

## TRANSFORMING

CLASSROOM  
PRACTICE**Peter Vaughan**

Out and About Adventures, Wangi Wangi, NSW  
shared with

**Graeme Perry**

TEACH Editor, Cooranbong, NSW

Increasingly society is looking to educators to assist in responding to issues affecting a growing proportion of the population. Social issues—bullying, youth suicide and domestic violence, as well as medical issues—safe sex, obesity, and other lifestyle health problems, seek space in the crowded curriculum. In 2007-08 the ABS National Health Survey found one-quarter of Australian children aged five to 17 years were either overweight or obese (up 4% from 1995); however, this proportion has remained relatively stable (ABS Australian Health Survey, 2014-15). Australians (who live in the world's most urbanised nation), like Americans, are experiencing what Ricard Louv (2014) has called 'nature-deficit disorder'. While this is not a recognised medical diagnosis, he believes that the physical activity of young people is decreasing and their screen-based activity is increasing. He suggests that "research around the world identifies a correlation between time spent in nature with reduced symptoms of ADHD and depression, and improved mental cognition and creativity" (para. 10).

Anecdotal evidence suggests that some of the most prominent memories of school for many students occur outside the classroom, in the outdoors—whether it be on a class camp,

an adventurous journey as part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, or on subject specific field trips. While the focus of these events organised by teachers may be largely in response to the syllabus, they can also encourage students to increase their engagement with the outdoors and can contribute to the development of positive personal and group attributes.

Both State and Federal governments are increasingly aware of the need for 'active recreation', as opposed to passive viewing and minimal engagement, and are consequently realising the need for strategies that cross the traditional health and education sector boundaries. While it is both unfair and unrealistic to expect schools to be the panacea for some of these problems, they can be part of the solution by encouraging student engagement in outdoor activities.

Choose to evaluate your classroom program and consider some strategies that may assist in developing more powerful outdoor education. Strategies for consideration could include:

- Integrating healthy food selection and preparation into student activities and programs
- Providing regular extended exposure to nature—including free/unstructured time
- Using outdoor professionals to deliver or assist in outdoor education programs that focus specifically on desired behaviours and outcomes

Why not initiate the development of a full institutional scope and sequence charting, plotting the delivery of outdoor education that also considers the integration of multiple subject areas? This would include and extend the desired lifetime wellbeing outcomes and values adoption that education must encourage.

**References**

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Avondale Schools Year 7 Outdoor Education: Kayak management—collaborative skills for problem solving. Photography: Peter Vaughan