Editorial

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In past editions of AJOE I have made a conscious effort to refrain from getting on my "soap-box" over particular issues. Perhaps my hesitancy can be traced back to accusations of me being "evangelistic" about my passion - experiential education. For the most part, these statements have been made by people outside the Outdoor Education fraternity - by people who don't really comprehend or understand our *modus operandi*. Nonetheless, I just can't help wonder about the direction in which contemporary education is heading. I find myself asking the question..."are we different from mainstream educators"?

I guess my curiosity was galvanised this week from two fronts. Firstly, most people know that I "lecture" at a University. My place of employment would be no different to any University in the country - the bottom line remains constant. Sadly, education appears to be driven by economic rationalisation and income generating working parties. Transcending all of this, is the notion that the almighty dollar seems to be inextricably linked with educational advancement. My skepticism is exacerbated by the advent of on-line delivery of courses which effectively means reduced face-to-face "connection" with your students. I am bemused that education has become a commodity that can be packaged in cyberspace through impersonal modes of delivery. Have we lost sight of who is at the core of our *raison d'être*? Don't people matter any more? May be I am just a luddite.

Secondly, whilst immersed in the contents of this edition I found myself reassured about the underlying philosophies which guide our profession. Ironically, the majority of articles in this edition emphasise the importance of "connection", whether that be with *self*, *others* or the *environment*. Unashamedly, the quality and academic rigour of these articles reaffirm my belief in Outdoor Education as a valuable pedagogical tool.

In the Viewpoint section, Tracey Dickson cogently argues that "risk" is an essential ingredient in Outdoor Education. She also articulates that "we seem to be at a time in the development of outdoor and experiential learning...where we are at the edge of significant growth". Undoubtedly Outdoor Education in Australia has matured to an acceptable level and Dickson espouses "we have learned lots...but isn't it time we stood on our own collective two feet?"

Whilst on the topic of risk, accreditation and certification it seems timely to address Simon Priest's article. He forewarns us of the pitfalls of accreditation and certification experienced in USA and the UK. In his own words "the results are well qualified technically proficient people, but they are far from qualified in all aspects of outdoor leadership". Priest suggests that "what is needed in Australia and New Zealand is an arrangement where the three approaches of program accreditation, leader qualifications and staff certification can exist in harmony and with synergy". He proceeds to outline some methods which will enhance this process.

Personally, the most poignant issue raised by Priest is his call for Australians to put aside politics and self-interests and get on with the task at hand. Taking this one step further, I believe we need some form of reconciliation between ORCA and AOEC. To this end, we need to "walk the same path together". It is hoped that during National Outdoor Education Conference in January we can form a powerful nexus.

Readers will witness a recurring theme in this edition: viz people daring to care about people. The article by Quay, Dickinson and Nettleton is a delightful paper about

community and caring. One particular quote resonated with my personal philosophy - "community and caring are not being achieved as educational objectives within schools at present". Never a truer word has been spoken! Moreover, the authors posit that in Outdoor Education we need to "address not only human community and caring, but also the relationships and interdependence, and corresponding issues of community and caring, which exist between humans and the natural environment".

Marcia McKenzie succinctly examines the adventure education literature and outlines suggestions for future research. In essence, she makes sense of "how adventure education program outcomes are achieved" and conveys that "it is a topic that has important implications for practice and one that contains a myriad of possibilities for future research".

A novel model for bush counselling is postulated by Adams and Sveen for use in Adventure Therapy. Not surprising however, is this edition's re-emerging theme of "acceptance and security" within the group. They advocate "the need to belong, the need for relatedness is a key requisite for members of the group".

Martin and Thomas investigate the notion of "connection and relationships" and take it to another intriguing level. They reveal that "if a person feels their emotional and physical safety is threatened when they visit natural places, then fear and discomfort become real barriers to moving beyond acquaintanceships - as they do in interpersonal relationship development". Carrying this to further magnitude, they believe "people who are familiar with natural settings are likely to have high levels of self-efficacy expectations their ability to cope with the demands of developing and maintaining their human-nature relationships". Possibly the most salient message for practitioners coming out of their paper was - "we doubt the tradition of stressing on site dangers and hazards as students step off the bus makes a good first impression".

Thomas and Thomas delve into the "image conscious, gear intensive, regulated and environmentally harmful" aspects of paddling activities. They take us beyond the "adrenaline pumping adventures" in which we attempt to overpower nature, into a world which allows participants to explore moving water from a totally new paradigm. Their work is exciting indeed.

Marijke Price expands on the theme of caring and nurturing in the outdoors. Her moving paper is indicative of the power of nature and a sense of community in the healing process.

Finally, the last paper in this edition written by Brendan Barrett, was simply uplifting. The poignant message was embedded in humour and wisdom and I consider it to be a "must read" for any facilitator in the field.

So, I've come the full circle and I am back to where this editorial began - on my "soap box" secretly lamenting the values of education. In my heart of hearts, I am destined to remain a luddite!!! From my perspective, outdoor education represents "primary learning" (first-hand, experiential education) and is so much more impactful than "secondary learning" (through textbooks, lectures and vicarious learning). In closing - I'll leave you with one of my favourite quotes:

"What you discover on our own is so much more important than what someone else discovers for you. It is like the difference between true love and an arranged marriage". (Readers Digest)