

## **Two Steps Forward, One Step Back? A Warm Response to Bob Henderson**

By Greg Lowan-Trudeau

Eminent Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete (2014) recently delivered a keynote lecture at an Indigenous education symposium. As expected, he shared inspirational quotes, examples, and images of the groundbreaking initiatives with which he has been involved over the past forty years. However, Cajete also shared excerpts from a similar keynote that he delivered in the early 1980s outlining the challenges facing Indigenous education along with potential solutions. Sadly, he reflected that, while significant progress has been made in many areas, we still face similar challenges to those encountered by educators in past decades.

Upon reviewing Henderson's (1989) contribution to the inaugural issue of *Pathways*, I was immediately struck by the similarities between his critical reflections on the field of outdoor education and the sentiments shared above by Cajete. By humbly juxtaposing his own cultural and pedagogical assumptions with those of Paul, his Inuk conversation partner who was so much more connected to the Land than most southern outdoor educators could ever begin to imagine, Henderson revealed a deep gap in Western-style outdoor education that haunts us to this day.

However, despite such persistent existential challenges, I believe that great progress has been made in the past twenty-five years. As a Métis educator, I can attest that there has been a dramatic rise in the authentic involvement and contribution of and leadership by Indigenous peoples; many outdoor programs now go well beyond using Nature as a challenging context for general "character building" to foster critical socio-ecological personal and group transformation.

Encouraged and emboldened by leaders like Henderson, Indigenous and allied voices have risen to build an increasingly complex critical dialogue related to fundamental questions such as:

- How can Indigenous peoples, knowledge, and traditions be respected in outdoor education (Lowan, 2009)?
- What is the role of non-Indigenous educators in decolonization (Root, 2010)?
- How might we travel respectfully in Indigenous territories? (Grimwood, 2011; Mullins, 2009)

However, as Cajete noted in his reflections on the challenges still faced by Indigenous education today, twenty-five years later outdoor education and educators themselves continues to grapple with competing ideals. Like Henderson, I routinely negotiate such tensions myself and have experienced embarrassing conversations and had my hand slapped by Elders for boasting too boldly about my prowess as an outdoor educator and adventurer. At other times I have received a

solid bonk from a low hanging branch to remind me to pay attention in the forest rather than day-dreaming of perfect eddie turns.

Despite the proliferation of integrated programs across Ontario and other parts of Canada, outdoor education, like Aboriginal education, remains a fringe or add-on subject in most jurisdictions. In the age of Nature Deficit Disorder (Louv, 2005), outdoor education has not become an integral aspect of most schools and educators still struggle to get their students outside. However, as outdoor educators we know that the potential benefits are worth the fight. And so we continue, one step, paddle, or pen stroke, at a time. Thanks Bob.

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### References

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