

Australian outdoor (and) environmental education research: Senses of “place” in two constituencies

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Abstract

The Outdoor Council of Australia’s renaming of *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education (AJOE)* as *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education (JOEE)* follows deliberations among Australian and international stakeholders in outdoor education about the future of publishing in the field and raises a question about the relationships of outdoor and environmental education that Andrew Brookes (1989) voiced more than a decade ago: Is outdoor education *environmental education re-invented*, or *environmental education reconceived*? In crafting this essay my initial intention was to review the histories (and possible future trajectories) of changing relationships between outdoor and environmental education research in Australia by appraising manifestations of these relationships within two key (albeit overlapping) constituencies broadly represented by contributions to two Australian journals: *AJOE* and the *Australian Journal of Environmental Education (AJEE)*. Brookes (1989) argued that the distinctiveness of outdoor education as a form of environmental education is derived from its physical and conceptual isolation from schooling. In the course of examining evidence for his proposition in research literature drawn from these two constituencies, I encountered an allegation that a “sense of place” seemed to be missing from Australian environmental education research. I dispute this allegation and argue that outdoor education’s physical and conceptual isolation from schooling is precisely what enables the cultivation of a “sense of place” in ways that distinguish it from other forms of environmental education. I conclude by reflecting on the implications of *AJOE*’s name change for cultivating this distinctive approach.

Keywords: sense of place, outdoor education, environmental education

Introduction

In an editorial introducing the first issue of *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education (AJOE)* under its new name, *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education (JOEE)*, John Quay (2016, p. 1) notes that the “change acknowledges engagement with the international community of academics and others for whom the discourses of outdoor and environmental education are central.” He adds:

Outdoor education, as theorised and practised in Australia, is well known for its concern with environmental issues. However, while it could be argued that Australians were amongst the earliest to press this point, the scope of this interest has never been Australian alone. The change in name signals this fact, but it doesn’t mean a major change in direction for the journal. There is no hard line drawn between various expressions of outdoor education, which is a broad church. In all of its guises, the influence of the “environment” in outdoor education is tangible, no matter how this term may be defined (nature, ecosystem, biosphere, wilderness, habitat, world, context, milieu, situation, location, etc.). (Quay, 2016, p. 1)

The deliberations about the future of publishing in outdoor education that led to the change of title, raise a question about the relationships of outdoor and environmental education clearly articulated by Andrew Brookes (1989) in *AJEE* more than a decade ago: Is outdoor education “environmental education re-invented, or environmental education reconceived?” Brookes (1989, p. 15) elaborates: “Outdoor education has been distinguished from physical education by its focus on environmental education . . . But is the environmental education which occurs in outdoor education distinguished by anything other than an association with adventure activities? After all, field trips are not a new idea.” I initially addressed Brookes’ question by reviewing histories of the changing relationships between outdoor and environmental education research in Australia and speculating on their possible future trajectories. I began by appraising selected manifestations of these relationships produced by contributors to two key journals: *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education* and *Australian Journal of Environmental Education (AJEE)*. In 2014, *AJEE* celebrated 30 years of publication (see Cutter-Mackenzie, A. Gough, N. Gough, & Whitehouse, 2014). Although *AJOE* has a shorter history (1995–2016), they share a tendency towards an increasing emphasis on research as they have matured (see N. Gough, 2014; Thomas, Potter, & Allison, 2009). Brookes (1989, p. 15) argues that “the distinctiveness of outdoor education as a form of environmental education is derived from