Teaching and Evaluating Outdoor Ethics Programs: Setting a Research Agenda

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Concerns over poor outdoor user behavior have spawned increasingly urgent calls for outdoor ethics education (Elliot, 1992; Enck & Stedman, 1992; Jackson & Norton, 1979; Marshall, 1993; Schmied, 1993; Waterman & Waterman, 1993). Outdoor groups are justifiably concerned about the impacts of negative user behavior, which include poor public perceptions of all participants in an outdoor activity, degradation of the outdoor experience for others, denigration of outdoor traditions, and loss of access to the outdoors (Matthews & Riley, 1995). Education-based strategies (Marshall, 1993; Schmied, 1993) have been gaining popularity and momentum. Are these strategies well-grounded in research? What does the research say about their effectiveness in changing outdoor behavior? What opportunities—and, in fact, imperatives—exist for research in this area?

The success of outdoor ethics education is ultimately benchmarked by long-term, enduring changes in the intentions, motivations, and behaviors of outdoor users and their communities. In their enthusiasm to respond to the need for outdoor ethics education, however, outdoor user groups, state and federal agencies, and even outdoor and environmental educators have adopted strategies and techniques, such as public awareness campaigns, promoting codes of ethics, and incorporating environmental ethics lectures, that are not supported by research. Several of these approaches, in fact, have been shown to be *ineffective* (Hartshorne & May, 1928/1930; Leming, 1993; Matthews & Riley, 1995).

Outdoor ethics educators who wish to base their efforts on what the literature suggests are the methods most likely to bring about long-term, ethics-based behavioral change will *avoid* the following:

- lectures

- excessive moralizing

- externally-derived codes of conduct

- adults setting the ethics agenda for youth audiences

- teachers/leaders as authoritarian figures

- assuming that long-term, ethics-based behavioral change will result from building knowledge or changing attitudes

- consequences, rewards, or incentives

- simply providing information designed to raise issue awareness or to urge good behavior

However, an emerging body of research provides some support for adapting the following approaches for use in outdoor ethics education:

1. Group participation in developing codes of behavior for outdoor activities;

2. Interactive teaching methods, such as small group discussions, role playing, and peer teaching and role-modeling;

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3. Discussions about ethical dilemmas that deal with *relevant* issues;

4. "Trigger" films and slide-shows and interactive videos;

5. Mentoring approaches, especially those based in the community and done on a long-term basis;

6. Use of community clubs and organizations.

At this point, there is very little research that has focused directly on evaluating outdoor ethics education approaches. Opportunities for the outdoor education research community clearly exist. Research is needed concerning:

- Formative evaluations of ethics education programs;

- The effectiveness of outdoor ethics education in various contexts;

- the importance of the socio-cultural context in outdoor ethics education;

- longitudinal effects of outdoor ethics education programs;

- the relationship between outdoor ethics and environmental stewardship;

- the interactions between motivations, intentions, and behaviors, as well as how to influence them.

Given the need for and interest in outdoor ethics education that exists on the part of the outdoor recreation, natural resource, and education communities, it seems imperative that outdoor education researchers respond. Providing more insights into how best to develop respon-sible behavior, including a commitment for resource stewardship, is arguably the most important task faced by the outdoor education profession.

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