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Anderson B. Young
SUNY Cortland

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BUILDING A RESEARCH COMMUNITY FOR OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Anderson B. Young, Chair
Second Biennial CEO Research Symposium

With the publication of the *Proceedings* of the Second Biennial Coalition for Education in the Outdoors Research Symposium, and with plans underway for the third symposium in 1996, it is appropriate to record the background and purposes of this initiative. In essence, these research symposia are an extension of the Coalition's commitment to communication for the enhancement of education in the outdoors. We seek to strengthen the field of outdoor education and to empower those associated with it.

The Coalition for Education in the Outdoors was established in 1987 as a means for improving communication among those involved in outdoor and environmental education. Ironically, one of the strengths of outdoor education—its interdisciplinary nature and its pursuit of multiple aims—is also one of its weaknesses. This multi-faceted nature of outdoor education has segmented the field into several interest areas. For example, there are a host of national associations that meet the needs of educators in the outdoors. Among them are the Association for Experiential Education, the American Camping Association, the National Recreation and Park Association, the Alliance for Environmental Education, the North American Association for Environmental Education, and the Council on Outdoor Education of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, to name a few. All do good work. Many have parallel programs in other countries and at the state and provincial levels. Each of these organizations has done much to serve the needs and interests of its members. Each tends to give primary emphasis to particular dimensions of education in the outdoors. Unfortunately, the proliferation of organizations made it almost impossible for both individuals and organizations to keep track of the

full range of developments in outdoor and environmental education.

The Coalition for Education in the Outdoors was created as an information clearinghouse to enable individuals and associations to keep in touch with one another. CEO is not an individual membership organization, but a collection of associations, businesses, agencies, and educational institutions involved with outdoor education. The Coalition seeks not to duplicate services of existing organizations, but to extend the reach of those organizations. It has done so principally through its quarterly publication, *The Taproot*, and secondarily through conferences.

CEO's research symposia are an extension of its networking mission. Most national and state outdoor education organizations are practitioner-oriented. While each tends to understand the importance of research and includes programs and services related to research, few have been able to sustain and nurture an on-going research community. For this reason, the founders of CEO established a research committee that would help the Coalition to advance the philosophical, empirical, and theoretical bases of outdoor education. That committee, first chaired by Camille Bunting of Texas A & M, organized the inaugural symposium in 1992 and laid the foundation for this second symposium and the ongoing work of CEO in the area of research and scholarship.

To advance the philosophical, theoretical, and empirical bases of outdoor education, these symposia have three subordinate aims. First, as reflected by these *Proceedings*, the symposium marks an opportunity for scholars to present their work to one another and to the larger community of outdoor educators. Second, the symposium is designed to build a sense of community among those interested in outdoor education

Dr. Young is professor of recreation and leisure studies at the State University of New York at Cortland. Correspondence should be directed to: Anderson Young, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, SUNY-Cortland, Cortland, NY 13045, (607) 753-4941.

PREFACE

research and scholarship. Third, the symposium provides a forum where participants can explore other means of accomplishing their research and scholarly aims for outdoor education. Each of these subordinate aims merits some elaboration.

These *Proceedings*, like the first set, include a group of research reports and essays on a wide variety of outdoor education related topics. Some deal with measurement issues and methodological problems in outdoor education research. Others deal with outdoor leadership from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective. Still others focus on the outcomes of school-based outdoor education programs or summer camp programs. The *Proceedings*, like the symposium itself, reflect the diversity of outdoor education, and they likely would not have been published as a group by any single outdoor or environmental education organization because of that diversity.

Although this publication is an important product of the symposium, the less formal communication at the symposium is an equally important, though less tangible, outcome. The participants at the symposium reflected the diversity of outdoor education. This symposium attracted a group of people that would never have gathered at the meetings of any of the many fine conferences throughout the year. There were practitioners from summer camps, nature centers, public schools, and youth-serving agencies.

The university people came from a host of disciplines—psychology, education, recreation, physical education, forestry, and natural resources. The symposium was structured to be highly interactive and supportive. Participants sought each other out for help in the design of future studies. Research partnerships were formed. In essence, the symposium cultivated a sense of community and cooperation among its participants.

Third, the symposium provided a forum to address areas of ongoing concern to researchers and scholars in the field. Topics under continuing discussion included: (1) creation of a new refereed research journal (or strengthening of an existing one); (2) gender issues in outdoor education; (3) improving the social relevance of outdoor education and its research variables; and (4) improving our understanding of qualitative and quantitative research paradigms.

Researchers, like their other colleagues in outdoor education, represent a diversity of backgrounds and interests. They come from different academic backgrounds and write for different literature sources. Through these biennial CEO research symposia, we are able to present some products of their work in a single *Proceedings*, and, equally important, we are building a research community that can only help to advance the field of education and the people and environment it serves.