

# Individual Outcomes of Participating in Adventure

*Jim Stiehl and Melissa Parker*

“What motivates the adventurer? It has never been an easy question to answer in anything less than a ramble, since, like describing the beautiful scent of a flower, describing the “why” of adventure must always fall short. It is all in the experiencing.”

—Will Steger



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## Chapter Concepts

- ◆ Present-day benefits of adventure are best understood in their historical context.
- ◆ Following the merger of the camping and education movements, specific adventure education outcomes began to be delineated.
- ◆ Adventure education can accomplish many outcomes in several domains, including positive identity, social skills, physical and thinking skills, and positive values and spirituality.
- ◆ Attempting to achieve too many outcomes, especially if any contradict or compete with others, may dilute program effectiveness.
- ◆ Achieving desired outcomes requires a deliberate alignment of philosophy, goals, instruction, and assessment.
- ◆ In today's educational climate, many people are skeptical of claimed benefits unless those benefits have been empirically validated.



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The time is late July. A five-day, 65-mile (105-kilometer) river trip is slated for 11 adults and 2 children: a mother and her 23-year-old daughter on the river for the first time without Dad; a couple who run about 10 rivers every summer; another couple who are raft guides and their 7-year-old; a third couple who have not taken a backcountry trip together in years; a woman recently divorced after 30 years of marriage; and a former NOLS instructor and her 13-year-old child, neither with any river experience. Each participant knows someone else in the group, but no one knows everyone.

Embarking with five rafts, two duckies (an inflatable cross between a kayak and a raft), one canoe, and a kayak, the group begins their travels down a remote southwestern river. In a high-walled canyon carved through wilderness, the group navigates a river that is flowing at 900 cubic feet per second (26 cubic meters per second) with an 8-foot (2.5-meter) drop each mile. Rapids, though not extreme, are challenging and frequent. After the first night, however, circumstances change dramatically. Following violent thunderstorms, flash floods pour down the canyon sides. The river quickly becomes deep red, and the flow increases to 2,600 cubic feet per second (74 cubic meters per second). What are the benefits of adventure for the participants in this scenario? Later in this chapter we will explore the answers.

In 1974, Maurice Gibbons compared a young aborigine's readiness for adulthood with that of city children. The young aborigine must survive a severe but appropriate six-month trial in a forbidding wilderness. He must demonstrate that he can be a contributor to the tribe. By contrast, youngsters

in our society often face "written examinations that test skills very far removed from the actual experience he will have in real life" (1974). In a similar vein, a college president in a newspaper cartoon belittles graduating students as having grown up in front of screens, saturated in popular culture, mesmerized by a world of fantasy, where entertainment is a national obsession and even "reality" is staged. The tone of the Gibbons article and the cartoon is reminiscent of renowned scholar James Coleman's earlier indictment of Western education, that too many of today's young people grow up information rich but experience poor. Quite the opposite, adventure programs are experience rich, using real-world experiences to achieve learning goals. But what are those goals?

Excitement, personal growth, achievement of goals, learning to trust and respect others—these and countless other desired outcomes have been associated with participation in adventure experiences. Not surprisingly, lists of adventure outcomes and the importance attached to each outcome vary considerably. This is due at least in part to the fact that discussions have not always used the adventure construct in similar ways. We believe that adventure education should be defined in the context of other constructs, such as adventure-based recreation, therapeutic adventure, and outdoor education. By drawing boundaries among such constructs, adventure programmers can be more specific about intended program goals.

In this chapter we begin by briefly describing the underpinnings of present-day outcomes of adventure programs. The benefits to participants are then grouped into several categories. These catego-

ries can assist in determining program intentions, verifying whether those results are achieved, and designing instructional activities that will engage participants in attaining the benefits. We conclude with some questions that might help determine the extent to which you are being mindful of adventure benefits and outcomes.

## Foundational Adventure Outcomes

Several people have received credit for advancing our thinking about the role of adventure situations in promoting educational goals (see Hunt 1999). Plato and Aristotle, for instance, agreed that young people could acquire and strengthen virtues (e.g., wisdom, bravery, temperance, and justice) by engaging in adventurous experiences that demanded those virtues. William James, a 19th-century philosopher and psychologist, argued that nature-based adventure could bring out many of the virtues taught through war, such as fidelity, conscience, inventiveness, discipline, and tenacity. In the mid-20th century, Kurt Hahn, embracing principles of the ancient Greek tradition, featured adventure education in his celebrated Outward Bound program. Adventure experiences were used to promote qualities such as spiritual tenacity, personal growth, service to others, and physical preparedness.

It is worth noting that a goal common to Plato, Aristotle, James, and Hahn is the teaching of virtue, and that each of their perspectives was somehow linked to the notion of war. Plato emphasized virtues in his descriptions of the best way to raise children to become responsible adults and, if necessary, warriors. Aristotle reinforced this position in his firm contention that virtues are acquired by forming good habits; that is, by living the virtues (e.g., becoming brave by doing brave acts). William James applauded risk taking in war as a means to teach human virtues, but he detested war. Thus, he did not advocate learning virtues through war, but rather through what he described as moral equivalents of war.

Kurt Hahn advocated military virtues such as facing dangers, dealing with unexpected difficulties, enduring hardships, and developing a fighting spirit. Unlike his predecessors, however, he also encouraged qualities that were not necessarily tied to war, such as service to others and respect for the environment. Regardless of the specific virtues championed by these forebears, all discussed adventure as a means, not an end in itself. As

stressed by Jasper Hunt, adventure was viewed as the “mere means to a much loftier end—human virtue” (1999).

Thus far, we have drawn attention to the implications of adventure education for living and learning virtues. But as Hunt contends, adventure education “has applicability far beyond the teaching of moral virtues” (1999). True knowing, for example, cannot be equated with passive reception of knowledge, unquestioned acceptance of authority, and the absence of risk. Rather, it is more complex and requires ingredients fundamental to adventure such as taking risks and facing uncertainty. At the heart of work by Henry David Thoreau and John Dewey is the conviction that genuine learning derives from thinking, inquiring, and questioning in situations connected to one’s own experience. This questioning is linked to risk: What might happen if I question my current understanding? What might it cost me to change my viewpoint? Looking good? Being right?

Since adventure education involves questioning and risk taking, Hunt (1999) concludes, “If adventure is an effective means for learning virtue, then . . . it is a good means for learning other things as well. As adventure education shows its effectiveness in the moral education realm, it gains additional justification for branching out into other educational areas.”

Let’s survey some traditional outcomes of adventure experiences. Though certainly not exhaustive, the list provides a sense of commonality as well as diversity in trying to identify and categorize the multiple benefits of adventure.

## Traditional Adventure Outcomes

The earliest adventure outcomes were derived from outdoor education in the context of general education. More specific outcomes were not clearly articulated until L.B. Sharpe began experimenting with education in camp settings in the 1920s. As the field matured, more sophisticated organizations emerged that worked to gain support for outdoor education in public schools. A pioneer in these efforts, Julian W. Smith, contributed in 1955 to the Outdoor Education Project, a cooperative enterprise between the American Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD) and educational programs throughout the nation (Smith et al. 1972). The purpose of the project was to expand and enrich educational programs in public schools, colleges, and universities through outdoor education.



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The first specific adventure education outcomes were articulated in the context of camping.

Smith and colleagues (1972) viewed outdoor education as “an approach to teaching, and a setting and process whereby learning is facilitated.” Supporting earlier notions of means rather than an end, Smith and colleagues remarked, “Since outdoor education has no identifiable content of its own, it has no goals other than those of general education.” A task force of AAHPERD’s Council on Outdoor Education and Camping submitted a number of educational goals that could be achieved through outdoor education. The list of eight goals follows (see Smith et al. 1972):

- To develop the full potential of the individual
- To develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and appreciation for the constructive and creative use of leisure time
- To promote the development of social relations and individual responsibility
- To promote the development of civic responsibility
- To promote the development of aesthetic interests and appreciations
- To help people become more self-reliant and secure
- To provide opportunities for people to strengthen their self-concept

- To develop awareness, appreciation, understanding, and respect for our relationship and stewardship responsibility to the natural environment

Later, Paul Darst and George Armstrong (1980) were convinced that the “addition of outdoor adventure activities to recreation programs and physical education curriculums should prove to be a most significant development in this century.” This was a time of considerable growth in adventure activities, which provide participants with a degree of excitement, risk, and challenge absent in many traditional sport and recreation activities. Aspiring to include outdoor adventure activities in schools and recreation programs, Darst and Armstrong identified numerous benefits. They reasoned that the benefits could be attributed to three motives—personal, economic, and social-psychological (see table 5.1).

Yet another set of benefits is offered by Alan Ewert (1989), who has been prominent in helping to give us a better understanding of outdoor adventure. He views the adventure experience as “a highly personal experience entirely understandable only to the individual.” Emphasizing two commonalities (“uncertainty of outcome and elements of risk and danger”), he separates the benefits and expectations of participation in outdoor adventure into four categories: psychological, sociological, educational, and physical (see table 5.2).

**TABLE 5.1**

**Darst and Armstrong's Benefits of Outdoor Adventure**

<b>Personal</b>	<b>Economic</b>	<b>Social-psychological</b>
New experience—adds a kick to participants' lives, allows them to experience something they haven't tried before.	Minimal financial investment—provides interesting and pleasant activities at a reasonable cost.	Socializing—provides a chance to meet others who have similar interests.
High-risk experience—facing perceived danger may help participants overcome fears, gain self-confidence, and enhance their ability to cope.		Unity—promotes cohesiveness and doing things together without the distractions of everyday life (e.g., television, telephone, social responsibilities).
Escape—offers release from the tensions and complexities of modern life.		Cooperation and trust—promotes better relationships through cooperation, appreciation of others, compassion, and respect.
Success—allows participants to achieve a highly personal sense of accomplishment.		Nature and the outdoors—promotes aesthetic appreciation for nature and concern for vanishing wild places.
Knowledge—participants learn more about themselves and the environment.		
Physical fitness—physical activity can help burn calories and increase strength, stamina, and flexibility.		

**TABLE 5.2**

**Ewert's Benefits of Outdoor Adventure**

Psychological	Benefits on a personal (versus group) basis: Self-concept (enhanced or strengthened view of oneself), self-efficacy (self-confidence), self-actualization (well-being, or improved self-expression and feelings of psychological health)
Sociological	Compassion, cooperation, respect for others, communication
Educational	Improved academic abilities, awareness of nature and the environment, problem solving, outdoor skills, value clarification
Physical	Strength, coordination, balance, cardiovascular endurance

In his introductory chapter to *Adventure Programming*, David Webb (1999) refers to the "great diversity" of organizations, products, services, and delivery of outdoor adventure today. Webb asserts that, despite this diversity, the goals and benefits of all outdoor adventure can be associated with three developmental objectives: recreation, skill, and character. See table 5.3 for examples of Webb's objectives.

Much of the early literature about the outcomes of adventure derives from insights from various champions of adventure. Despite the consistency of these perspectives, it is no longer acceptable to claim benefits without attempting to validate such claims. Thus, in the last decade there has been a rise in objective empirical studies designed to assess participant perceptions of various outcomes (e.g., Holman et al. 2004). Nevertheless, categories of adventure outcomes continue to vary according to authors' and researchers' findings and intentions (e.g., program development, enhanced academic understanding, marketing and advertising), definitions used (e.g., adventure education, outdoor education, outdoor adventure pursuits, experiential education, adventure therapy), and discipline (e.g., recreation versus education).

Acknowledging this diversity, Simon Priest (1999) suggests four distinct categories of adventure programming that are based on the program's primary focus: recreational (changing how people feel), educational (changing how people think), developmental (changing how people behave),

and therapeutic (changing how people misbehave). Jude Hirsch (1999) elaborates on the primary goals for each of these categories:

- Recreation: fun, laughter, challenge, excitement, initiative, and so on
- Education: change in sense of identity or self-concept
- Development: learning associated with a generic theme such as cooperation, communication, or trust
- Psychotherapy: learning about interpersonal processes that apply to relationships with significant others

Priest (1999) asserts that "one adventure program can deliver all four types of programming," and Hirsch (1999) concurs that "we are all doing adventure education; therefore, there will be universals." However, classifying programs into such categories does not seem to provide programming directives that address the needs of the individual or outcomes that apply to the whole person using adventure as a means rather than an end in itself. While programs may be designed for different purposes, the individual outcomes or benefits should transcend program type to meet the needs of the individual.

Although outcomes across categories sometimes overlap, they also often contain concepts that are vague in terms of actual learning or outcome gains. In the next section, we offer categories that encom-

TABLE 5.3

### Webb's Goals and Benefits of Outdoor Adventure

Recreational	Skill	Character
Enjoyment	Goal setting	Independence
Relaxation	Decision making	Interdependence
Entertainment	Problem solving	Self-efficacy
Excitement	Responsibility	Willingness to take risks
Catharsis	Physical development	Tolerance
Self-expression	Nature awareness	Respect
	Communication	Trust
	Leadership	Compassion

Adapted from S. Priest, 1999, Introduction: Experientia. In *Adventure programming*, edited by J.C. Miles and S. Priest (State College, PA: Venture), xiii-xiv.

pass both educational and recreational goals and that provide tangible definitions of outcomes that are designed for and taught through adventure.

## Tangible Outcomes of Adventure

For the purposes of this chapter we suggest that there are distinctions between adventure and outdoor programs that reside in their primary purpose, the setting in which they are conducted, and the risk involved. Outdoor programs focus on the development of technical skill in the natural setting and thus involve actual risk. On the other hand, adventure programs focus on personal and group development in developed areas and concentrate on perceived risk. While adventure and outdoor could be two ends of a continuum with much overlap in the middle, the distinctions become important when determining goals and benefits of programs.

Our interest in original and current proponents of adventure led us repeatedly to the American Camp Association (ACA). Founded in 1910, the ACA represents all segments of the camp profession and is dedicated to enriching the lives of children and adults through camp experiences. A recently published ACA document provides a starting point for defining and categorizing adventure outcomes (2005b). The document summarizes a large

research study of camper outcomes. Results from the study provide evidence that camp is a positive force in youth development. Moreover, many of the aspects of positive growth mentioned in this study correspond with outcomes cited in previous literature. The following domains used in the ACA study can assist in identifying specific goals for adventure programmers.

### Positive Identity

If we address the possible goals or benefits of adventure education in terms of benefits to the participant, the notion of positive identity has remained primary through the decades. While *positive identity* is a bit of a nebulous term, it generally includes various aspects of character development such as self-esteem, determination, dependability, ambition, and independence. Increases in self-esteem lead to feelings of worth, competence, confidence, and optimism. Independence fosters stepping out of one's comfort zone into unfamiliar territory that produces anxiety and fear as well as exhilaration, initiative, and calculated risk taking.

### Social Skills

The acquisition of social skills extends beyond the individual benefits of positive identity by focusing on participants' interactions with each



Adventure provides occasions for being together and feeling connected to something outside ourselves.

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## CAREERS IN ADVENTURE

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**NAME:** Heidi Shingleton

**JOB:** Senior Wilderness Instructor, New Horizons for Young Women (Springfield, Maine)

**BACKGROUND:** BS in social work, Colorado State University; MS in sport pedagogy, University of Northern Colorado

**WHAT'S YOUR JOB**

**LIKE?** I lead eight-day therapeutic wilderness expeditions throughout the state of Maine. Mode of transportation depends on the season (backpacking, canoeing, snowshoeing, and dog sledding). I am responsible for the supervision of three coinstructors and six adolescent girls.

New Horizons for Young Women is a therapeutic wilderness program that lasts six to nine weeks. The focus of the program is emotional growth, requiring me to run groups and facilitate personal enlightenment aligned with the girls' treatment plans. The backwoods of Maine is used as the vehicle that promotes change. Each day is unique, posing its individual challenges and splendor.



One minute I may discover a moose enjoying its afternoon snack, the next I might have to reduce a girl's injured shoulder. I spend the majority of my life living out of my tent and in the company of adolescents, many of whom have been kicked out of school, some of whom have been raped, and all of whom have undergone numerous psychological diagnoses. The dynamics of my job require me to rely on a multitude

of skills: communication, navigation, outdoor technical competence, wilderness medicine, crisis response, and written documentation.

I am fortunate to have a job that allows me to enjoy the natural world while facilitating personal discovery. I am amazed by the girls' resiliency and I am empowered by their ability to reset their lives and forge ahead. My advice to others wanting to enter this field is to jump in with both feet, expect to be exhausted, and always remember to listen to your intuition.

other. The social dimension of adventure can be highly significant. For example, challenges in an adventure setting can facilitate group bonding and cooperation. Working as a team, people can learn to resolve disagreements, appreciate differences, develop new friendships, and generally get along with others. Adventure experiences also can offer opportunities to demonstrate leadership and to accept responsibilities unavailable in other settings. Finally, adventure provides occasions for being together, having a sense of community, enjoying the company of like-minded people, and feeling connected to something larger than oneself.

### Physical and Thinking Skills

In their 1929 classic book, *Camping and Character*, Dimock and Hendry list skills in camping activities such as canoeing, swimming, riding, and sailing accompanied by the associated knowledge as the first and second objectives of the summer camp experience. Few would argue this potential benefit of adventure education. Physical benefits can be classified as the psychomotor and technical skills required for participation in activities that entail moving across land or water by natural means. The physiological gains of exercise constitute another aspect of physical benefits.

Depending on the setting, adventure education can provide the venue for the acquisition of a vast array of physical and thinking skills that are usually associated with living outdoors. Thinking skills include knowledge of safety measures and the need to follow them as well as knowledge of skills and the environment in which they take place (Ford and Blanchard 1985). Higher-order thinking skills such as planning and solving problems are an often sought-after benefit. Additionally, most adventure programs tap into their setting to provide environmental awareness as a cognitive outcome.

### Positive Values and Spirituality

As mentioned earlier, acquiring and strengthening virtues was an overriding concern for early proponents of adventure experiences. The need for virtuous conduct is just as important now as it was then (some would argue more so). Successful participation in today's complex society demands making appropriate decisions and accepting the consequences of one's choices. Insights gained from constructive adventure experiences can help instill positive values and principles such as selflessness and compassion, keeping commitments and fulfilling obligations, self-discipline, and honesty, to name

a few. These values and principles are important in that they can assist in "achieving some harmony between principles of self-interest and altruism. It suggests that not only can we explore, develop, and appreciate our own unique potential, but that we can use our emerging abilities to benefit others and the environment in which we all live. Consequently, by becoming responsible we can reaffirm our own worth, our sense of belonging, and our awareness of place" (Parker and Stiehl 2005).

Certainly for many, outdoor adventure experiences involve a spiritual component. Spirituality, although often associated with religion, can be painted with a much broader stroke. When adventure programs are conducted in the outdoors, contact with the natural environment can add a spiritually moving dimension; "either because of the beautiful natural setting, the opportunities for bonding with others, or meaningful religious practices, young people have an opportunity to connect to the earth, to each other, and perhaps to a higher power" (ACA 2005a).

We believe in a humble orientation to the environment—that the outdoor world does not exist for the hedonistic pursuits of a privileged few, that loud people who speak before listening, who use more than their share of the air to announce their identity, are like destructive initials on a tree trunk tarred with a brush of unsustainable and repugnant attitudes. The natural world rejuvenates the soul and reminds us of our place in this awe-inspiring world. It is where we come closest to appreciating our connectedness with the rest of creation.

## Achieving Benefits

It is abundantly clear that adventure education has a vast potential for achieving a multitude of goals, educational and otherwise. The uniqueness of the environment and the activities provide a venue not only for learning new skills and acquiring relevant knowledge, but also for promoting calculated risk taking, camaraderie with others, and reverence for the natural world. The larger question, however, may be this: Is adventure education reaching its potential? In 1918, Bobbitt stated,

The controlling purposes of education have not been sufficiently particularized. We have aimed at a vague culture, an ill-defined discipline, indefinite moral character building, an unparticularized social efficiency, or nothing more than an escape from a life of work. Often there are no controlling purposes; the momentum of the educational machine keeps it running. So long as objectives are but vague guesses,

or not even that, there can be no demand for anything but vague guesses as to means and procedures. But the era of contentment with large undefined purposes is rapidly passing. (41-42)

While Bobbitt was speaking of traditional education in kindergarten through 12th grade, it would not be unreasonable to substitute adventure education for education in his admonition.

All too often adventure education has relied on its novelty as an attractor while neglecting to design learning environments in which deliberate goal acquisition is the chief aim. If adventure programs are to mean something, they must first

- be built on a solid philosophy that reflects the values and beliefs of the program designers,
- state important goals,
- include a way of measuring those goals, and
- incorporate instructional practices that allow participants to demonstrate achievement of the goals (Tannehill and Lund 2005).

Good content that is poorly delivered or good intentions with weak or inappropriate content are unlikely to produce favorable results.

### Stating a Philosophy

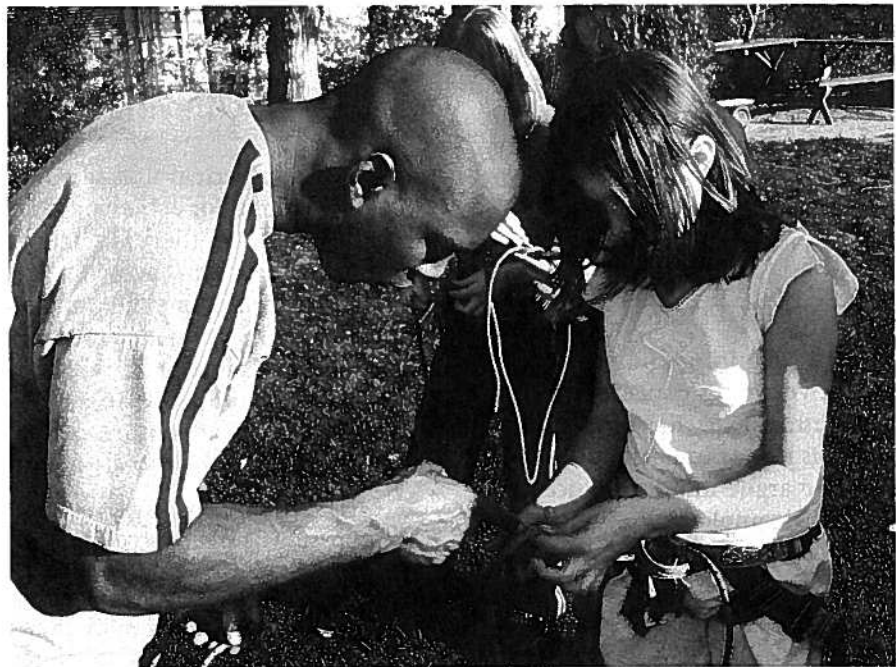
The philosophy of any adventure program provides the foundational beliefs that undergird all

subsequent decisions of a program. The philosophy emanates from the beliefs and values of the program designers, the participants the program serves, and the setting of the program. In adventure programming, a philosophy might range from providing participants with the physical skills necessary for being more active in the outdoor environment to simply offering a venue for fun and escape. Adventure programs, whether recreational or educational, should contain a clear philosophy that leads to discernible learning or benefits, even if those benefits are an escape from ordinary life.

### Determining Goals, Assessments, and Instructional Strategies

Once a philosophy has been articulated, the following three questions can guide what educational experts have referred to as **backward design** (Wiggins and McTighe 1998), an **outcomes approach** (Spady and Marshall 1991), and **design-down curricular process** (Lambert 2003).

1. **What do we want our participants to know and be able to do as a result of being in our program?** In educational terms, this is a curricular question of what is to be taught. By answering it, adventure programmers and educators identify what's important and the deliberate intended outcomes of their programs. Wiggins and



Adventure programs should result in discernible learning.

McTighe (1998) define this information as “enduring understandings” because it represents what we want participants to gain from our programs.

**2. How do we know when participants have been successful?** The answer to this question allows programmers and educators to know when they have achieved the desired outcomes. Traditionally, adventure educators have used subjective observation to answer this question, if they answer it at all. To guide future programming and assist in participant achievement of desired benefits, systematic and objective means of documenting the achievement of benefits must be identified.

**3. How can we get participants to achieve desired outcomes in the most challenging and engaging ways possible?** Adventure activities are alluring for most participants. Over two decades ago, Young and Parker (1987) cautioned that this attraction could lead to a laxness in instruction resulting in haphazard acquisition of the desired outcomes. If adventure education is to reach its potential, learning experiences (instruction) must be designed to intentionally and purposefully lead participants toward the desired goals and benefits.

An example from a college-level basic hiking class may help clarify these points. One of the class goals is for students to acquire a greater appreciation and knowledge of the natural world around them—to really see what is out there. This includes curricular aspects of flora, fauna, and geological features. The use of written journals accompanied by teacher questioning and an out-of-class partner hike reported through a written and pictorial portfolio were determined to be meaningful and reasonable ways to determine if participants have, in fact, gained this information (assessment). Several instructional activities can then be designed to help students achieve the goal.

- In an effort to guide novice students’ initial journal entries, questions are given at the beginning of every hike that focus on the environment. Questions include such things as identifying a unique rock formation, signs of past human habitation, and five new flowers.
- Another strategy is to acquire a deck of cards with the suits changed to birds, flowers, trees, and animals and provide each participant with five cards. They then look for those things throughout the day.

- The instructor identifies flowers and birds along the trail while helping students learn key identification points.
- Knowing that beginning students most often walk looking at the back of the person in front of them, students can travel a designated section of trail in groups of three, increasing their ability to see.
- Candid camera is an instructional activity that asks students to walk in pairs, one person behind the other. The lead person is unsighted and guided by the sighted partner from behind through hands on the shoulders. When the sighted partner says “Click,” the unsighted partner quickly opens and shuts her eyes and reports to the sighted partner what she sees.
- Finally, after acquiring requisite skills and knowledge, participants walk solo for a while.

Because many of these activities require cooperating with a small group or partner, they might also have social benefits—especially if the groups are designed so that participants work with people they do not know.

Lambert (1999) uses the metaphor of a three-legged stool to emphasize the importance of each aspect of program development. If all three legs of the stool—**curriculum, assessment, and instruction**—are weighted equally, the stool is solid. If one or two legs are removed or weighted unequally, stability is compromised.

### Customizing Outcomes

One of the unique aspects of adventure education and programming is its ability to be used to achieve multiple goals, yet it is precisely this uniqueness that can become its Achilles heel. While in the quest to accomplish everything, nothing may be accomplished. Research on benefits from adventure programs supports this notion. For example, in terms of positive identity the results are equivocal; several studies report positive gains in self-esteem constructs (Carson and Gillis 1994; Hattie et. al 1997), some report mixed results (Hazelworth and Wilson 1990; Kaly and Heesacker 2003), and still others report no effect (Danziger 1982; Jernstedt and Johnson 1983; McBride 1984; O’Connell 2002; Pann 2000). The possible benefits of adventure programs cannot be argued, but the reality of those effects is varied.

## CAREERS IN ADVENTURE

**NAME:** Tim O'Connell

**JOB:** Associate Professor, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University (St. Catharines, Ontario)

**BACKGROUND:** BSE in recreation education, SUNY-Cortland; MEd in outdoor education and outdoor recreation, University of Minnesota; PhD in recreation resource management, New York University

**WHAT'S YOUR JOB LIKE?** My job responsibilities include teaching undergraduate and graduate classes in outdoor leadership, skills, and programming; conducting research on topics such as how a sense of community develops during wilderness trips; delivering semester-long skills-based courses in rock climbing, backpacking, canoeing, and other outdoor pursuits; and coediting the *Journal of Experiential Education*.

Being a university professor is a great job! After working for Wilderness Inquiry, an organization that provides integrated wilderness trips for people with and without disabilities, I accepted a university job. As a professor, I



continue to be able to blend earlier work experiences with my personal and professional interests. It is exciting to support students in realizing their potential as outdoor and adventure professionals. While many people think that university professors have a cushy job with time off during the summer, it is actually quite the opposite. My summers are filled with many undertakings such as conducting research, writing,

teaching in various programs around North America, volunteering to lead sea-kayaking symposia, preparing new course materials, developing grant proposals, and trying to keep my technical skills sharp. Thus, one of my biggest challenges is to balance the many demands of being a university professor with spending necessary field time with students as they experience outdoor recreation and adventure education firsthand. My advice for anyone who is thinking about becoming a university professor? Prior to pursuing graduate work, spend substantial time in the outdoor and adventure education field. Those experiences and skills will enhance your credibility and will make your job much easier.

As previously indicated, adherence to the guidelines of curriculum planners can better ensure the achievement of benefits. However, Jensen and Young (1981) and Stiehl and Parker (2005) take the achievement of benefits a step further. Even adventure programs with a clear philosophy are affected by time, clientele, location, expertise, and a host of idiosyncratic differences. Thus, it is unlikely that one program can be all things to all people. In the desire to have participants achieve all potential benefits, a program may not achieve any.

A useful delineation according to primary and secondary goals (Jensen and Young 1981) may help adventure programmers and educators focus on certain goals and benefits. Their contention is that programs may have primary goals or benefits and others are secondary or concomitant. For example, an outdoor adventure program that is part of a school physical education program might have as its foremost benefits the acquisition of outdoor skills such as orienteering, hiking, and so on for safe participation in outdoor activities. Therefore, physical and thinking goals would be primary. However, while students are learning those skills, they may well acquire social benefits through working with others, and they may develop a positive identity as they gain competence in a new activity. On the other hand, an adventure program that is part of a summer camp with articulated spiritual and social aspects would likely program experiences that use the outdoors as a medium to primarily gain increased spiritual awareness and social competence and secondarily teach necessary skills. Programs would thus be well served by articulating their philosophy to delineate primary and secondary goals and design activities to meet those goals.

Author Tom Robbins (1976) may have summed it up best: "If you believe in peace, act peacefully; if you believe in love, act lovingly; if you believe in every which way, then act every which way, that's perfectly valid—but don't go out trying to sell your beliefs to the System. You end up contradicting what you profess you believe in, and you set a bum example." Adventure education has many potential benefits. However, attempting to achieve too many benefits, especially if any contradict or compete with others, poses a risk of diluting program effectiveness.

Here are some questions that might help you determine the degree to which you are directing efforts toward the benefits and outcomes of adventure in your program:

1. Do you have clearly developed, publicly stated outcomes that underscore the benefits of adventure?
2. Do your outcomes align with the values and beliefs of your sponsors, advocates, and participants?
3. Are your outcomes appropriate for your participants' needs, interests, and abilities; your resources; and your staff knowledge and skills?
4. Do your activities and policies support your stated outcomes?
5. Do you have functional assessments for your stated outcomes?
6. Is there ongoing evaluation of the extent to which outcomes are being achieved?

## Summary

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Benefits to adventure participants can be grouped in four categories: positive identity, social skills, physical and thinking skills, and positive values and spirituality. Establishing a program philosophy and then deliberately deciding the intended results of the program, identifying how it will be known if those results are achieved, and designing specific instructional activities to engage participants in the attainment of the benefits all enhance the acquisition of these benefits. In the effort to avoid trying to do too much, program planners may want to establish primary and secondary goals.

How did the participants on the river trip in the opening scenario benefit from their adventure? For the 23-year-old daughter, it was a physical challenge because she had never rowed the river by herself. She was testing her technical skill. For the recently divorced woman, it provided feelings of increased self-worth and optimism as she ventured out on her own. For the couple that had not had the opportunity to take a trip together for a while, it provided a bonding experience and a chance to rediscover the things they enjoyed doing together. For the 13-year-old and the paddlers who took 10 or more trips a year, it was social—visiting, talking, making new friends. For the raft guides, it allowed appreciation of one of the most incredible natural resources in the southwestern United States. The medium of the river provided an adventure that allowed each participant to enjoy his own rewards. Furthermore, continuous fluctuations in river flow

provided ongoing challenges, which served to bring this diverse group closer together.

### *Review Questions*

1. How did Plato, Aristotle, William James, and Kurt Hahn each affect our understanding about the role of adventure in promoting education goals?
2. What did Henry David Thoreau and John Dewey contribute to our thinking about adventure education?
3. What are the historical roots of today's use of adventure and outdoors for promoting educational goals?
4. Compare and contrast Julian Smith's list of outdoor and adventure goals with those of his successors.
5. List and provide several examples for each of the four adventure outcome domains suggested by the ACA.
6. Select one of the ACA adventure outcome domains and discuss reasons for its justification as an independent domain.

7. Comment on the statement, Adventure education tends to be attractive, and yet also has been neglectful.
8. What are some key ingredients of a successful adventure education program? Elaborate on one of these ingredients.

### *Student Learning Activities*

1. Present a time line of historical events and views that lead to present-day concepts of adventure education goals and benefits.
2. Based on readings, observations, and personal experience, develop a list of adventure education benefits and compare them with those discussed in the chapter.
3. Identify several principal benefits of adventure education and design ways to assess or verify whether participants realize those benefits.
4. Describe some adventure activities and how their design plays a role in accomplishing explicit adventure education goals.
5. Design an overview of a proposed adventure education program, including (or perhaps debating) purported benefits.