Classroom As Community:
Harnessing The Power of Outdoor Experiential Education!
Ron Williamson
Thanks for the invitation!

Collins' connection...you can blame John's son?

Mike T & Spruce!

Probus' “OEE” Thread – previous/future speakers? (Baffin Birds, Arctic Council, Camino Trail, Eco City...and others)
Speaker's Dilemma?

Light travels faster than sound.
This is why some people appear bright until you hear them speak!
Generally speaking, you aren't learning much when your lips are moving.
Presentation Overview

1. Personal Connections – Photo Overview
2. Experiential Education Backgrounder
3. Outdoor Experiential Education is…
4. Research Reinforcements
5. Summary – Invitation for Probus Folks?
6. Conversation Opportunity???
Part 1 - “Nature as Teacher”

“September Syndrome”...others who just have to tell you what they saw/did in nature

I invite you to recall a “memorable” experience you've had in natural world

“If you were a PLACE...what PLACE would you be?”
Personal Outdoor/Experiential “Hooks”

1st wilderness “suitcase” canoe trip in early 20's; “light when on” as contrast/complement to competitive sport background

Daughter's extensive Rotorua research – knew everything ABOUT it...except ESSENCE!

Friend's Botany M.Sc degree – didn't even know the plant was growing outside lab window!
Earth Rise turned scientists into poets...changed everything except the way we think?
ECOS “Disconnect”

ECOS Greek word for OUR HOME

So “ECONOMY” is management of our home

“ECOLOGY” is connections of systems within our home

“dualistic thinking” has led to “either/or” understanding...imperative to reconnect!
Global Awareness of Connections
Lifestyle Trends

The average Canadian spends between four and six percent of their lives outside, and this includes the time spent in a car!
Importance of Hands On, Direct Experiences in Nature
Schools' Take Up The Challenge

MISSION STATEMENT

PROVIDING ALL CHILDREN WITH DIRECT CURRICULUM-BASED EXPERIENCES IN AND FOR THE OUT-OF-DOORS.
“No child left behind?...inside”!
Rediscovery - All things are connected
Everything is becoming something else
Connections with Natural World
Ecological Understandings
Personal & Group Development
Appreciating Human Heritage
Outdoor Skills – but not as prime focus
Whether close to home...
Schoolyards & Neighbourhoods...
...or further afield
So...what's the current wisdom telling us?
Abundant, interdisciplinary research...
...suggests clear pathways on which to move forward
So...let's “take the plunge”?
Learn through experience... experience through learning
To know and not to do... is not to know?
Troubling Observation...

Children enter school as question marks and leave as periods.

Neil Postma
I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no human should witness. Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot by high school and college graduates.

So I am suspicious of education. My request is to help your students become human.

Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.
Teaching's 3 T's:

1. **Transmission** - “big jug/little mug”
2. **Transaction** - acknowledges learning a 2 way process
3. **Transformation** - education for change
The Poet Yeats said...

Education is NOT filling a pail but lighting a fire.
# 1 Pre-requisite for Student Success is...

- presence of and relationship with a caring adult

"order of operation" for student success:

1. Social Connections, then
2. Personal Connections, followed by
3. Academic Connections.
Key Teaching Strategies

3 Teaching Strategies consistently have been associated with student success:

1. Teacher as Storyteller
2. Teacher/Student Reflective Opportunities
3. Teacher As Life-Long Learner
Are YOU worth learning?

We teach who we are. Good Teaching cannot be reduced to techniques; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.

Parker Palmer

What a Teacher teaches is themselves. Are you worth learning?

Jean Vanier
The Learning Pyramid

Research suggests learning (retention & application) varies based on the method of instruction:

- Lecture - 5%
- Reading - 10%
- Audio-Visual - 20%
- Demonstration - 30%
- Group Discussion - 50%

PRACTICE BY DOING - 75%
TEACHING OTHERS – 90%
Ancient Chinese Proverb

Tell me…and I'll forget.
Show me…and I may remember.
Involve me…and I'll understand.
The Business Council of Canada's TOP 10!

1. Communication Skills
2. Interpersonal Skills
* 3. Computer Literacy
4. Leadership Ability
5. Highly Motivated
6. Team Player
* 7. Analytical Skills
8. Organizational Skills
9. Initiative
10. Creativity/Energetic
“High Tech” & “High Touch”

- “high tech” very necessary
- intentional focus upon “high touch” literacy skills as, or more, critical
Einstein's wisdom...

Not everything that counts can be counted...

and not everything that can be counted, counts!
Einstein Also Said...

Imagination is more important than knowledge.
Greatest nation...

What's the greatest "nation" on earth?

Well, IMAGI-NATION of course!
More "emotional learners" than "intellectual learners"

Critical to attempt to actively engage students through integrating *opportunities to DO, TO FEEL and TO KNOW.*

The adage: "Connecting Hands, Heart & Head" has deep empirical roots!
Community building triad engages by:

First... **TO DO** (HANDS)

Then... **TO FEEL** (HEART)

Finally... **TO KNOW** (HEAD)
Try? Try?

There is NO Try!
There is only do or not do.

Yoda – Jedi Warrior
"What do I want my students to DO?"

Speaks to the heart of "Experiential Learning"

Do...then Reflect...then Apply!

2 quick illustrations:

- Tommy & Moose; Hubble Deep Field

Create "Holy Sh*t" experiences as much/often as one can???
Original Hubble Deep Field
Directly engage each of:

- 3 Learning Styles - Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic
- 3 Brain "Dominances" - Left, Right & Balanced
- 9 Multiple Intelligences - SLIMEBILN
There are NO SHORTCUTS to any place worth going.
Experiential Teacher's Paradox

There's something you need to know and I can tell you that with my help you can probably learn it. But I cannot tell you what it is in a way that you can now understand. You must be willing therefore, to undergo certain experiences as I direct you to undergo them so that you can learn what it is that you need to know...

Donald Schon – Queen's University address
“The Risk Cycle”

The more risks...the more growth.

The more growth...the more character.

The more character...the more wisdom.

The more wisdom...the more peace.

The more peace...the more risks!
When nothing is sure...
everything is possible.
There is no such thing as failure...just successes you don't like!
Part 3 - Outdoor Experiential Ed is...

A powerful learning methodology

2 approaches to “program delivery”:

i) **Focus/Interdisciplinary Course** (high school single or multiple credit programs)

ii) Using the outdoors as the context for learning across a variety of integrated subjects (elementary school math, language, science...)

Outdoor Exp. Ed Focus

Supported by 3 supporting “pillars”:

i) * Outdoor Skills (medium through which...)

ii) Personal & Group Development (EGO skills)

iii) Ecological Understandings (ECO skills)

* If focus is primarily Outdoor Skills then it's Outdoor Recreation...not Outdoor Education!
P & GD (EGO) Skills

Intentional “Team Building/Goal-Oriented” approach

5 “T.I.C.C.L” skills intentionally taught:

- Trust, Initiative, Cooperation, Communication, Situational Leadership
“ECO” Skills

The Story of Life – “Sense of Wonder”

7 Key Eco Concepts: “ECBCICA”
Energy Flow, Cycles, Biodiversity, Community, Inter-relationships, Change, Adaptation

Ecosystems Thinking through direct, hands on experiences in “natural” setting – schoolyards, 10 minute Field Trips, outdoor centres, beyond...
Ecology 101?

4 summary points...say it all?

i) There is no such thing as a free lunch

ii) Everything is becoming something else

iii) Everything goes somewhere – There is NO AWAY!

iv) Nature knows best...indeed Nature bats last!
Part 4 - Research Reinforcements

Compelling research repeatedly demonstrates that using OEE significantly enhances/improves:

- academic performance, standardized test scores
- student behaviour – concentration, civility, ADHD
- engagement, motivation, independence, self-confidence,
- critical thinking skills – appreciating complexities
- lifelong stewardship, connections with environment
- physical and emotional health improvements
Last Child in the Woods?

Richard Louv's call to save our children from “nature deficit disorder”

Using nature as the context for learning significantly develops:

- creativity, imagination, concentration
- Multiple Intelligence - “Nature Smart”
- emotional growth, positive social interactions
Ecological Literacy

2 variables consistently present in developing “Ecologically Literate” learners:

i) On-going presence of a MENTOR (“teacher in the broadest sense...Probus grandparent?)

ii) Frequent contact with/in natural settings
Part 5 – Summary

Out Exp Ed = Out Effective Ed!

“Good teaching can happen anywhere. It just so happens that the outdoors is rife with “generative edges” making it a very powerful learning context”.  

James Raffan
Support for OEE

“overwhelming reason to increase outdoor education is nothing short of the salvation of the planet.”  
Robert Bateman

“outdoor education ought to be a mandatory part of every curriculum…”  
David Suzuki

“increase funding for outdoor education as a core commitment to counter the staggering ignorance of how the natural world works.”  
T. Homer-Dixon
Invitation to Probus?

Suggested that the Business community may be the only viable “social agency” that can make the difference needed in the 21st century “reclaiming the commons” movement clearly underway.

2 resources of interest?

i) “The Ecology of Commerce” - Paul Hawken
ii) “Small is Beautiful” - E.F. Schumacher

“OEE mentor” as grandparent; Young Naturalists
One evening an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said, “My son, the battle is between two “wolves” inside us all. One is Evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and ego.

The other is Good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf wins?”

The wise elder simply replied, “The one you feed.”
Recent “40th Anniversary” Conference asked participants the question...

“What is Outdoor Experiential Education to you?”

You Tube (2 min) Video Summary:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j92Tk4xnPb8
Part 6 – Conversation Opportunity?