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The Future of Research in Outdoor Education

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**PLENARY SESSION ON
THE FUTURE OF RESEARCH IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION**

Simon Priest, Ph.D.

Editor's Note: The CEO research symposia have always included working sessions on topics and issues of concern to participants. At the fourth symposium, the topic was no less than "the future of research in our field." Masterfully facilitated by Simon Priest, symposium participants alternated between plenary sessions and smaller working groups and sought to develop agendas and strategies that might advance our field in important ways. Pleased with the results, everyone asked Simon to prepare a summary, which he promptly did and distributed by e-mail. For the record, we conclude these proceedings by printing Simon Priest's outline-style summary of this productive session. (ABY)

FUTURE OF RESEARCH IN OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Four groups broke up to discuss and summarize their preferences for enabling future outdoor education research. The groups chosen were: 1. Before the study (access to resources) 2. After the study (sharing & dissemination) 3. Bridging the gap between practitioners and academics 4. Moving beyond descriptive studies.

One desire that seemed to cross all four groups was for the development of an electronic connection (Andy Young and Simon Priest volunteered to work on this project). The electronic

connection consisted of two major parts: a discussion list and a website.

The discussion list was found to already exist and Simon Priest subsequently shared the new procedures for signing up via E-mail: To join OUTRES, send a message to [<mailbase@mailbase.ac.uk>](mailto:mailbase@mailbase.ac.uk) from the E-address that you will be using to send and receive messages on the discussion list. Do not include a subject entry, but make sure the text reads "join outres yourfirstname yourlastname" (EX: join outres Simon Priest). Further information will then be sent to you automatically (save these commands for future use, especially when leaving the list).

The website (viability being examined by Andy Young at Cortland) would contain postings on instrument usefulness, research designs, data sets, subject locating, funding sources, abstracted studies, and annotated bibliographies.

- A "pool" of instrument information would be categorized by constructs measured, and would include trustworthiness data for instruments borrowed from other disciplines and reviewed for their application to OE and related areas of study.
- A posting of research designs would be available for visitors to interact and share their thoughts on how to improve these designs.

- A "swap meet" would be set up for folks to post their offers of sharing data sets for secondary analysis or for others to leave their "wish list" of data collection. Readers might incorporate some of these wishes in their own data collection procedures and then share these sets, or might contact a researcher to collaborate on a secondary analysis of other sets.
- A "dating service" would be established to connect researchers looking for subjects and practitioners looking to have their programs studied. Researchers and practitioners would post their needs and connect to form study teams. Researchers could also list their areas of general research interest and practitioners could describe the specific kinds of programs they have.
- A listing of available grants and needed research would contain links to other sources. Researchers would be encouraged to contribute abstracts of their studies to a clearinghouse, provided these were presented in a common format:

HIGHLIGHT: one sentence about the most important aspect of the study.

REFERENCE: journal or presentation citation in APA 4.

PURPOSE: one paragraph about the intent of the study.

DESIGN: description of qualitative or quantitative study design.

TREATMENT: description of intervention or experiences involved.

SUBJECTS: numbers of people and their groupings or other arrangements.

INSTRUMENT: way data were collected (survey, observation, interview).

MEASUREMENT: frequency and/or conditions of data collection.

ANALYSIS: one sentence about the statistics or examination of data patterns.

FINDINGS: outcomes of the analysis with diagrams, tables or graphs.

CONCLUSIONS: one paragraph summing up outcomes in relation to purpose.

- A searchable database of annotated articles was suggested in the spirit of past paper publications. Translations of these summaries might also encourage more international involvement with outdoor research. Obviously a website this large and varied would require a simple search engine to make locating information within the various databases and bibliographies much easier.

Other ideas outside the electronic connection included having a "show & tell" of instruments and designs at the next Symposium with the production of a "green book" of instruments and designs as one possible outcome. The creation of a mentoring system to help new researchers and doing a "best of" Symposium Proceedings were additional thoughts that received support from the plenary.

The needs to look to other disciplines (for how they bridge gaps and conduct studies beyond the descriptive) and to do more replicative studies were common themes for several of the groups. One solution offered was to train research "producers" at conferences on how they might write with greater application content so "consumers" can better understand the studies. Partnerships between practitioners and researchers were viewed as necessary to ensure this happens.

Theory and model building was a key focus for one group. Clear needs

were outlined for integrated teams of researchers, with positivistic and naturalistic (or other) viewpoints of research. These teams, who can design and interpret from varied perspectives, would conduct studies (by qualitative and quantitative methods) to seek causality and interconnection. In this way, we could begin to build and test new theories and models. Such a multiparadigmatic approach using dualistic methods requires that we all examine the underlying philosophy of our research (why we do what we do, why we collect certain kinds of data in certain ways and why we ask different types of questions).

Lastly, we were all encouraged to establish our single lines of study (and to stick with these) so we can create personal track records in areas of expertise. The role of graduate students was emphasized (not as slave labor, but as valued learning experiences) and the need to market the value of research to others by engaging our professional organizations (AEE & ACA) to include summaries of the proceedings in their publications as special issues or editions was highlighted.

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