



Outdoor & Adventure Education Programs

OAEP Pre-Conference Newsletter

OCTOBER 2008

The Many Faces of Outdoor and Adventure Education



Identity. Who You Are, What You Do and Where You Come From are all very important details for most human beings. The need to identify with self, place and purpose transcends race, gender, culture and creed. In this age of modern disconnect, the role experiential educators can play in helping students find answers to these questions is an amazing opportunity and responsibility. Outdoor and Adventure Education Programs can facilitate this search for meaning and expose students to the wisdom of the natural world. Whether it's through a high ropes course experience, an overnight wilderness solo or a life changing float down a desert canyon, the work we do with students of all ages, faces and backgrounds is paramount to our success as a human race in the future. By helping others define and discover themselves, we all gain a greater identity as interconnected members of humankind. Identity has played a large role in shaping our accomplishments this year. Since its inception, the Out-

door Adventure Programs professional-based group has welcomed participants from many different organizations and parts of the globe. The OAP group, which has the historic distinction of being AEE's original working group, traditionally serves as the default profession-based group for association members. So in an effort to embrace our role as catch-all, OAP began casting a wide net this year to see who was gathered up inside?

Who Are We?, Where Are We From? and What Do We Do? began to guide OAP conversations leading up to Little Rock. The first steps towards defining our identity were taken when a new OAP Leadership team was announced last autumn. With a revived sense of energy and outlook, the new leadership team put together a plan for the OAP annual meeting in Little Rock. A survey was sent out to current OAP members and a call for new participants was also sent out.

When a sizeable group of committed educators met in Arkansas for AEE's 2007 International Conference, approx twenty five individuals at-

tended the OAP annual meeting. Hoping to better define ourselves and mirror the many identities that compose our profession-based group, it was unanimously decided to add the word "Education" to the OAP name.

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MANY FACES (con't from page one)

The new Outdoor and Adventure Education Programs group quickly rallied around the new moniker as fresh ideas and initiatives were discussed. New and old voices alike called for better and more consistent group communication, more professional development/ training opportunities and heralded the need to raise money through pre-conference OAEP workshops.

There was a call to establish a 2009 budget so the OAEP group can offer workshops and seminars. A budget line was also suggested for the funding of an OAEP advocacy outlet and small business resource center for Outdoor and Adventure Program community. The leadership team listened intently as group members eagerly shared their visions for the OAEP group's future. Like most annual meetings, the clock ran out just as the collection

of those attending were hitting their stride.

Capturing the energy and ideas cultivated in Little Rock, the OAEP leadership team set about to tackle more

By helping others define and discover themselves, we all gain a greater identity as interconnected members of humankind.

pieces of the larger Identity puzzle. A new OAEP mission statement for along with new goals and objectives were drafted to better reflect our new name and group's focus. The OAEP section of AEE's website was re-designed and re-launched. Finally, in response to calls for better communication and dissemination of information amongst the OAEP family, the framework and schedule for a bi-annual newsletter was drawn up, the

results of which you are reading right now.! After all these improvements, the leadership team is eagerly anticipating OAEP's annual meeting in Vancouver. There still are many actions, strategies and plans to discuss, debate and move on in November.

Overall, it was an incredible year of growth for OAEP. It was a time to discover just who we are as a collection of experiential educators. Throughout the upcoming year, OAEP looks to implement a newly devised action plan offering more opportunities for learning, networking, growth and development. But for a moment, let's embrace the success and accomplishments of 2007-08. The ability to tackle this larger idea of Identity wasn't easy but now the results are clear. The many faces that make up our profession-based group shall now answer with confidence; This is Who We Are! This is Where We're From! This is What We Do!

WHO & WHAT is OAEP?

About OAEP

The Outdoor and Adventure Education Programs Professional Group (OAEP) aims to connect practitioners and organizations with a commonwealth of theoretical and practical information, resources, and networking opportunities. The broad umbrella of OAEP covers a variety of programs and ideas as well as being a component of the historical roots of the Association for Experiential Education.

OAEP's Goals

- To provide a network for those involved with outdoor and adventure programs
- For smaller programs to have a place to express their voice
- To provide a forum for the sharing of best practices, advocacy, and enrichment through pre-conference and workshop offerings at International AEE Conferences.

2008-2009

OAEP LEADERSHIP TEAM

Graham Prather, graham.prather@mnsu.edu

Ali Lien, alien_sprout@hotmail.com

Michael Ackerman, michael@learnoutdoors.com

A CALL FOR ACTION- OAEP in 2009

With just about a month left before the November AEE conference in Vancouver, the OAEP Leadership team has been busy developing the agenda for this year's annual meeting. Looking to incorporate the conference theme of "Building Bridges" the OAEP profession-based group will focus on cultivating inquiry, sharing knowledge and taking action in 2009. The message from OAEP members has been very clear and the theme of Action will guide OAEP in the months ahead. Having made considerable strides in 2007 and 2008 to develop and define our group's identity, we all agree, it is now time to Act!

Our goal is to emerge from the 36th Annual Conference in Washington with an Action Plan, drawn up by OAEP members that will result in specific objectives for the upcoming year. We'll revisit the idea of sponsoring a pre-conference training seminar that could offer a track for professional development and/or certification opportunities.



Having made considerable strides in 2007 and 2008 to develop and define our OAEP group's identity, we all agree, it is now time to Act!

We'll continue our discussions concerning the many challenges facing Outdoor and Adventure Education programs in today's economy and we'll revisit and address the last minute, Little Rock suggestion that OAEP facilitate a series of workshops for small business owners within the field of Outdoor and Adventure Education.

As with all these motions, we'll be looking for OAEP members to come forward with a willingness to spearhead individual actions. Lastly, we'll

hear from the OAEP Leadership Team as they update and present additional opportunities for OAEP in 2009. By committing to the creation of a 2009 Action Plan, to be approved at the annual meeting and ready for distribution in OAEP's post-conference newsletter, our group will begin laying the groundwork for another successful year. As stated in OAEP's mission, "we are looking to raise the bar of excellence in programs and facilitation and it is therefore paramount to experiential education's success that the OAEP professional group serves as a platform for the continuing development of all members." Through the combined efforts, energy and vision of all members of the Outdoor and Adventure Education Programs group, we can foster that growth amongst our community and answer the call for action in 2009!

Outdoor & Adventure Education Programs Annual Meeting

The OAEP Profession-Based Group will hold its Annual Meeting at the upcoming AEE International Conference in Vancouver, WA. OAEP welcomes all members of the Experiential Education community to join us at this very important event!

Thursday, November 6, 2008 @ 4:45 PM
in the Hilton Vancouver's Pine Room

Association for Experiential Education
36th Annual International Conference
November 6-9 2008—Vancouver, WA



WE'LL SEE YOU IN VANCOUVER!

When introducing the concept of challenge by choice, how many times have you immediately lost group participants who chose not to challenge themselves in any way? This is especially true working with at-risk youth who often come to group with low self-esteem and significant trust issues. Over the past 15 years of experiential programming with this population, I have developed a method of presenting challenge by choice without losing too many participants along the way.

When starting a new group, after brief introductions, I always begin with group rules for participation; **physical and emotional safety, cooperation, communication, and fun!** "First and foremost" I explain, "because these groups may involve moving around together at a high rate of speed, I need to get a commitment from everyone here to agree to be both *physically* and *emotionally* safe."

This means individuals can choose not to participate when the activity feels physically or emotionally unsafe because the challenge level seems too high. This is very different from participants thinking that challenge by choice means they can choose if they want to challenge themselves or not.

By beginning with these rules, I am setting the stage to introduce challenge by choice in a safety context. This means individuals can choose not to participate when the activity feels physically or emotionally unsafe because the challenge level seems too high. This is very different from participants thinking that challenge by choice means they can choose if they want to challenge themselves or not. To emphasize the importance of group safety, I spend some time explaining

and giving examples. Most times, participants understand physical safety; no contusions, abrasions, bumps, or bruises on you or anyone else. For example, no National



Hockey League "hip checks" are permitted if two people are trying to sit down in the same chair at the same time.

Emotional safety, however, may need more explanation. Because many young people today commonly tease or jokingly put each other down, the idea of not hurting someone's feelings or putting yourself down during group needs to be emphasized and understood. Rephrasing like "No having fun at someone else's expense" is effective. Giving concrete examples of emotional safety in the framework of a few upcoming activities is also helpful. Asking the group to give you examples of what not to do in these activities is even better. I will not move on to the remaining group rules until I have a verbal or "thumbs-up" signal from each participant agreeing to abide by the rules of physical and emotional safety. Next, I explain the remaining group rules of communication, cooperation, and fun. I describe them as necessary for the group to succeed in some of the more challenging, problem-

solving initiatives that lay ahead.

It is at this point that I introduce the concept of challenge by choice. I tell the group that no one will be asked to try something if they feel physically or emotionally unsafe in the attempt. I might give an example of someone *with a sore ankle choosing* not to join in a fast game of tag. I stress that only the individual knows what comfort level they feel in a challenging situation and the group has to be OK with the individual's choice. After a brief opportunity for questions, I immediately move the group to our first activity

A fun icebreaker that quickly engages the whole group in a non-threatening manner is my first choice. By providing an opportunity to easily succeed with a minimal amount of frustration, the group can transition smoothly from a passive listening stage to a more interactive mode. During these initial activities, facilitators need to be very vigilant and conscientious in calling individuals on physical and emotional safety issues. As the group develops, hopefully, participants will begin to call each other and the group will become self-monitoring.

As the group progresses to activities requiring increased emotional and physical risk, I will revisit the concept of challenge by choice, but only after the group has experienced some success and a sense unity. In this way, participants are more likely to stay involved in the activities. More importantly, a group atmosphere has been created where individuals can feel safe and have fun while challenging themselves in a supportive environment.

This article was submitted by Dominic Cataldo, MLIR from the LaSalle School.

Do you have a bit of wisdom to share with the Outdoor and Adventure Education community? If you have a topic or idea you'd like to throw out there, we'd love to hear from you. Email submissions to michael@learnoutdoors.com



The **Leadership Experiential Adventure Program** is located in south central Pennsylvania in the heart of the Michaux State For-

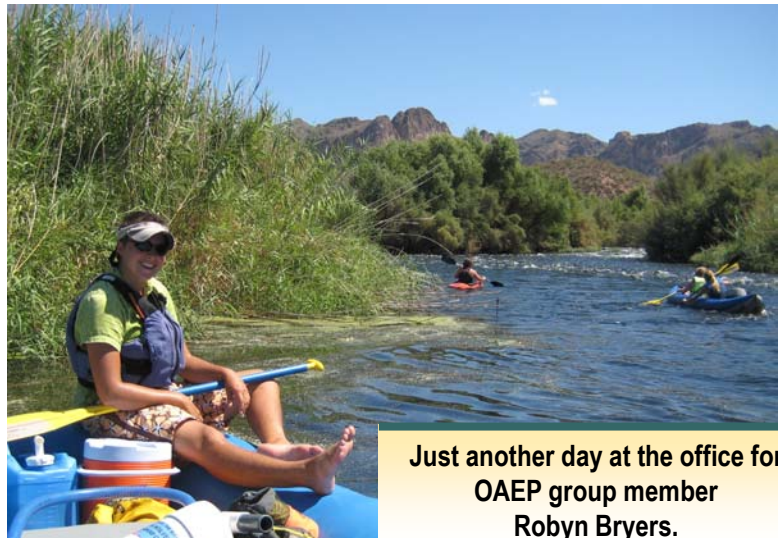
est. It was originally developed as a subset of the Abraxas Leadership Development Program, later renamed the Cornell Abraxas Leadership Development Program. Abraxas Youth and Family Services is a provider of residential and non-residential based therapeutic programs for at-risk, adjudicated, and dependent youth. These programs service youth ranging in ages, backgrounds, and level of care in the state system from many states in the North East United States and beyond. Today, the Leadership Experiential Adventure Program remains a subset of the Abraxas Leadership Development Program and continues to thrive in the field of Outdoor Behavioral Healthcare.

The LEAP program practices sound and quality experiential education in many arenas of the outdoor industry. These include hiking and backpacking, on-site high and low ropes challenge courses, environmental awareness and ethics, initiative and self-esteem exercises, flat water paddling, rock climbing and rappelling, and is currently branching to include vocational programming in landscaping and horticulture through a fully functional educational program that is tied into the formal state certified educational department. These activities are designed to challenge our participants to apply therapeutic principles that he or she has learned while participating in our extensive residential clinical process.

The LEAP program believes strongly in providing depth and quality to our programming, practicing principles that are proven by the experiential education industry.

These include effective risk management and a high level of safety, Leave No Trace Principles, Challenge By Choice, Full Value Contract, and allowing the learner to be the teacher and leader. The LEAP program prides itself on meeting the criteria and standards of the known organizations and leaders in our field. The Leadership Experiential Adventure Program clearly understands, believes in, and has followed the principles and practices of quality experiential education since the inception of our program in 1994.

This profile was submitted by Shane Sloat, currently serving our nation while on military leave from his role as LEAP Program Manager.



Just another day at the office for OAEP group member Robyn Bryers.

Robyn Bryers, an OAEP Member from Prescott AZ, has been attending International AEE Conferences for the past five years. Robyn is a veteran field instructor known throughout industry as a dynamic educator who has the unique ability to capture a group with her presence, style and energy. We caught up with Robyn and asked her to share her thoughts concerning the upcoming 2008 AEE conference in Vancouver.

OAEP Profile: *So you've been coming to AEE conferences for some time now. What keeps you involved and motivates you to attend each year?*

Robyn I started attending conferences as a Prescott College student. The community and sense of camaraderie at my first conference was very inspiring. At the 2006 conference I actually landed my current job as Program Director for Learn Outdoors.. Now in that role, I stay motivated to come and exhibit for our school and facilitate the occasional workshop. It really is an experience I wait all year for and it's a great chance to re-connect with old friends and network with new colleagues.

OAEP Profile: *Why do you choose to participate in the OAEP profession-based group?*

Robyn The work I do as an Adventure Educator is most



WE WANT YOU

& your submissions for the
Next oae news;etter

email:

michael@learnoutdoors.com

OAEP PROFILES (con't from page five)

successful at the local level . At our annual OAEP meetings I gain a wider perspective on experiential education when I hear voices and experiences from other parts of the country. Also, as a director of a small, outdoor business, it's good to hear that other administrators are facing the same challenges we are in Arizona. I usually leave the conference very excited with new ideas to implement back home!

OAEP Profile: What direction would you like to see OAEP head in 2009?

Robyn: I think the group did a great job moving forward with restructuring itself this past year. I think we'll push for more results from OAEP in 2009 and maybe offer some development workshops for the larger AEE community. I am very intrigued by all the initiatives brought forth at the Little Rock gathering and I'm excited for our upcoming annual meeting. I think OAEP gives the little folks in the Outdoor and Adventure Education Industry a voice and an opportunity to unite through the great work we are all doing. I guess what I'd most like to see is OAEP reach out and be an advocate, ally and resource for all of those people working hard in the field of experiential education.

OAEP Profile: What's next for you in the new year?

Robyn: Well I just got back from spending the summer in Kenya living and working amongst the Maasai people. Aside from trying to get back there as quickly as I can, you'll probably find me running rivers and working trips through next summer. Between Outward Bound, Girl Ventures and Learn Outdoors I stay pretty busy. But I'm really looking forward to seeing everyone in November and I hope there's lots of dancing opportunities!



OAEP's MISSION

The significance of participant and educator exposure to experiential learning methods and practices through outdoor and adventure programs is priceless to the promotion, acceptance and integration of experiential education into the mainstream. The experiential process of action, reflection and application is easily recognizable as a distinct method in our programming and may be a strong introduction or example to learners and teachers when presented with skill and expertise. Raising the bar of excellence in programs and facilitation is therefore paramount for experiential education's success and the OAEP professional group serves as a platform for the continuing development of its members. Abolishing the overly simplistic slogan of "Learning by Doing" and transitioning to a more appropriate expression of action, reflection and application will lead to stronger, more precise programs in outdoor and adventure settings and beyond.

Here's What's Coming Your Way in OAEP's Post-Conference E-Newsletter, due out February 2009:

- A complete recap of OAEP and the 36th Annual International AEE Conference
- OAEP Annual Meeting Notes
- 2009 OAEP Action Plan
- OAEP Wisdom— The Greening of Adventure Programs
- OAEP Member Profiles
- And MUCH MUCH MORE!!!!