assist students in developing a sense of place and belonging in the setting of the program. Such place-responsive programs represent a growing trend in Canadian OAE (e.g., Asfeldt, Urberg and Henderson, 2009).

Related to this blended approach, Canadian programs are often interdisciplinary. For example, programs combine the curricula of biology, geography, history, literature, environmental studies, leadership, physical education and others. In addition, it is common for instructors from multiple disciplines to co-teach such programs using both the classroom and the field. There has been a near-national proliferation of integrated curriculum programs in junior high and high schools (grades 9–12) where one or two teachers run two-to-four credit courses that include an outdoor education component. This has been a key avenue for experiential OAE to find its way into mainstream public schools. Programs in Yukon are particularly distinctive examples (Sharp, 2011); programs also exist



in Ontario, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia (Johnston, 2011). On the East coast of Canada, the province of Nova Scotia has recently affirmed its support for OAE within all of its elementary, junior high, and high school years (Nova Scotia Department of Education, n.d.).

Central to many Canadian OAE experiences is the self-propelled, hand and foot, wilderness travel experience. Often, these travel experiences retrace historical routes using traditional Indigenous means, such as the canoe, snowshoe, or dogsled along a route used during the fur trade or by early explorers, pioneers or First Nations people. These travel experiences are influenced by the regional geography, culture and history and aim to connect students to Canadian history and landscape and enhance Canadian identity while dispelling the human/nature dualism myth. Travel based capstone experiences offered after a sequencing of activities over many months or years, is a common program structure (Asfeldt and Hvenegaard, in press). Artificial environments, such as high and low ropes courses, are much less commonly used in Canada, particularly in comparison to their popularity in the US. There are an abundance of professional outdoor educators in Canada. However, Canadian's are not typically as professionalized as, for example, in the US, UK, Australia or New Zealand. Because of Canada's geography, relatively small

population, the expense and time associated with gathering together, there are few Canadian national OAE organizations. However, Canadian outdoor educators are members of Canadian organizations such as skiing, climbing and canoeing associations, which provide nationally recognized certifications. It is common for Canadian programs to be based on a single person's visions, skills, ideas, and passion rather than being directed by a national or international organization, such as Outward Bound. Recently, an initiative by the Outdoor Council of Canada has been launched to encourage, promote and facilitate safety-oriented OAE and recreation for every Canadian; leadership-training courses are now being offered. Some provincial organizations, such as the Alberta Council of Environmental Educators, the Saskatchewan Environmental Educators and the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario are active and provide important support and resources for outdoor educators in their respective regions.

Canadian OAE comes in many forms and is strongly influenced by diverse regional differences in geography, climate, culture and history. Canadian OAE may be described as an organic form of education that is most commonly nature-based, uses traditional outdoor travel techniques to travel culturally and historically significant routes and provides participants with opportunities to enhance their under-

standing of and connection to place and landscape, all the while learning about themselves and their group. Over the last 50 years, the various ways OAE is offered and valued in Canada has both waxed and waned; however, its incredible diversity and breadth of offerings through multiple agencies (e.g., elementary, junior high and high schools, colleges, universities, clubs and summer camps) are perhaps its greatest strength. While viewed by many to be as ironically Canadian as the canoe, beaver and moose, it has an uncertain yet promising future. At present, it is generally seen to be gradually growing; and, while social and political forces will continue to influence its development, it seems to be well established, generally valued and culturally ingrained into the Canadian psyche.

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