

TEACHING LIFETIME OUTDOOR PURSUITS



*Includes
CD-ROM
with unit plans,
lessons, and
assessments*

JEFF STEFFEN • JIM STIEHL
Editors

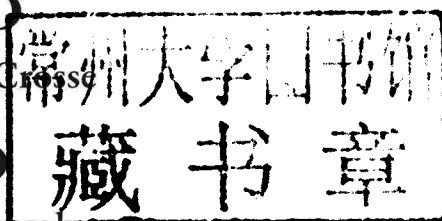
TEACHING LIFETIME OUTDOOR PURSUITS

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Preface

In the gym we seldom confront discomforts such as developing a blister on a difficult hike, getting soaked in the rain, being exhausted and dirty at the end of a strenuous day, or dealing with bothersome insects. Since most of us don't deliberately seek uncomfortable situations, why should we take kids into the outdoors where surprise changes in the weather or unexpected obstacles might impose physical and emotional demands? Moreover, in an age when many adults are trying to protect children from every conceivable disappointment and inconvenience (see Malone, 2007, regarding the bubble wrap concept), why should we assume the added responsibility of dealing with anxieties that being outdoors creates for some kids?

First, outdoor activities don't automatically entail discomfort. Students who know how to stay warm and dry, for example, can be comfy and content in a cold environment. Second, the rewards and pleasures usually far outweigh the frustrations and demands of an outdoor experience. Outdoor experiences can provide excellent opportunities to learn about resilience and patience. They also offer a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment when newly acquired skills are used to solve a tough problem or to surmount an obstacle. In short, students may occasionally feel discomfort, but in doing so they discover how to deal with problems while also feeling competent and good about themselves. They may even have a great time as well.

Each author in this book has used the outdoors to create noncompetitive opportunities for students to challenge themselves and to spend time with their teacher outside of the traditional classroom. We do not view outdoor pursuits as an escape from the gym but as a limitless classroom and an integral part of a student's educational experience. It is one thing for students to learn kayaking from a hired guide, but it is quite another thing for students to go kayaking on coastal waters with their physical education teacher—and the same goes for climbing or snowshoeing. The shared adventure and perspective can create a profoundly different student-teacher relationship.

In searching for a useful instructional text, we could not locate anything devoted solely to outdoor

pursuits. There is no resource that is widely available or extensive enough or useful enough to help teachers initiate outdoor pursuits in a physical education setting. Some books mix outdoor pursuits with other outdoor activities such as cooking and sanitation. Other books present teaching strategies in some chapters while omitting them in others. Still other books assume extensive background training and experience in teaching outdoor activities. And few offer any suggestions about assessment.

In writing this book, we assumed the following: *Teachers want to know what to teach and how to teach it as well as how to determine whether learning occurs.* Thus, we solicited chapters from physical education instructors who have successfully incorporated outdoor pursuits into their traditional physical education programs. Our contributors know the ropes, so to speak. Each chapter follows a similar format and includes both content and pedagogy for a particular outdoor pursuit. In the accompanying CD-ROM, our authors provide samples of unit plans, lessons, and assessments (unit plans are also found at the end of chapters 2-12). We also include information about knots that are used frequently in various outdoor settings in the final chapter.

When used by university and college educators, this book can be adopted for a single course or can be used across several courses. We have included a reasonable number and breadth of activities that, regardless of geographic location, can be incorporated into a school physical education program. For instance, the chapter on snowshoeing may be irrelevant to someone in the southwest, but the chapters on hiking, bouldering, rock climbing, canoeing, geocaching, and so on should be relevant to that area.

This book is also written for the physical education teacher who has a keen interest in outdoor pursuits but may have minimal knowledge and experience, a modest budget, and questionable planning time yet required accountability. We hope you will join the increasing number of teachers who are adding outdoor pursuits to their physical education programs. Days can be long and strenuous. Cuts, bruises, and poison ivy may appear. All are part of the joy of being outside with students.

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Introduction to Outdoor Pursuits

Jeff Steffen
Jim Stiehl



Modern life and education tend to be moving farther away from experiences close to nature.
Julian Smith

During the past decade, adventure education and outdoor pursuits have been increasingly incorporated into physical education curricula (Wurdinger & Steffen, 2003). Although outdoor and adventure programs have existed for almost a century (Neill, 2004; Outward Bound, 2006), recognition and support by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) has brought about a new era for adventure and outdoor teaching.

During the unfolding of this new era, it has become common for public schools to feature climbing walls, ropes courses, and other equipment for outdoor pursuits. The days of viewing activities such as snowshoeing and rock climbing as alternative or high risk are dwindling. At the same time, distinctions between adventure education and outdoor pursuits have become blurred. Terms such as *adventure programming*, *outdoor education*, *outdoor activities*, *adventure education*,

outdoor adventures, and *outdoor pursuits* are often used synonymously. While there may be similarities among these terms (e.g., reference to a type of curriculum or units of instruction or professional associations), there are some important differences worth noting, especially with respect to the concepts of adventure and outdoor pursuits, since the latter is the focus of this book.

OUTDOOR PURSUITS DEFINED

Adventure education often takes place in developed, facility-based areas (e.g., gymnasiums, playgrounds, nearby athletic fields) and involves activities geared toward increasing personal confidence and mutual support within a group (Miles & Priest, 1999). Many adventure programs include acquaintance activities (activities for getting to know other group members), disinhibition games and icebreakers (movement for fun and laughter), communication tasks (activities for decision making and conflict resolution), and problem-solving and trust-building activities (Rohnke & Butler, 1995). Low and high ropes course challenges may also be included (see Association for Challenge Course Technology, 2008).

Outdoor pursuits take place in natural settings and involve skills for traveling from one place to another without using motorized transportation (Ford, Blanchard, & Blanchard, 1993). In contemporary physical education programs, outdoor pursuits have been associated with lifetime activities (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2004) and may include rock climbing, hiking, backpacking, canoeing, biking, kayaking, camping, snowshoeing, scuba diving, surfing, skiing, and snowboarding. Not considered among outdoor pursuits are activities such as paragliding, cliff parachuting, skydiving, and bungee jumping. Although these intense sports are marching into the recreational mainstream, their purpose (thrill seeking) and dangers (potential injury and death) do not align with the goals of physical education.

In addition to their differences in settings and activities, adventure education and outdoor pursuits possess two important distinctions that have implications for the curriculum and instruction ideas given in this book. First, with its orientation toward personal and interpersonal growth, adventure education tends to be heavily weighted in the affective domain. Although conducted in a movement context, it requires little in the way of psychomotor skills. Outdoor pursuits, on the

other hand, place greater emphasis on the psychomotor and cognitive domains because of the requirements for traveling in the outdoors. Explicit skills and knowledge are necessary for a specific outdoor pursuits activity (e.g., caving or canoeing). Thus, while students at all skill levels can enjoy outdoor pursuits, these pursuits involve greater knowledge and skill acquisition than that required by adventure education.

The second distinction between adventure education and outdoor pursuits involves their risk or potential for physical or emotional harm. Both carry risks and both require proper policies and procedures for risk management. But in adventure-based programs there is a large contrast between the perceived risk and the actual risk. Much of the risk taking in an adventure setting is related to the disequilibrium that occurs from people participating in an experience that is beyond their comfort zone. Unfamiliar and unexpected activities are presented in a novel setting. As a consequence, students experience anxiety and perceptions of risk.

In outdoor pursuits there is less contrast between perceived risk and actual risk simply because these activities take place in natural settings. The outdoors present real risks in the form of wildlife, insect bites, adverse weather, contaminated drinking water, avalanches, and a host of other possible hazards. Certainly adventure activities and outdoor pursuits can provoke emotional anxiety, but potential physical risks are more real in the outdoors than in the adventure setting.

BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR PURSUITS

Several reasons account for the increased popularity of outdoor pursuits in physical education programs. First, for some young people the most appealing physical activities are those that provide excitement, challenge, and a degree of risk while minimizing the importance of winning and losing (Stiehl, 2000). Second, more physical education teachers are recognizing the many benefits that students can derive from outdoor pursuits and are considering these benefits when preparing objectives and activities. These benefits include the following:

- **Self-confidence.** Having self-confidence can lead to a greater willingness to handle challenges and to learn from and admit to mistakes. Many students with limited physical skills experience a swift success in outdoor pursuits that leads them to believe in their ability to succeed. Learning how to read a map, for

example, can help a student plan a travel route that is efficient and enjoyable for everyone. More specifically, by understanding a map's contours, the student can not only avoid potential hazards (e.g., moving water, exposure to lightning) but also conserve energy by avoiding unnecessary elevation gain or loss. By matching the difficulty of the route to the abilities of the group, the student supports the group while also experiencing a sense of accomplishment. Acquiring a new technical skill empowers and encourages continued involvement in an activity. Students are better poised to take on new challenges when they feel genuinely capable as a result of gaining new proficiencies.

- **Mutual support.** Group efforts sometimes fail because of conflict among group members. Therefore, an important aspect of successful outdoor pursuits programs is the emphasis on working together and respecting others. This necessitates a combination of interpersonal skills and appropriate communication. Rock climbing, for example, involves cohesiveness and trust between climber and belayer. Good belayers provide climbers with the reassurance to push their physical limits by giving them the knowledge that they can do so without worry. Another aspect of mutual support is the need to belong, which is a strong motivator. When students feel connected to others and safe enough to try new things, their willingness to persevere at a task increases. But they also must understand that conflicts may arise and must know how to resolve potential conflicts. Outdoor pursuits develop enthusiastic and contributing group members who view their roles as an important component of an effective team.

- **Fitness.** Different outdoor pursuits involve different types of fitness. For instance, some activities can be vigorous, requiring cardiorespiratory endurance. Cycling up a steep incline provides the steady, sustained exercise recommended for health and weight control. Bouldering, on the other hand, demands power, agility, and flexibility. Any outdoor activity can provide opportunities for people of all fitness levels to be challenged and included. Cycling can be adapted to individual fitness levels, and bouldering involves certain skills that can compensate for insufficient power (e.g., relying more on the legs than the arms or using techniques for shifting weight and resting). Consequently, students can experience early success with accompanying increases in fitness.

- **Excitement and fun.** An element of risk, whether perceived or real, adds to the excitement of outdoor experiences. And as students cope successfully with

risks, many of them learn to be more autonomous and self-sufficient. There is also a sense of excitement associated with trying something new. For instance, caving often includes squeezing through cramped, shadowy passages that may be steep or slippery. This task can be a daunting, even threatening, proposition, especially for students who are claustrophobic, afraid of the dark, or concerned about spiders, bats, and other mysterious cave-dwelling critters. But it also can help students learn how to cope with fears and anxieties. Furthermore, the fun of outdoor pursuits cannot be overemphasized. If an activity isn't enjoyable, students will not willingly experience more of it. According to Karl Rohnke, "Rediscovering the capacity for play can be an extremely powerful experience" (Rohnke & Grout, 1998, p. 11) and can lead to a more resilient, playful spirit.

- **Wonder of nature.** In his popular book, *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv (2006) suggests that too many young people today have what he terms a *nature-deficit disorder*. According to Louv, a broken bond with natural surroundings reduces not only the richness of our human experience but also our mental, physical, and spiritual health, which all depend on such a bond. Nature offers something that the street, gated community, or computer game cannot. Moreover, using our own power to arrive at a destination unexplainably adds to our appreciation of beauty. Although climbing high peaks presents important challenges, an equally valuable experience may be sitting still in a quiet place away from the usual distractions and listening to the breeze or observing a vast landscape or delicate flower. As Texas Bix Bender says, "See the heavens, smell the air. . . . On a good day, that's all you need. On a bad day, that's all you need" (Bender, 1997, p. 39). Finally, of considerable value is the possibility of an increased sensitivity to taking care of the surrounding environment. As we often remind our students, it isn't about how long you're in a place—it's about what you do while you're there. Did you leave it a better place for being there? Although having more immediate significance in an outdoor setting, this important lesson also applies to students' schools and neighborhoods.

WHY SO MUCH INACTIVITY?

Despite the known benefits of participating in physical activities such as those enjoyed in outdoor pursuits, why is there so little participation? Lack of physical activity,