

A Conversation Starter: **AMP**-lifying Outdoor Adventure Education as an Innovative Tool for the 21st Century

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Abstract: The AMP team promotes a sustainable adventure movement and increased use of Outdoor Adventure Education as an innovative educational tool in schools, communities and businesses. Taking a whole system approach and applying leading social movement and diffusion theories, the Adventure Movement Project seeks to develop a framework for integrating Outdoor Adventure Education into whole communities to inspire servant leadership, achieve sustainability, and drive innovation. A socially just and sustainable planet can thrive with Outdoor Adventure Education acting as a highly effective catalyst to drive social, economic, educational, and environmental change.

Key Words: Outdoor Adventure Education, sustainability, leadership, innovation, social movement



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Getting a new idea adopted, even when it has obvious advantages, is difficult.

Everett Rogers, 2003, *Diffusion of Innovations*, p. 1

Framing Outdoor Adventure Education (OAE) as an innovative educational tool is at the core of the Adventure Movement Project and the mission to create a sustainable adventure movement and significantly increase the use of Outdoor Adventure Education in schools, communities, businesses, and institutions. No easy task, but a mission that with an intentionally designed plan, founded on core Outdoor Adventure Education values and featuring real, direct, and authentic experiences for a critical mass of stewards will prove to catalyze and lead the larger sustainability revolution. As Andres Edwards, author of the *The Sustainability Revolution* (2005) and *Thriving Beyond Sustainability* (2010), related to me, “If you discuss Outdoor Adventure Education as a tool... then the outdoors is an amazingly powerful ‘tool’ to help us connect to ourselves, to help us clarify our values and reveal to ourselves who we are. It's self discovery by interacting with others and with nature” (A. Edwards, personal email, August 31, 2012). Diffusing Outdoor Adventure Education and reaching a critical mass underpins the mission of the Adventure Movement Project, but engaging a diverse community of advocates in this discussion is integral to the larger Adventure Movement Project vision.

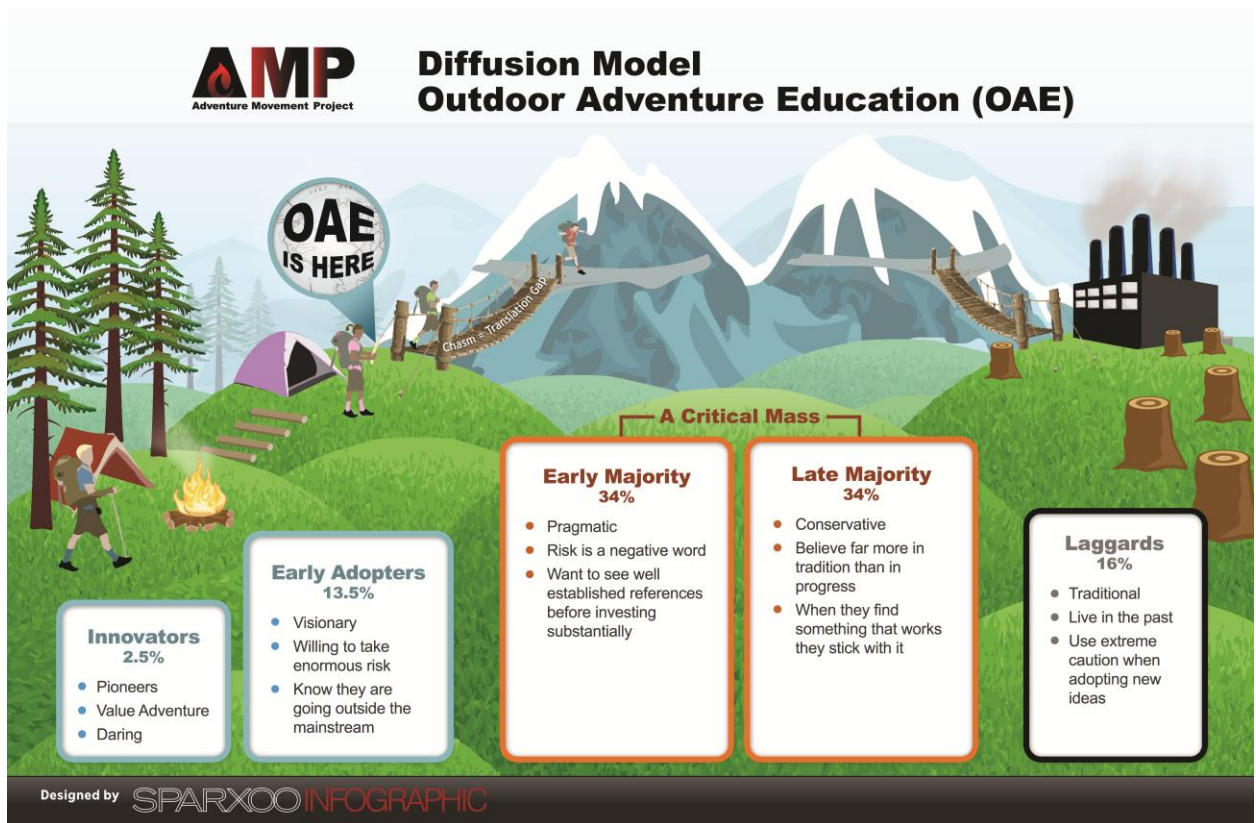


Figure 1: Diffusion Model adapted from Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers, 2003) and Crossing the Chasm (Moore, 2002). Put yourself, your school, or your organization on the map. Where are you in this model?

I. The Adventure Movement Project Process

At the heart of the Adventure Movement Project is a passion for Outdoor Adventure Education and a belief that it can have a significant impact on entire communities in building a socially just and sustainable planet. The Adventure Movement Project uniquely frames Outdoor Adventure Education as an “innovation” and filters it through various social movement and diffusion theories, primarily Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point* (2002). Ultimately, AMP seeks to develop an intentional plan and the whole community adventure model that will drive a sustainable adventure movement. One of the first tasks I undertook was to reach out to experts in the Outdoor Adventure Education field to gain further insight especially as it related to the blending of Outdoor Adventure Education and the social movement theories. Several key themes emerged and what follows is a first look at how and why the Adventure Movement Project intends to lead the sustainable adventure movement. For a more detailed account and access to the full AMP Delphi study, all research materials are available and open sourced at <http://adventuremovementproject.org/research/>

II. Foundation for a Movement

How will AMP inspire a movement? The values that define the Adventure Movement Project will drive the swarm of AMP affiliates- service providers, investors, and enthusiasts- because values are enduring. Outdoor adventure education promotes shared human values, values that will be imperative for people facing an uncertain future in order to, as a collective human body, come up with the best possible environmental, educational, and economic solutions for our planet. Building a diverse coalition through the following convergent values in the field of outdoor adventure education; wilderness and environmental stewardship, adventure and challenge, diversity, service and compassion, and safety and risk, will position the Adventure Movement Project to uniquely deliver the vision of a socially just and sustainable global community through a unified, amplified outdoor adventure education message.

So why does Outdoor Adventure Education Matter anyway?

Adventure education allows them[participants] to broaden their world - to learn from experience, take appropriate risks, work with others, and connect to a larger world. These crucial skills are needed if they are to help solve the world’s problems when they sit in our shoes. Adventure is the most effective way to grow responsible, accountable kids who can work in teams and keep the big picture in mind.

Betsey Upchurch

Preston Cline, Associate Director of Wharton Leadership Ventures at the Wharton School, calls on the founding father of modern Outdoor Adventure Education when he reflected, “For the same reason Kurt Hahn thought so. Because, if done right, you can help someone realize that they are greater than they think they are. It is the single greatest thing we can do in education.” The impact Outdoor Adventure Education bears on participants is reflected in these answers and speaks to the imperative of unifying the field for the greater good around a clear message.

III. The Case for a Clear Message

A common theme in virtually all the social movement theories (Gladwell, 2002; Hawken, 2007; Jones, 2012; Moore, 2002; Rogers, 2003; Rosenberg, 2011) is the need to have a clear, concise message that resonates with a critical mass in order to call people to action. If the message is too complicated, not unified, or inconsistent, an innovative idea has no chance of reaching a critical mass or creating large scale change. Here is where the vagueness and complexity of defining Outdoor Adventure Education, the diversity of the methods and activities used, and the general lack of clarity in the field around a defined message poses a problem for Outdoor Adventure Education reaching a tipping point. In order to present a clear message, therefore, Outdoor Adventure Education must first find agreement and then embrace a unified message for the greater good. A prime example of this was championed by Henry Ford when he embraced the message of driving, the freedom of the road, instead of just selling cars.

A. A Tool for the Times

Systems thinking is widely espoused today, but many organizations lack the capacity because they lack the commitment to build the skills and the tools to help them do so. Buckminster Fuller used to say that if you want to teach people a new way of thinking, don't bother to teach them. Instead, give them a tool, the use of which will lead to a new way of thinking. (Senge, 2010, p. 46)

Outdoor Adventure Education is a tool not an outcome, and it is the right tool at the right time. A commitment to Outdoor Adventure Education is a commitment to address our future in a way that no other single tool can do as effectively all at once. If done well, high quality Outdoor Adventure Education implemented in schools, communities, and businesses can be an extremely effective catalyst to change the world. Understandably, Outdoor Adventure Education is not a single solution that will solve all our planet's woes. Nevertheless, if packaged as part of a larger movement, and connected to what matters in each community, it could be an incredibly effective tool to inspire a collaborative effort to solve the world's most pressing issues. The bottom line is Outdoor Adventure Education as a tool solves for pattern, which "refers to a solution that addresses multiple problems instead of one. Solving for pattern arises naturally when one perceives problems as symptoms of systemic failure, rather than as random errors" (Hawken, 2007, p. 178). Acknowledging we have a systemic failure and presenting Outdoor Adventure Education as a tool to address the whole system could be an effective way to frame OAE in a new context and significantly increase the use of Outdoor Adventure Education across the board. OAE intimately engages three critical pillars which will determine the future of this planet; 1) sustainability; 2) innovation; and 3) servant leadership.

IV. The Call: Why AMP and Why Now?

We must find ways to manage essential commons such as water and topsoil, healthy ecosystems, rainforests, and stable climate. But we still have a long way to go until we find a number of ways to do this practically. Managing or stewarding these commons starts with a critical mass of stewards—individuals, teams, and organizations who see the risks and who are willing to act. (Senge, 2010, p. 217)

How do we engage a critical mass of stewards who see the risks and are willing to act? Outdoor Adventure Education can be a highly effective tool and a practical catalyst to mobilize a

critical mass of stewards if and when OAE rests on the three pillars of sustainability, innovation, and servant leadership. AMP calls for embracing these pillars- the trunks on which OAE can



grow- so that OAE can deeply address the larger societal issues that we now face.

Consequently, the Adventure Movement Project seeks to engage all people and organizations who care deeply about the environment, the economy, and education and who acknowledge the crisis present in each. AMP will intentionally develop the framework for the whole community adventure model which builds sustainable communities through a commitment to Outdoor Adventure Education. Unlike single minded solutions for each, AMP will employ a regenerative whole system approach that solves for pattern and delivers real solutions for our planet's future by achieving sustainability, driving innovation, and inspiring servant

Figure 2: AMP champions 3 Pillars-sustainability, innovation, and leadership-grounded on core OAE values. Committing to Outdoor Adventure Education as an innovative tool, we can create a socially just and sustainable planet.

leadership through a commitment to Outdoor Adventure Education.

1. Sustainability

The relationship between humans and nature lies at the center of sustainability. (Andres Edwards, *The Sustainability Revolution*, 2005, p. 113)

We need to ask, “What would a way of thinking, a way of living, and ultimately an economic system look like that worked based on the principles of the larger natural world? And how do we create such a way of living in our organizations and societies, one step at a time?” (Senge, *The Necessary Revolution*, 2010, p. 41)

A common theme that ran through multiple responses in the AMP research study was how Outdoor Adventure Education could impact an awareness of sustainability and natural principles. As Edwards and Senge both reference, connecting humans to the natural world will be tantamount to truly achieving sustainability. Providing a direct, immersion experience in the natural world for people is a core principle that runs across Outdoor Adventure Education and can be a pathway to environmental sustainability. Upchurch elaborated and Cline agreed when she said, “We do not understand the natural world as the source of all other resources. We must protect it and we can only do that with people who have been there.” Senge (2010) warns, “shaping a sustainable, flourishing world for life beyond the Industrial Age- This represents perhaps the greatest learning challenge humans have ever faced, and it will require extraordinary leadership from institutions of all sorts” (p. 12). One way institutions can lead this effort is by providing the resources and using their influence to create a sustainable adventure movement.

2. Innovation

Johnson (2010) in *Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation* emphasizes getting outside, away from the monotony of daily tasks, to engage in a more associative state where innovation thrives (p. 110). Framing Outdoor Adventure Education as a tool that can drive innovation, innovative products, and innovative systems could be a potential way we can tweak the Outdoor Adventure Education message to incentivize its use for innovative businesses, schools, and whole economic and educational systems.

Business organizations have a crisis of people who have business skills. Adventure education builds business skills such as responsibility, accountability, the ability to work successfully in teams, the ability to lead and influence others, the ability to see the big picture and what needs to be done now,” stated Upchurch with agreement from Cline.

The business skills that Upchurch refers to here are also aligned with the skills necessary to drive innovation. Connecting Outdoor Adventure Education directly to innovative thinking is integral to reframing a more inspiring message in order to break through to a critical mass.

3. Servant Leadership

One of the fundamental attributes of leadership is knowing what to do in a situation filled with uncertainty and having the conviction to do it and inspire others in the process. A strength of Outdoor Adventure Education as stated by Cline is it can, “Start teaching people how to navigate uncertainty. No this is not easy, but fundamentally it is what we are great at.” Leadership development has long been a primary core outcome in Outdoor Adventure Education

and again came out in this research. Robert Greenleaf in *Servant Leadership* (1977) frames developing leadership as a priority this way:

Preparation to lead need not be at the complete expense of vocational or scholarly preparation, but it must be the *first priority*. And it may take some difficult bending of resources and some unusual initiatives to accomplish all that should be accomplished in these critical years *and* give leadership preparation first priority. But whatever it takes, it must be done. (p. 46)

Positioning Outdoor Adventure Education as a tool to prepare leaders should be part of the larger message that Outdoor Adventure Education needs to make. After all, Greenleaf claims in *Servant Leadership* that in order to prepare people to serve society the key is to prepare, “inexperienced people to venture into the unknown, to face the inexactitude and the wildness, with assurance” (p. 189). Greenleaf’s characterization exactly reflects the leadership experience that Outdoor Adventure Education delivers in spades. Peter Roy, former President of Whole Foods Markets and a past Chairman of the National Outdoor Leadership School, emphasized that the most powerful case for Outdoor Adventure Education is it creates leaders (P. Roy, personal communication, September 30, 2012). By emphasizing creating leaders through Outdoor Adventure Education, we can then build the confidence and assurance that we will come up with best practice solutions for each situation we encounter and the world will be a better place.

V. Building the Adventure Movement Project Coalition

Collaborating is ultimately about relationships, and relationships do not thrive based on a rational calculus of costs and benefits but rather because of genuine caring and mutual vulnerability. (Senge, 2010, p. 233)

The imperative to collaborate across boundaries around such issues has been established. Now we just need to learn how to get better at it, quickly. (Senge, 2010, p. 49)

Cline framed the need for the Adventure Movement Project to collaborate by advising to:

Partner with organizations who are required to navigate complex adaptive problems, understand what their strengths and challenges are, identify ways that you can help them and the world will come calling. The world is becoming more rapid and complex, not less, and the leaders of tomorrow will be needing our skill sets.

The complexity of sustainability issues is the crux of the complex adaptive problems that we are dealing with as a society and Senge (2010) affirms that, “Partnering across sectors will be crucial in dealing creatively with all the core sustainability issues...” (p. 94). Upchurch linked the issues by highlighting, “the need for cross sector collaboration to solve the world’s most pressing problems and again, we know that adventure programs builds people who collaborate better.” Cline agreed with Upchurch’s overall comments and expanded saying, “There is a larger effort at creating sustainable lives. To manage our time, money, relationships sustainably. We could play a huge role in that movement.” Targeting organizations and institutions that are

attacking sustainability issues and have a sustainability ethic will be a focus of the Adventure Movement Project moving forward. Getting connected with this larger movement and creating a simple, effective message that positions Outdoor Adventure Education as a tool to achieve sustainability, drive innovation, and inspire servant leadership will help create a sustainable adventure movement. “We have a tool. What we don’t have is a critical mass who understand the issues deeply enough to know why we would want to fix it,” Upchurch stated. Reaching a critical mass, finding that tipping point and diffusing Outdoor Adventure Education as an innovative tool can happen. To join the conversation and contribute to how OAE can come to embrace a fully sustainable world view, please visit the AMP website at <http://adventuremovementproject.org/>

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