

Key issues in the industry:
towards the Summit

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Metaphors seem pretty common in our field. Over the past decade or so, we have tended to use metaphorical images as a means to help describe ideas which are often hard to portray more directly. Nature as a friend is one I use often. The metaphorical links between the activity and workplace underscores much of corporate outdoor programming. Learning from bush to school is often founded on metaphoric transfer.

This conference 'Towards the Summit' you could probably interpret a few ways, but essentially the title exists to draw attention to the national conference to be held in early January next year. Why a Summit and not a conference, symposium, seminar or session?

The word summit used in the political sense, is a gathering of heads - a meeting to consider issues of importance - a time to make some resolutions - to solve some problems - establish some preferred future actions. A Summit is a precursor of change.

In the outdoors a summit is also significant. It's often a goal of the journey - summits offer new perspectives, broader views, and fresh outlooks. And for some, summits are launching places.

For the national conference Summit is a combination of both political and outdoor meanings. This event aims to bring together people concerned and interested in the future directions of outdoor education. The speakers are deliberately chosen from beyond mainstream outdoor education - their aim will be to challenge and provoke thought and discussion. Unlike a conference the majority of sessions will involve all participants. After several key presentations participants will break into working groups to consider implications for outdoor education. By way of challenging plenary speakers and follow up workshops, the Summit aims to set some agendas for future action. It will seek to develop resolutions and strategies for change. The Summit aims to be a gathering of outdoor educators who will strive to reach beyond the field to those who at present know little or nothing about what we do - and let's be honest, there are a lot of school Principals, land management agencies, government bureaucrats, the media and also parents who know nothing about the field yet make decisions which influence us, often quite directly.

As well as reaching or seeing beyond, the Summit is directed inwards, towards ourselves as a profession. It's aimed at helping us clarify what it is we have to contribute to society.

These are grand ideals. An attempt to gain such goals won't come over a couple of days in January 2001. The preparation for the Summit begins now, with this conference in Victoria (and earlier in other similar gatherings in other States). We hope to begin to develop the issues and potential resolutions between now and next January which will help us ensure the Summit is successful as a precursor of change.

Ref

12th National Outdoor Education Conference: Proceedings,

Victoria, Australia.
2000, January.

Why have a Summit now?

It's time! The rest of this session and the workshop which follows will be beginning the process of identifying the issues which will help get us to the Summit – there are no shortage of pivotal issues which are demanding attention, something that you can all help clarify.

The theme of the Summit: 'Education Outdoors – Our Sense of Place'

There are four differing interpretations I wish to mention about the Summit theme. Each of these interpretations will contribute to specific days during the Summit. The first two will be considered from Summit Day One.

- The place of outdoor education within society. Who are outdoor educators? What sectors contribute to the outdoor education family? What are the beliefs and values which we hold as a profession? What do we hold sacred? What are we contributing to society? – and as a consequence of this?
- What place do outdoor educators have among the professions? Is outdoor education a profession? Will professionalisation of outdoor education contribute to a better future for practitioners and clients? What do you need to know to join this profession? Is there a career to be had?

On day two of the Summit the environmental considerations will be highlighted.

- What place has the outdoors in outdoor education? Do we in outdoor education help our clients to understand and develop a sense of Place in the Australian natural environment? How important is the natural environment to outdoor education outcomes? Is outdoor education, education for sustainability?

The Summit will be preceded by a seminar day focussed on education. Outcomes from this day will be brought forward into the Summit and considered with other papers and presenters on day three.

- The place of outdoor education in education. Education occurs in an ever increasing range of settings. In conventional schooling and Higher Education, what is outdoor education contributing? What is the state of play in outdoor education curriculum in VET, schools across the country, in tertiary and TAFE institutions?

The Summit process today

To focus now on how we can contribute to the Summit process today. I conducted a literature review last year which looked at the way in which groups evolve and are maintained as 'professions' or 'professionals'; mainly groups like nursing, paramedics, and teaching. I will use my findings to act as a framework for the workshops which follow.

The review identified five signposts which can point the way to how professions evolve. I could spend time trying to define what a profession is but essentially the following signposts point to a definition.

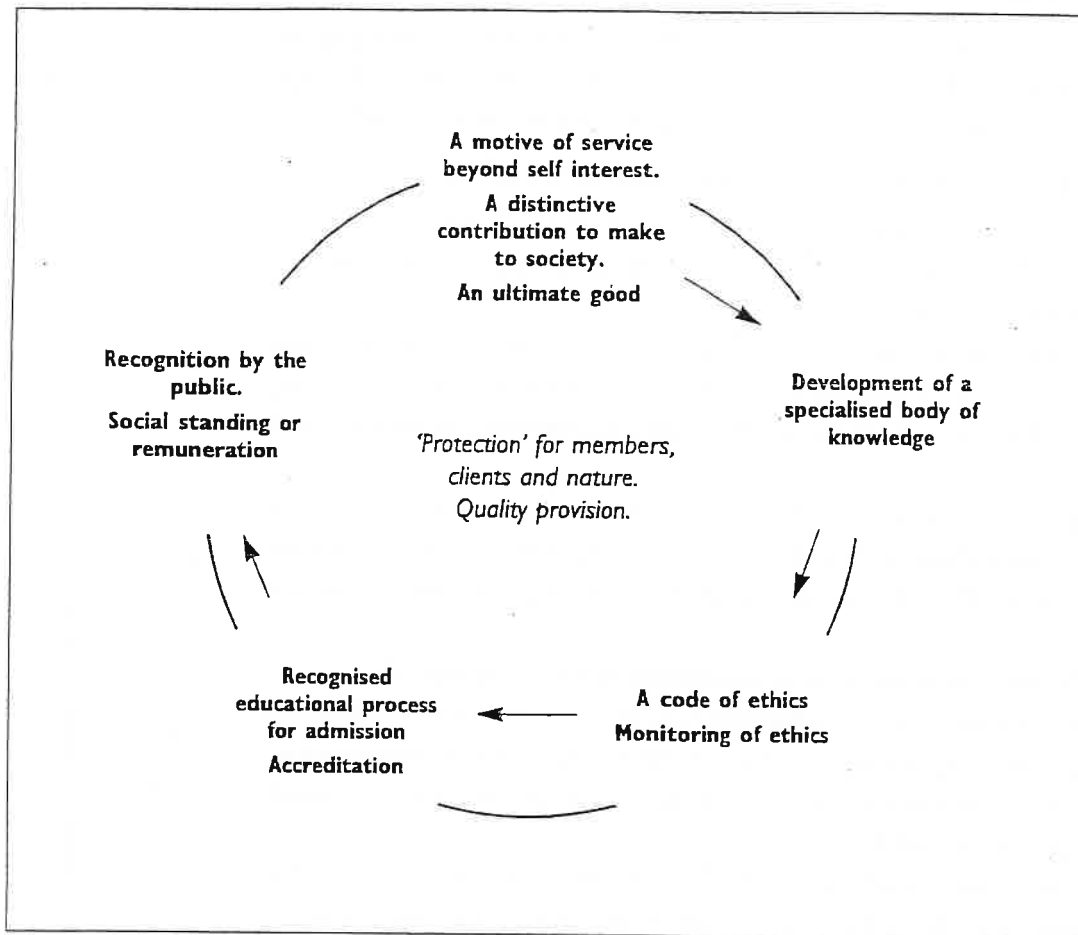
Signposts to a profession

1. Professional – motive of service?

The first signpost that points towards a profession is:

- a motive of service beyond self interest (A distinctive contribution to make to society. An ultimate good.)

Figure 1: Signposts to a profession



As a signpost it's vital – it sets up the foundation upon which the profession is built. The foundation of nursing is – patient care, of the legal profession – upholding and interpretation of the law, of medicine – health and healing. For each of these professions there is a clear well and recognised motive of service which is valued. What about outdoor education?

Outdoor education has a foundation of a clear motive of service, or recognised contribution to society.

What do you think?

strongly agree ← → strongly disagree

One of the issues which arises for me is that outdoor education as a label is pretty broad. It's not a thing, like a tree or a canoe – it's a social construct and we give it meaning in our particular culture, time and place.

By way of example: Alison Lugg and I recently conducted a survey based research review of the nature and scope of outdoor education in Victorian secondary schools. In our research we asked teachers what they consider to be important learning outcomes developed through outdoor education (Lugg and Martin 2000). Group co-operation, improved self esteem and increased responsibility were seen to be the most important of twelve outcomes. Fitness, developing recreation/leisure skills, and involvement in conservation activity were considered the three least important outcomes. Now I wonder if you would agree?

The most important learning outcomes which can be developed through outdoor education are: group co-operation, improved self esteem and increased responsibility.

What do you think?

strongly agree ← → strongly disagree

In the past I've written and spoken about the outdoor education/outdoor recreation family. I believe that outdoor recreation is the parent of many of the orientations we now have. If we could look at a family portrait of outdoor education in its broadest sense I think we could point out a few specific individuals. I can easily identify four distinct orientations; outdoor recreation, outdoor education, and adventure therapy & adventure/corporate training. (see Figure 2, Mapping the Field, p 12)

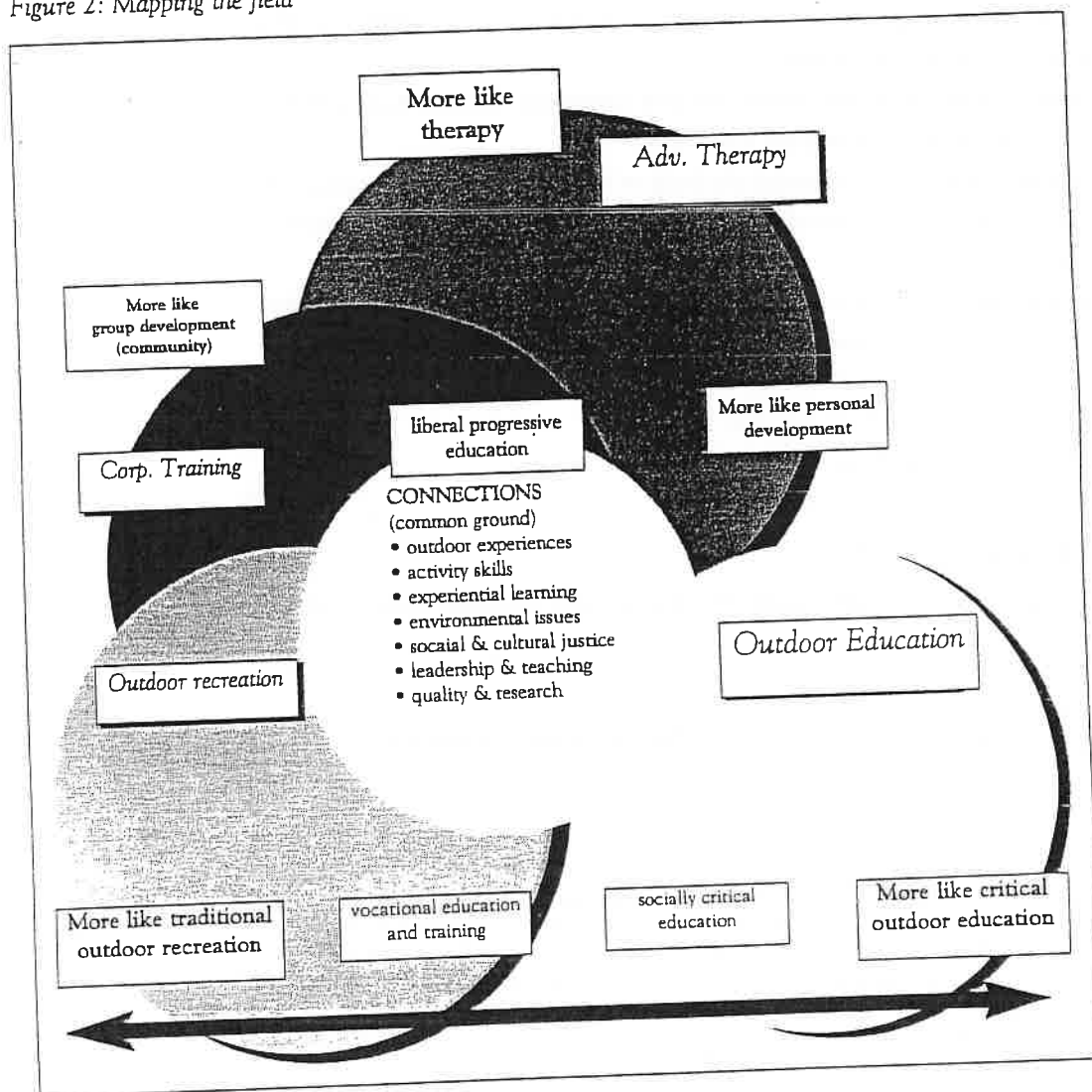
2. Professional – Body of Knowledge

The second signpost flows from the first.

- development of a specialised body of knowledge.

If the motive of service for school outdoor education is centred on these broad aspects of

Figure 2: Mapping the field



personal development what are the implications for the first two signposts towards a profession? Motive of service and body of knowledge? And . . . what if the motive of service changes? (see Table 1)

Where does your own professional view of outdoor education fit here? The Summit and our lead up could help us determine that.

So . . . the first two challenges for today and the Summit.

What is the professional motive of service of outdoor education as described by the differing family members or orientations?

- What type of society/community do we as a profession want to embrace/live in/aspire to?
- What do we see as a healthy/sustainable society and how can/does outdoor education (if at all) contribute to this? Do we want this as an outcome of our work in the outdoors?
- Can we clarify the contribution each orientation seeks to make and is this in some way distinctive?
- How are different orientations both connected and disconnected from each other? – what can we learn from these patterns of inter-relatedness – (the conflict, the paradoxes, the ironies) how might nature be able to enlighten us on this?

Allied to this identification of the motive of service or contribution, is the question of what is the body of knowledge and how this evolves.

- What constitutes a body of knowledge within outdoor education? Is there such a thing?
- Where does the current body of knowledge come from?
- Who has responsibility to shape and determine the body of knowledge for outdoor education?
- What responsibility do we have to contribute to development of a body of knowledge in outdoor education?
- How is best practice translated? How do we know best practice when we see it anyway? How does best practice inform or assist development of professional knowledge?
- Where is research taking place in outdoor education?
- What are the priorities for research in our field?
- Who is funding research for our field?
- How are research findings understood in practice?

3. Professional – Code of ethics

Returning to the third signpost of a profession. Professions have identified codes of ethical

Table 1.

Motive of Service	Implied Body of Knowledge?
Education for: group co-operation, self esteem, responsibility.	Personal development education as a process. Life skills.
Education for leisure and recreation	Outdoor activity knowledge and skills. Minimal enviro impact knowledge/skills
Education for a more sustainable relationship with humanity and the natural environment	Critical perspectives on human to nature interaction: personal, cultural, historical and contemporary analysis.
All of the above???	Everything!

conduct. Such codes are built from an understanding of the motive of service and grow out of collective wisdom: 'A code of ethics [can be] seen as the cumulative wisdom and virtue of local codes of practice (Socckett in Goodlad et al, 1990. p. 243).

For outdoor education we ought to be developing codes of conduct for how we relate to people and the natural environment. Ethical codes can only be built on a clear motive of service which has developed an 'ultimate good'. Only if I have identified the intent of my endeavour, its ultimate purpose or reason for existence, can I be clear about why any particular action or practice is better or worse than another. The Ultimate good must form the touchstone against which my ethical practices evolve (Hunt 1990). If I haven't sorted out why I take clients into the bush then I'm not going to be able to decide why one particular action or state of affairs is better or worse than another. In past years a few national and state workshops have attempted to develop a code of ethics for outdoor education. They failed mainly because the participants had differing ideas about what they thought they were trying to achieve in the outdoors.

(As an example: I recently listened to a person speak on a wilderness intervention program with at-risk youth. He described his program, the challenges of his role, the joys of success and frustrations with nonresponsive inhumane administrative systems. I was full of admiration for someone who clearly gave so much in the belief of his work. Towards the end of his talk I asked "what do the kids think of the outdoors once they have finished the trip?" He replied - "perhaps half hate the bush and never want to have anything to do with the outdoors again. We use the outdoors as a means to an end" In caricatures I am a critical outdoor educator. For me, developing sustainable relationships with nature is the ultimate good. I couldn't agree with a process that left people hating the bush. I couldn't work in the style of adventure therapy that was described so passionately - given my ultimate professional good, it would be unethical.)

So we have a third set of challenges for the workshops and Summit. - *a professional code of conduct.*

- How do we relate to people and the natural environment? What code of ethical practice are we holding to? A) for clients B) for non-human nature.
- The choice of what we teach is an ethical one - what importance is education that provides skills and knowledge to: heal the earth, build sustainable economies, promote healthy communities?
- What are the ecological emergencies or imperatives we face as a society? What has outdoor education got to do with them?
- What are the human or social justice imperatives we face? What has outdoor education to do with these?
- How might codes of practice be developed?
- To whom would codes of practice speak?
- What would codes of practice encompass?
- How could codes of practice be supported?

4. Professional - entry?

The next signpost to a profession points to how members are admitted or join the profession. My review indicated that any profession requires a recognised entry pathway. An entry pathway

is thought to be critical to the integrity of the profession. Controlled entry helps to ensure that the previous three signposts are understood – that members have an identified motive of service, understand the body of knowledge and the code of ethics which apply. In our field we would refer to this entry pathway as accreditation!

Outdoor educators ought to develop a clear (accreditation) system which limits and controls entry to the profession.

What do you think?

strongly agree ←————→ strongly disagree

In our study of school outdoor education programs we sought to determine the qualifications held by teachers of outdoor education. Of the 171 teachers involved in outdoor education.

- 24% have specialist tertiary qualifications in outdoor education.
- 43% have activity specific certificates.
- 61% have first aid or bronze or surf bronze safety related certificates.

(See Table 2 below: These figures are interesting when related back to the issues of body of knowledge and how this is maintained and transferred.)

The fourth area of challenge for the workshops and Summit. – a professional entry process.

- Is accreditation or some other sort of registration a valuable and worthwhile way to promote quality within the profession?
- How do we currently gain entry to this profession? What professional accrediting mechanisms are currently in place to maintain admission to the profession?
- What educational pathways are appropriate for each different outdoor education family member?
- Who should determine what is appropriate entry?
- How might entry processes be funded?
- What role exists for industry wide accreditation, such as that developed by the Outdoor Recreation Council of Australia (ORCA)?
- Should groups like the Outdoor Recreation Council (ORCA) and the Australian Outdoor Education Council (AOEC) merge?

Table 2: Summary of Outdoor Education Staff Qualifications and Certification
(Lugg and Martin (2000))

Outdoor Education Staff Qualifications (total = 171 staff)	% of total	Of these, % also with First Aid or Bronze or Surf Br	Of these, % also with activity specific community certificates.
Grad Dip/Cert OE (25)	15	65	54
BA OE (15)	9	73	53
B Ed PE (60)	35	62	32
App Sci PE (9)	5	66	22
B Ed (23)	14	57	61
B Sc (14)	8	50	57
BA (8)	5	50	25
Other (17)	9	65	35

- What accreditation or entry control systems exist in other professions which could be of value for this field?

Professional entry is problematic and potentially divisive. But how long now have we struggled with this? For all the work many have committed to the NORLD process and then the development of Training Packages for the VET system, are we any closer to an industry wide system? Or have we simply added another training pathway with little thought to the end result?

I think the way forward here lies with acknowledging the disconnections, and connections within the field then determining what is 'appropriately shared accreditation and what is specific to each family member. The family has not yet sat around the table long enough to solve this - let's build for the Summit.

5. Professional - recognition?

The final or fifth, signpost I would erect to point to a profession is that of public recognition via either social standing or remuneration. The conference yesterday considered some of the issues of relevance to remuneration and working conditions, but this signpost goes beyond that. Recognition also relates to the way in which professional opinions are sought and how advice is received and acknowledged:

- How is the expertise of outdoor educators accepted or acknowledged by society?
- Do outdoor educators get consulted by Government - and on what?
- If in a free market products find their own value - what does the common outdoor education pay rate tell us about outdoor education?
- What expertise do outdoor educators actually have?
- What are outdoor educator's worth in the marketplace?
- What levels of responsibility are expected?
- How do we address issues of burnout and career structure.

To summarise

The five signposts are clearly integrated and dependant on the other. They act in synergy to create a whole, a circle which encompasses both quality of service to whoever our clients may be, and protection for ourselves as professional members.

The workshops that follow are leading up to the Summit. We have five key issue areas. For each I have raised an initial list of discussion questions - let's think of them as loads of equipment and food which need to be sorted before they can be carried towards the Summit.

The aim of the workshops is to sort priorities, develop more questions, suggest some answers, suggest some action or ways in which we might be able to sort through all of the fairly compelling issues which we currently face. Each workshop has a facilitator who will be helping to steer towards the Summit. Good luck and safe journey.

1. A distinctive contribution to make to society - what each of the family members hold to and the way in which they inter-relate.
2. Development of the body of knowledge? What constitutes our body of knowledge? What are the key areas for research today?
3. How do we relate to people and the natural environment? What code of ethical practice are we holding to? A) for clients, B) for non-human nature

4. How do we currently gain entry to this profession? What professional accrediting mechanisms are in place? What educational pathways are appropriate for each different outdoor education family member?
5. Do the public recognise our professionalism? Is recognition translated into remuneration, career structure, social standing?

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Figure 1
Mapping the field?

