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# OUTDOOR EDUCATION



*Wildchild by Peter Pigott*

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# Editorial

*Robyn Zink*

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Welcome to this issue of the *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*. The first three look at different aspects of incident reporting and management. The fourth article picks up from the theme of the previous issue of AJOE and examines how people develop relationships with a particular place.

In *What would you like? Identifying the required characteristics of an industry-wide incident reporting and learning system for the led outdoor activity sector*, Natassia Goode, Caroline Finch, Erin Cassell, Michael Lenné and Paul Salmon report on the first phase of a study aimed at developing an industry-wide incident reporting and learning system (UPLOADS). This involved an extensive literature review identifying characteristics of successful reporting and learning systems, followed by a two-round survey of outdoor activity providers to obtain their views on the importance of these characteristics. Along with identifying what outdoor activity providers consider as essential characteristics of a reporting system, the study highlighted strategies that would encourage participation in such a system.

The second article, *Safety-related improvisation in led outdoor activities: An exploratory investigation into its occurrence and influencing factors*, Margaret Trotter, Paul Salmon and Michael Lenné examine if outdoor activity leaders improvise in safety-critical situations and why they improvise in these situations. Of the survey respondents, over 50% said they did improvise in at least half of their activities, mainly in response to changing environmental conditions or due to the need for easier procedures. This study also identified factors that enabled respondents to improvise successfully in safety-critical situations.

The third article in this issue, *Supervision of school and youth groups on lift-served ski slopes: A research perspective*, by Andrew Brookes and Peter Holmes reviews the research on injuries and deaths on lift-served ski fields. Based on the data from these studies they make a number of suggestions for the supervision of school students on ski fields. They make the case that supervisors do have to be familiar with the area and they cannot rely on resort management to remove or mitigate all hazards. Given that many accidents can, at least in part, be attributed to the behaviour of the individual concerned, supervisors of school students have a responsibility to observe and monitor how students are coping with the conditions and that they are following instructions.

The final article in this issue has a very different focus. In *Listening place* Laura Piersol explores the relationships a group of university researchers have developed to a place. Using narrative inquiry, Piersol asks what lessons can be learnt from a space of “deep listening” in place. This approach allows the author to explore some of the complexities and rewards of forming relationships with a place. Based on these insights she offers some suggestions for outdoor educators who are looking for ways to foreground the environment in their pedagogical practices.

*John Dewey and education outdoors: Making sense of the 'educational situation' through more than a century of progressive reforms* by John Quay and Jayson Seaman is reviewed in this issue of AJOE. This book is a welcome addition to the body of outdoor education literature as the authors set out a clear and detailed argument of how Dewey's work can be used to challenge our thinking about outdoor education and, more importantly our programming decisions and practices when we take student outdoors.

This is the last issue of AJOE I will be editing. I wish to take this opportunity to thank everyone that has contributed to AJOE during the time I have been editor. It has been a privilege and a pleasure to interact with such a diverse group of people. My job has been made easy by the goodwill and enthusiasm everyone has shown for AJOE and outdoor education research.

Happy reading.



Robyn Zink, Ph.D  
Editor

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# What would you like? Identifying the required characteristics of an industry-wide incident reporting and learning system for the led outdoor activity sector

*Natassia Goode<sup>1</sup>, Caroline F. Finch<sup>2</sup>, Erin Cassell<sup>3</sup>, Michael G. Lenné<sup>3</sup>  
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## Abstract

The aim of this study was to identify the characteristics that led outdoor activity providers agree are necessary for the development of a new industry-wide incident reporting and learning system (UPLOADS). The study involved: 1) a literature review to identify a set of characteristics that are considered to be hallmarks of successful reporting and learning systems in other safety-critical domains; and (2) the presentation of these characteristics to 25 Australian led outdoor activity providers using a two round modified-Delphi technique to obtain consensus views on their relative importance in this domain. Thirteen out of 30 characteristics were endorsed as “essential” for developing an incident reporting and learning system for the led outdoor activity sector, and a further 13 were endorsed as “required”. “Essential” characteristics primarily related to operational or practical characteristics of the system, while “required” characteristics primarily related to system infrastructure, data quality and the basis for developing of countermeasures to address identified injury risks. The findings indicate that although led outdoor activity providers are primarily concerned that the demands of reporting do not adversely impact on their day to day operations, they also recognise that data collection methods and countermeasure development need to be of high quality. The paper concludes by highlighting some potential strategies for implementing the characteristics considered “essential” and “required”.

Keywords: Incident database, risk management, safety, outdoor activity

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## Introduction

The goal of the UPLOADS (Understanding and Preventing Led Outdoor Accidents Data System) project is to develop a standardised, national approach to incident reporting and learning for the outdoor sector in Australia. The project is funded by a range of stakeholders in the outdoor sector, including outdoor education and recreation associations, outdoor activity providers and government departments (see acknowledgements). The system is primarily aimed at organisations which facilitate supervised or ‘led’ outdoor activities (i.e. led outdoor activity providers). This is a diverse group which includes organisations operating under the banners of outdoor education, school camps, adventure tourism, outdoor recreation and outdoor therapy. While these organisations pursue a range of different goals in the provision of outdoor activities, they all owe a duty of care towards those involved in their activities (e.g. instructors, participants, volunteers) to eliminate or manage the risks involved as far as reasonably possible. Moreover, the provision of common activities (e.g. bushwalking, camping, rock climbing) implies that these different types of organisations may be able to learn from one another’s experiences.

Gathering detailed information on incidents and identifying contributing factors is a valuable component of risk management in outdoor programmes. Incident rates can be used to evaluate the efficacy of risk management decisions or countermeasures over time (Cessford, 2009), and identify when changes to risk management strategies are necessary (Leemon & Schimelpfenig, 2003). Information on contributing factors provides an empirical basis to justify changes to policy, training, or program location or activity (Brown & Fraser, 2009; Capps, 2007; Dickson, 2012a; Haddock, 2008; Merrill & Wright, 2001). Incident reports, if accessibly stored, can help retain organisational knowledge despite staff turnover (Haddock, 2008). In addition, actual data on incidents can provide a basis for communicating with participants and their families about the real, as opposed to the perceived, risks involved in outdoor activities (Leemon & Schimelpfenig, 2003).

While collecting incident data at the organisation level has benefits, a national system compiling information on all led outdoor incidents, including near misses, would provide further benefits to the sector as a whole. First, a standardised, national system would potentially provide a common language for cross-organisational communication and learning within a very diverse ‘sector’ (i.e. those involved in the provision of led outdoor activities). Second, while

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# Safety-related improvisation in led outdoor activities: An exploratory investigation into its occurrence and influencing factors

Margaret J. Trotter<sup>1</sup>, Paul M. Salmon<sup>2</sup> and Michael G. Lenné<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Monash University, <sup>2</sup>University of the Sunshine Coast

## Abstract

The dynamic nature of led outdoor activities means that, despite activity providers' best efforts, activity leaders can be exposed to unanticipated situations for which no procedures exist. Improvisation, the spontaneous, real-time conception and execution of a novel response, has been identified as a potential means of maintaining safety in such situations in other safety critical domains. This study examines improvisation in the led outdoor activity context with the intention of adding to the body of knowledge around activity leader decision making. In this exploratory investigation a survey study was undertaken in order to determine whether safety-related improvisation occurs during led outdoor activities, and also to identify the circumstances in which it occurs, the form it takes, and to establish by what factors it is influenced. Over 50% of respondents reported improvising in at least half of their activities, commonly as the result of unanticipated environmental conditions and/or the need for easier procedures. Respondents identified a range of factors that influenced their ability to improvise, many of which overlap with those found in other safety critical domains, but some that appear to be unique to led outdoor activities.

Keywords: Improvisation, safety critical situations, led outdoor activities

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## Introduction

Led outdoor activities (LOA), defined here as instructed activities taking place in an outdoor setting that have an educational goal associated with them, can involve a degree of uncertainty and risk. Participating in LOA activities that involve an acceptable level of risk can be beneficial as they provide an opportunity for participants to engage with risk, to test their capabilities, and to learn from mistakes (Cline, 2007; Dickson, 2012). Despite LOA organisations' best efforts to keep levels of risk acceptable, the dynamic environment in which many LOAs take place means that LOA leaders and their participants can sometimes find themselves in situations that their organisation has not anticipated, and hence are outside their organisation's procedures or their own experiences or knowledge. These situations may have the potential to negatively impact the safety of the activity leaders and participants. Research from other domains has shown that one means of devising solutions to such unplanned for safety critical situations is through improvisation (e.g. Weick, 1993; Mendonça, 2007; Grøtan, Størseth, Rø, & Skjerve, 2008). This study considers safety-related improvisation in LOAs.

Improvisation is an ambiguous concept in relation to safety. Inappropriately devised or poorly executed improvisation has contributed to adverse outcomes for activity leaders and participants. Examples include the Mangatepopo Gorge incident in 2008, in which six students and their teacher were swept over a spill weir and drowned after following

their LOA leader's improvised plan to exit the flooded Mangatepopo gorge in New Zealand (Brookes, Smith, & Corkill, 2009), and the Ptarmigan Peak incident in Alaska, in which two students died after the failure of the improvised roping and anchoring system devised by the activity leaders led to all four roped climbing groups becoming detached from the slope and falling into a boulder field (Williamson, Ratz & Miller, 1997). To the contrary, evidence from other safety critical domains such as firefighting and emergency response services (e.g. Klein, 1999, pp.19-20; Bigley & Roberts, 2001; Roux-Dufort and Vidiallet, 2003), and aviation (e.g. National Transportation Safety Board, 2010) indicates that appropriate, effective improvisation can save lives. This suggests that improvisation by LOA leaders and their organisations, if appropriate and effective, may also have the potential to impact positively on the safety of participants and leaders in the event that they find themselves in an unanticipated, safety critical situation. An improved understanding of improvisation in relation to LOAs may, therefore, provide new insights into safety for LOA organisations. As a first step in this line of inquiry, research is required to understand the nature of improvisation during LOAs.

This article presents the findings from an exploratory study that was undertaken as part of a wider research program examining improvisation by LOA leaders. Specifically, a survey study was undertaken to provide broader evidence that improvisation takes place in safety critical situations within the LOA domain. The aims of this study were to identify the circumstances in which safety-related

# Supervision of school and youth groups on lift-served ski slopes: A research perspective

*Andrew Brookes and Peter Holmes*

*La Trobe University*

## Abstract

Supervised practice is a common feature of many snow sports excursions to downhill ski resorts by school or youth groups, often in combination with lessons from a ski school. What is the role of supervision in preventing mishaps, injury, or fatalities? This article presents results of a search of published snow sports safety research for evidence and findings that have implications for supervision.

We sought and examined published research that had the potential to inform supervision practice, with a particular emphasis on more recent publications and review articles. The premise was that insights into accident patterns and causes could improve injury prevention and safety decisions in organisations and in the field, should those insights be applied.

The study examined: How death and serious injury arise in somewhat different circumstances than more common, less serious injury; use of helmets and other protection; the effectiveness of ski lessons in preventing injury; potential for monitoring the application of lessons; understanding environmental hazards and any relationship with slope classification. We noted that patterns and causes of injury in terrain parks are distinct enough to warrant separate treatment, and should not be regarded as part and parcel of overall supervision of skiing or snowboarding.

Keywords: Outdoor education, snowsports, supervision, safety, skiing, snowboarding, injury prevention

## Introduction

School and youth groups are a common sight on Australian ski slopes, particularly mid week, and the school snow trip is a fixture of many school extra-curricula offerings. Published guidelines for such trips commonly make a distinction between instruction (often by a ski school) and supervision by accompanying teachers or assistants. Although supervision guidelines can take a norm-referenced approach (as in defining common or accepted practice), in this article we take a criterion-referenced approach, framed by the question what must supervision achieve to prevent injury or death?

How snow sports supervision is defined and managed varies depending on the administering authority. The Victorian Department of Education, for example, requires the following:

A teacher registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching and either employed by the Department of Education or endorsed by the school council must be present and have overall responsibility for the activity .... [w]here not directly responsible for the instruction of the activity or assisting the instructor, the teacher present must understand the activity and the environment in which it will be conducted.... The teacher in charge is responsible for the supervision strategy, which must be endorsed by the school council as part of the excursion approval

process. (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013)

Some Local Area Authorities in the UK require specific qualifications. For example, the Highland Council requires Teachers leading a snow sports excursion to have a National Governing Body Award (The Highland Council, 2012). In Scotland the governing body is Snowsport Scotland, which offers an Alpine Ski Leader qualification (a six day course) (Michie & Tate, 2010). The supervisors, under the direction of the leader, are required to have completed a three-hour theory session and to have: "knowledge of the environment that is being used and the associated hazards. Individuals need to be familiar with the generic risk assessments for the activity they are supervising and the location which will either be on snow or an artificial surface." (The Highland Council, 2012)

The Snowsport Scotland Alpine ski leader manual runs to 176 pages, and devotes a short section explicitly to supervision, which maintains that "[Supervision] is the major responsibility that the leader undertakes. The responsibility is both constant and total." It continues: "The leader is also responsible for ensuring that there is, at all times, an adequate level of supervision." (Michie & Tate, 2010, p. 103). Six dot points follow, including the terms adequate, appropriate, and suitable, but exactly what supervision consists of remains implicitly for supervisors themselves to determine.

# Listening Place

*Laura Piersol*

*Simon Fraser University*

## Abstract

Within the field of outdoor education, some theorists argue that although leaps and gains have been made in terms of educating for the intrapersonal or 'self'-development, they have come at the expense of the development of equally important relations with the local land and community (Hales, 2006; Loynes, 2002). Given this foregrounding of self over interpersonal and place-based relationships, this study aimed to explore the relationship to place that exists amongst members of a university education research team. In particular, it addresses how interpersonal relations might inform relationship with the land. The principle questions that guided the study were: What lessons can be learned from a space of 'deep listening' in place? And what might this offer to our lived experiences and understandings of outdoor and ecological education? The methodology of narrative inquiry was utilized to gain a deeper understanding of what place and human others have to teach by engaging with the stories they have to tell. Six themes emerged from the interviews based on what the participants deemed to be important in the process of listening to place and strengthening ecological relations. This paper explores each theme and shares possible implications for the field of outdoor education.

Keywords: place-based education, listening; narrative inquiry, interpersonal relations, more-than-human world

## Introduction

A relationship with 'place' has the potential to transform our practice as educators. As Gruenewald (2003a) states, "an understanding of it [place] is key to understanding the nature of our relationships with each other and the world" (p.622). Yet, renowned nature writer Hay (as cited in Gessner, 2005) has said that one of the worst things happening on the planet right now is that we are "forgetting about localities", our place in the world where we take root, take responsibility and form community (p.16). The result being that we become increasingly alienated from the neighbours (human and more-than-human) that we occupy this earth with and the lessons they might offer us (Baker, 2005; Evernden, 1993). It seems as though even the field of outdoor education is not immune to this trend.

In 1986, Priest proposed that outdoor education promote a blend of relationships including: intrapersonal, interpersonal, ecosystemic and ekistic. Since then, Hales (2006) and Loynes (1998; 2002) have made compelling arguments that although leaps and gains have been made in terms of educating for the intrapersonal or self-development within the field they have come at the expense of the development of equally important relations with the local land and community. Loynes (2002) has argued that the current, dominant approach to outdoor education ends up stripping lessons of their context and particularity, he states:

My concerns were that an 'off the shelf', commodified approach to providing adventure experiences and talking about them was counter to the organic and emergent nature of experiential learning

as it takes account of environments, individuals, groups, cultures and activities and the experiences that arise from their interaction. (p. 113)

Among his primary concerns is the fact that "groups are understood as teams in the context of a shared goal and not as communities with a multiplicity of needs and dreams" and that the individualized nature of outdoor programs often comes "at the expense of human interdependence" (Loynes, 2002, p.114). He also points out that within the dominant paradigm of outdoor and experiential learning, the rest of the natural world is viewed as a "resource" rather than "a home to which to relate" (p. 114). Haluza-Delay (1999a) points out that within the field the natural world has also been seen as "opponent" to "conquer" (p.130). Loynes (1998) warns that by embodying such values, whether intentional or not, we are on a slippery slope sliding towards disconnecting people from the very community and places that the field originally attempted to highlight. Hales (2006) echoes this concern, stating:

Despite the intentions of the motive of service in promoting equality of self, others and the environment there still appears to be a trend in some outdoor education practice to prioritise self-development over the development of relations with others and the environment. (p. 54)

Baker (2005) specifically highlights the disconnection from place that is happening within experiential education, stating "the day has passed when participants can leave adventure-based programs with a sense of accomplishment, but without a sense of their relationship to the land" (p. 268-9).



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# John Dewey and education outdoors: Making sense of the 'educational situation' through more than a century of progressive reforms

*Reviewed by Robyn Zink*

Quay, J., & Seaman, J. (2013). *John Dewey and education outdoors: Making sense of the 'educational situation' through more than a century of progressive reforms*. The Netherlands: Sense Publishers

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Like many who work in outdoor education, my introduction to John Dewey was through the idea that an experience only becomes educative when it is reflected upon. As I learnt how to be an outdoor educator I learnt I had a responsibility to provide students with a good quality experience in the outdoors, which had to be followed by some form of reflection if they were to learn from that experience. This Deweyian "fact" was presented as a given. Over the years working with groups I did begin to think the relationship between experience, reflection and learning was more complex and nuanced than the "do and reflect cycle" that underpins outdoor education. It was not until I started to read the work of John Dewey that it became clear that "do and reflect" was a highly distilled and oversimplified version of one small component of his educational philosophy.

Given Dewey is heralded as one of the founding fathers of outdoor education, it continues to surprise me that there is not more work in the field that engages directly with Dewey's ideas. *John Dewey and education outdoors* is a very welcome addition to the small body of work on Dewey in outdoor education.

The premise of this book is that outdoor education, as with education generally, suffers from what Dewey called educational confusion. This is the persistent dichotomies between subject matter and method, or as Dewey referred to it, between curriculum and the child. In addressing this confusion the authors do three things. First they "explain how Dewey's theory has been approached wrongly" (p. 63). Second they "discuss how Dewey situated his theory in recent human history" (p. 63), and finally they "describe the educational program Dewey developed on the back of these ideas, in which *experience* and *education* are unified" (p. 63). They do this through Dewey's concept of occupation.

Quay and Seaman start the book by locating outdoor education in recent human history. They confine their discussion to the development of outdoor education in the USA, profiling key reformers and the ideas they promulgated from the 1900s. Outdoor

education or, open-air or out-door schools were opened in response to the health needs of children. The potential that these out-door schools held for bringing alive the curriculum, particularly with regard to nature studies, was seen as self-evident by early reformers. Nature study was outside the norms of education at this time, which focused on memorization and spelling, reading, writing and arithmetic. But nature study was "gradually subsumed within the system" (p. 16), transforming into botany; subject matter that could be chunked for sequential delivery and assessment.

In another round of reform where there was an attempt to put the interests of the child ahead of the curriculum Cap'n Bill Vinal advocated for nature-lore; knowledge gained through experience in the outdoors. He promoted camps as an appropriate setting for this type of education. But as the camp movement grew, Quay and Seaman point out similar conflicts between the perceived needs of the child and the curriculum emerged. It is here that the authors delve into the outdoor education as method or as subject matter tension that has bedevilled the field in detail. The emergence of adventure-based education in the latter part of the 20th Century only exacerbated this tension.

In the following chapter the authors chart how the environmental crisis has been mobilised in outdoor education and how this intersects with a desire for adventure. As with the previous chapter the argument turns on the tensions between outdoor education as subject or as method. Quay and Seaman pay particular attention to what they call *the period of experiential education* because direct experience became a central pillar of outdoor education during this time. It is here they bring Dewey directly into the conversation because of his concern with experience. They point out that he found the advocacy for direct experience in education to be very problematic as "it was clear to him that even in the traditional classroom, where the focus was chiefly on subject matter, experiences were being had" (p. 54). Key to Dewey's argument is that subject matter cannot be disconnected from method; the two are in dialogue. Keeping subject and method in a persistent dichotomy maintains the confusion