



# Going Global in the Outdoors

- how outdoor leaders can encourage education for a fair and sustainable world

by Geoff Cooper

## Introduction

**A**s outdoor leaders we can make a considerable impact on how and what young people learn. In general we work with well-motivated groups who are keen to be outdoors. We are not restricted by tight timetables and narrow curricula. We can introduce ideas from a wide variety of disciplines, make relationships between places, people, their work and connections with other peoples around the world. We can present the bigger picture. We are in a good position to discuss some of the issues that affect life on the planet. We should not be afraid to address these issues, discuss our values and help young people clarify their own values.

## A Global Citizen

In a keynote address at the Adventure and Environmental Awareness Group's "**Broadening Horizons**" conference in 2005, Eleanor Knowles, Director of Cumbria Development Education Centre, stressed the importance of knowing our values and not being afraid to encourage young people to talk about values. She argued that we should encourage global citizenship and outlined the key characteristics of a global citizen:

### A Global Citizen:

- respects and values diversity
- has an understanding of how the world works
- is outraged by social injustice
- participates in the community at a range of levels from local to global
- is willing to act to make the world a more sustainable place
- takes responsibility for their actions<sup>1</sup>

## A Model for Global Citizenship

It is clear that there is an expectation of a global citizen to move from awareness and understanding through to action. Some years ago<sup>2</sup>, I developed a model to describe the process of educating for sustainability based on the three simple considerations:

1. I recognise the need to act - **Awareness**.
2. I know how to act - **Empowerment**.
3. I will act - **Commitment**.





### 1. Awareness

It is important to know and understand what is happening in the world, how other people live and work and how we are all interconnected through, for example, trade, ideas and the World Wide Web. We need to appreciate that there is an unequal distribution of food and resources both in our own countries and throughout the world and that some countries and multi-national companies have considerable political and economic influence across the globe.

We also need to understand issues such as climate change, loss of species and availability of clean water, which result from our lifestyles and affect the whole planet.

### 2. Empowerment

As leaders we need to involve young people and make them feel responsible for their own lives, to empower them. A basis for such empowerment is to develop self-esteem, confidence and motivation. Empowerment also involves encouraging a range of skills and competencies such as effective communication, interpersonal skills, problem solving, critical thinking and negotiation that are essential for decision-making. Creativity and vision for the future are also required to inspire positive change. Many of these skills are central to work in outdoor education and outdoor leaders have considerable experience in empowering young people.

### 3. Commitment

Sometimes we are aware of an issue that needs addressing and we have the ability and confidence to take action but we still do nothing about it. What

triggers our commitment to act? This is a difficult question; we may change our behaviour because there are rewards or penalties. Financial incentives or deterrents may have short-term effects on our actions but real change can only result from a shift in our values. I believe that the key to commitment and action is VALUES. Let's look at an example.

### Lessons from an Orange

An orange is a good starting point to discuss global issues. This orange has come from southern Spain, which has suffered from many years of drought. The orange groves require a lot of irrigation and this takes water from other habitats and species.

So we may be able to measure the effect of our demand for oranges on the environment of Andalusia.

But this is only one global connection. Many of the workers in the orange groves are migrant workers from Africa. Some of these will have come from West Africa, displaced from the land by commercial plantations or desertification. Some may have arrived as illegal immigrants into Europe in search of jobs and a better life. They may have left families in Africa with impacts on the social structure and economy of their home area. So the global connections and implications continue.

But there is another lesson from the orange. I've noticed working in outdoor centres over many years that young people don't like eating oranges. The fact that they prefer to eat bananas tells us a lot about the values young people hold.

Why don't they like oranges? I can suggest the following reasons:

- They have to be peeled.
- They don't have a ring pull.
- They give you sticky fingers.
- They don't have a designer label.
- They may not be sweet enough.
- It's not cool to eat oranges.



next page →





*Which outdoor activities have greatest potential for good global citizenship?*

The banana, now the most popular fruit in Britain, does not have these problems. In fact it even has a “natural” ring-pull.

So, this tells us some things about young people. They don’t like too much discomfort, inconvenience, getting messy, and it may not be cool to be seen eating an orange! This gives us insights into the values that society puts on us. We are encouraged to value convenience, immediacy, lack of effort, comfort, fashion-consciousness. We can certainly challenge some of these values in outdoor education. For example, we go out in all weathers, we get wet, muddy, there is discomfort. We encourage effort and many of us don’t place too much importance on fashion!

### What are the values promoted by Western societies?

The discussion of the orange leads us into considering some of the other dominant values promoted by Western commercial societies. We face these day in and day out on TV screens, videos, films, in newspapers etc.

- Over-competitiveness
- Aggression
- Greed/acquisition
- Conspicuous consumption
- Instant gratification
- Bigger is better
- Speed, glitz, glamour.

To what extent do we challenge these values in outdoor education?

### What values does a global citizen need?

I can suggest some:

- Simplicity
- Harmony
- Equity/fairness
- Empathy/tolerance
- Co-operation
- Responsibility
- Kindness/generosity

Are our actions as leaders, the ethos of our organisations, the methods we use, and the choice of programmes and activities conducive to promoting values for a fairer and more sustainable world or do they reinforce the dominant Western commercial values?

### How do we come across as leaders?

For example, do we:

- Live our values
- Motivate through learning and enjoyment
- Help young people clarify their values
- Develop their key skills
- Promote systems thinking emphasising global connections
- Encourage action?



## What values are promoted by the ethos of our organisations?

What messages are our organisations putting across? How do we care for our customers and the environment? Are we open to new ideas and change? Do we take a broad view of outdoor education? Do we relate our work to the lives of young people? What links have we developed with the local community and other organisations? Do we promote co-operation rather than competition?

## Do the methods we use encourage global citizenship?

Do we manage to involve young people in decision-making? How do we help them take responsibility for their learning? Are we conscious of different learning preferences and do we vary our teaching styles and methods to meet individual needs?

Methods such as Philosophy for Children and issue-based learning encourage enquiry and critical thinking, skills that are particularly relevant to global education. It is also important to promote systems thinking concentrating on interrelationships rather than issues in isolation. Personal reflection and reviewing build on self-awareness and give confidence to the learner.

## What about our activities and programmes?

Do our programmes encourage?

- Self awareness
- Co-operation
- Thinking skills
- Curiosity
- Reflection
- Taking responsibility?

Too often we start with a consideration of activities instead of working on our values, aims and methods. Do we use activities as an end in themselves or a vehicle for learning? Which outdoor activities have greatest potential for good global citizenship? Are the quick thrill, "buzz" activities offered in some programmes working against a more sustainable, global agenda?

## In conclusion

There is no doubt that we can do a lot through Outdoor Education to support an agenda for global awareness and sustainability. In summary we can:

- Show by personal example
- Discuss and question values
- Encourage systems thinking
- Make global connections
- Develop personal, social and communication skills
- Encourage action.

**This talk was presented to introduce the theme of "Going for Global through the Outdoors" at Cumbria Development Education's "Outside the Box" Conference at Rydal Hall in April 2007.**

### NOTES:

1. Adventure and Environmental Awareness Group (2005) Broadening Horizons: Environment, Sustainability and the Outdoors. See: [www.aea-uk.org](http://www.aea-uk.org)
2. Cooper, G. (1998) Outdoors with Young People: A Leader's Guide to Outdoor Activities, the Environment and Sustainability, Russell House Publishing.

### Author's Notes

Geoff Cooper has worked in schools, teacher training and outdoor education centres. He is head of Wigan Council's two outdoor education centres in the Lake District and chair of the Adventure and Environmental Awareness Group.

### Photographs:

All from the Low Bank Ground Team