

**OUTWARD BOUND**  
Inspiring Australians

What the  
Research  
*Really* Says!

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# Contents

	Page
Introduction	3
Does Outward Bound <i>Really</i> Work?	4
Do the effects <i>last</i> ?	5
How does Outdoor Education compare with other intervention programs?	6
How does OUTWARD BOUND compare with other outdoor education programs?	7
Are all OUTWARD BOUND programs equally effective?	8
Are OUTWARD BOUND's effects equally strong in all areas?	9
What do participants think of the program?	10
Summary	11
References	12

## Introduction

The marketing, the stories, the instructors and the theories all give the impression that Outward Bound works. From one small idea in the 1940's there are now over 40 schools and thousands of people doing Outward Bound programs around the world every day. This remarkable growth of an 'alternative', non-for-profit approach to education and training is testimony to the success of Outward Bound programs.

For many people this sort of evidence speaks for itself.....the renewed sparkle in someone's eyes, the excitement when people realise that their potential is more than they'd previously dreamt, the close sense of community experienced by people who were once strangers.....and so the list goes on. For many people, what can be seen, heard, felt, and the stories that are told, is what Outward Bound is really about.

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Outward Bound is really about.*

*For other people more tangible evidence is necessary.*

For other people more tangible evidence is necessary. Indeed, this has been the approach of Outward Bound Australia. Since 1969 Outward Bound has been inviting, initiating and doing scientific research on the processes and effects of its programs. A summary of the studies produced by this extensive research program can be found in "Outward Bound Australia Theory & Research: A reference volume" (Outward Bound Australia, 1998a). This current document takes a different approach. The answers to key questions such as "Does Outward Bound Australia *really* work", "Do the effects *last?*", and "How does Outward Bound Australia compare with other outdoor programs?" are presented and illustrated in such a way that staff, clients, sponsors, researchers, and other interested people can understand what 30 years of research investigation has discovered.

## Does Outward Bound *Really* Work?

The single, most conclusive study that answers this question is a “meta-analysis” which combined the results from 96 different studies on adventure education, including Outward Bound Australia (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997). The improvements from the beginning to the end of Outward Bound programs in qualities such as self-confidence, teamwork, leadership abilities, communication skills had an impressive average “effect size” of .47.

### *Outward Bound’s effects:*

- *are equivalent to an 18% increase in the rate of learning*
- *show that 68% of participants are better off than when they began*

What does an “effect size” of .47 mean? This can be compared to an “effect size” of zero, which means no change. This is equivalent to an 18% increase in the rate of learning, or shows that 68% of Outward Bound participants improve from the beginning to the end of the program. This evidence, based on many thousands of participants, is the strongest supporting evidence to date that yes, Outward Bound Australia *really* does work.

Outward Bound Australia programs have been shown to positively impact on the following variables (see Outward Bound Australia, 1998a for entire list of references):

- *Academic Performance*
  - *Adventurousness*
  - *Androgyny*
  - *Coping Skills*
- *Emotional Control*
  - *Hardiness*
- *Leadership Ability*
  - *Mood*
  - *Motivation*
  - *Open Thinking*
  - *Optimism*
- *Personal Control*
- *Physical Self-concept*
  - *Self-concept*
  - *Self-confidence*
  - *Self-discipline*
  - *Self-efficacy*
  - *Self-esteem*
  - *Self-perceptions*
  - *Self-regulation*
- *Social co-operation*
  - *Social Skills*
  - *Assertiveness*
  - *Taking Initiative*
    - *Teamwork*
- *Time Management*

- *Well-Being*

## Do the effects *last*?

Many forms of intervention or training have positive effects. Typically, however, once the program is finished the effects fade fairly rapidly over time. This is a major headache for most educators - how can successful transfer of learning be achieved? Examination of the Outward Bound Australia outcomes have revealed a remarkable phenomenon. Not only is the Outward Bound "effect size" of .47 maintained over time, but there is an ongoing *additional* growth of .17 for at least 18 months after the program finish (Hattie, et al, 1997).

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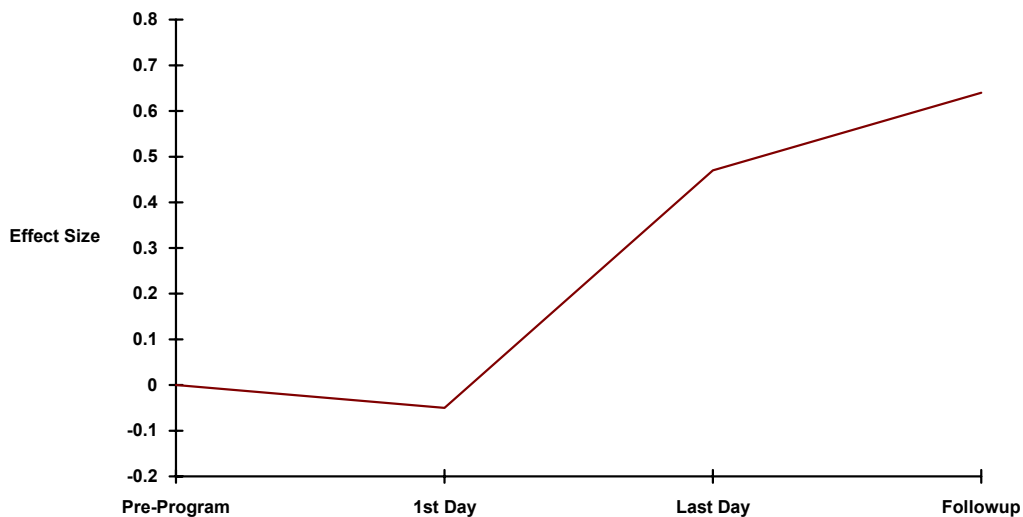


Figure 1. Outward Bound Australia Program Effects over Time

*"It seems that adventure programs have a major impact on the lives of participants, and this impact is lasting."*

- Hattie, et al. (1997, p.70)

## How does Outdoor Education compare with other intervention programs?

There are many different types of outdoor education programs available. There are an even greater number of other forms of training or education. So, how do the outcomes of Outward Bound Australia programs compare? A wise consumer should consider all possible options before deciding on where to go. Overall, for self-concept change programs, the evidence suggests that physically-based interventions such as Outward Bound, summer camps, and physical fitness programs are more effective than cognitive, behavioural and other therapies (Hattie, J.M., 1992).

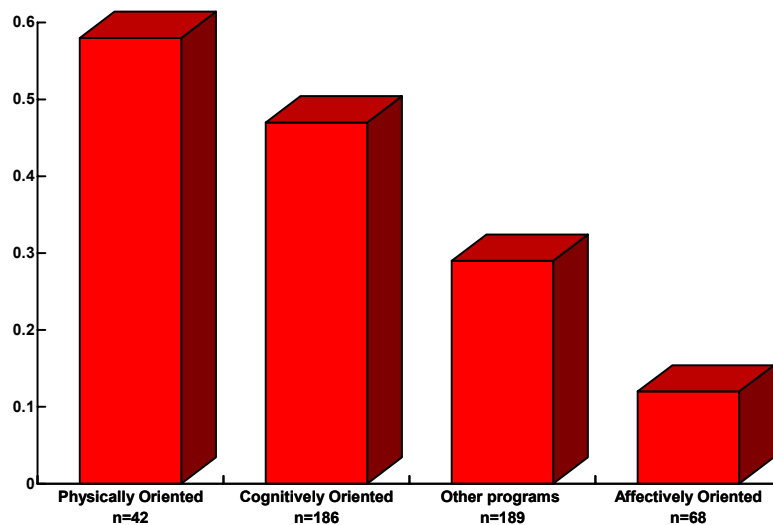


Figure 2. Effect sizes for self-concept intervention programs (Hattie, J.M., 1992)<sup>1</sup>

*....for self-concept change programs, the evidence suggests that physically-based interventions....are more effective than cognitive, behavioural and other therapies (Hattie, J.M., 1992)*

<sup>1</sup>Note

(a) *n* refers to the number of studies, not the number of participants

(b) Physically Oriented programs: Summer schools, Outdoor education, Physical exercise, Motor development;

Cognitively Oriented programs: Cognitive therapy, Cognitive behavior therapy, Behavior therapy, Personal development, Communication, Transactional analysis;

Other programs: Psychology courses, Academic, Counselling skills, Environmental, Non-descriptive;

Affectively Oriented programs: Adlerian, Client-centred, Gestalt, Creative self-awareness.

## How does OUTWARD BOUND compare with other outdoor education programs?

There is a great deal of variability between the outcomes of different types of outdoor education programs, ranging from negative to highly positive (Hattie, et al., 1997). Hence it is important to compare the effects of OUTWARD BOUND programs with the outcomes for other forms of adventure education. Figure 3 shows that the research on non-OUTWARD BOUND programs ( $ES=.20$ , based on 584 effects) is substantially weaker than for OUTWARD BOUND programs ( $ES=.47$ , based on 417 effects).

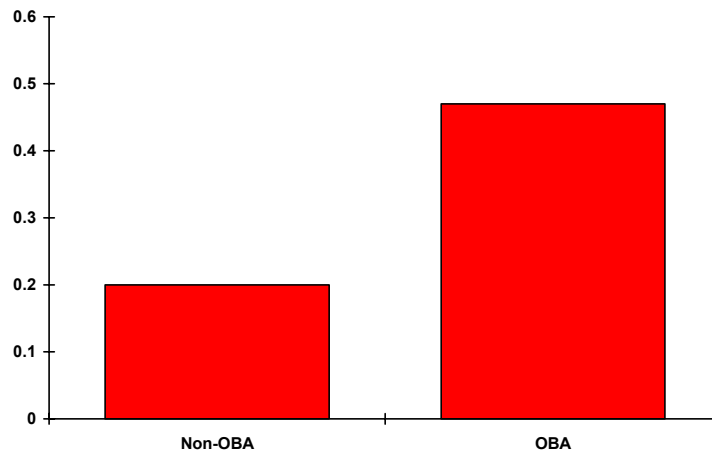


Figure 3. Effect sizes for OUTWARD BOUND and Non-OUTWARD BOUND programs (Hattie, et al, 1997)

*This is a dramatic illustration that participants on OUTWARD BOUND programs seem to receive over twice as much benefit than participants on other outdoor-based education programs.*



## Are all Outward Bound programs equally effective?

The outcomes of any educational program dependent on a complex combination of factors such as the age and gender of the participants, how motivated they are, the length of the program, the quality of the instructors, the sequence of the activities, and so on. Hence it is not surprising that we've already seen that there are differences between Outward Bound program outcomes and other types of change programs. Figure 4 shows that even within Outward Bound different programs achieve different outcomes for the different types of programs.

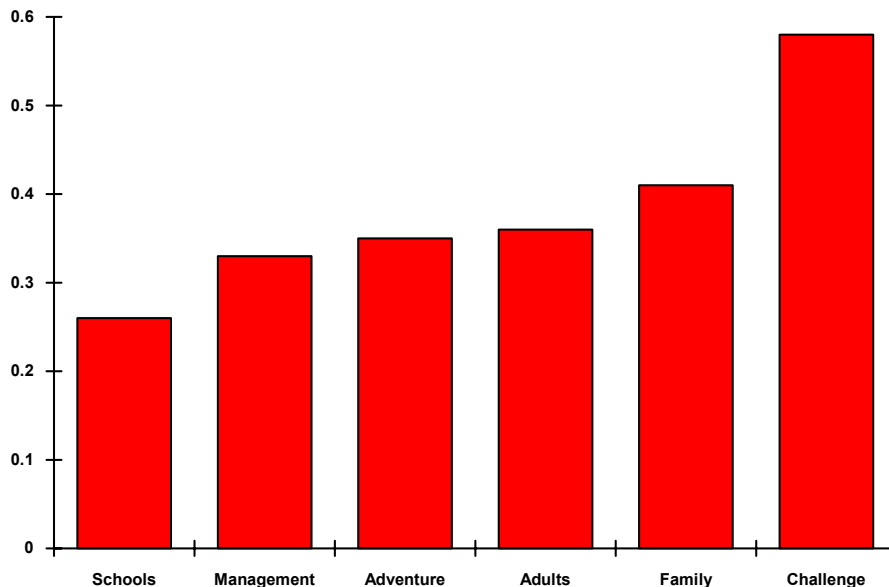


Figure 4. Effect sizes for Different types of Outward Bound programs (Neill, 1998)<sup>2</sup>

Clearly the most effective programs are the 22-day "Challenge" courses for 17 to 30 year olds. The lowest "effect size" are for 3 to 9-day "Schools" programs, which are usually compulsory programs for lower high school students. It has been noted in other research that adolescents in this age group seem particularly resistant to intervention (e.g. Hattie, J.M., 1992), although it should be noted that the "effect size" for school courses is still a positive .26, which remains higher than the non-Outward Bound effect size of .20.

*Clearly the most effective programs are the 22-day "Challenge" courses....although it should be noted that the....Outward Bound school courses are still higher than the non-Outward Bound average "effect size".*

<sup>2</sup>This figure is based on the responses of 2762 participants to the "Life Effectiveness Questionnaire" before and after Outward Bound Australia programs.

## Are Outward Bound’s effects equally strong in all areas?

Outdoor education programs are by no means a panacea for all the world’s ills. In some areas, OUTWARD BOUND programs are particularly effective, in other areas less so. It is also true that no one program can meet the needs of every single individual or every single organisation. Hence it is vital that careful consultation takes place with organisations and individuals considering an OUTWARD BOUND program so that appropriate goals can be set and program modifications made to achieve those goals.

An overall indication can be given, however, about the relative strengths of OUTWARD BOUND programs. Figure 5 shows the “effect sizes” for 8 key outcomes emphasized on OUTWARD BOUND programs. It can be seen that the strongest effects are achieved in the areas of Time Management and Self-Confidence, while Achievement Motivation appears to be more resistant to change.

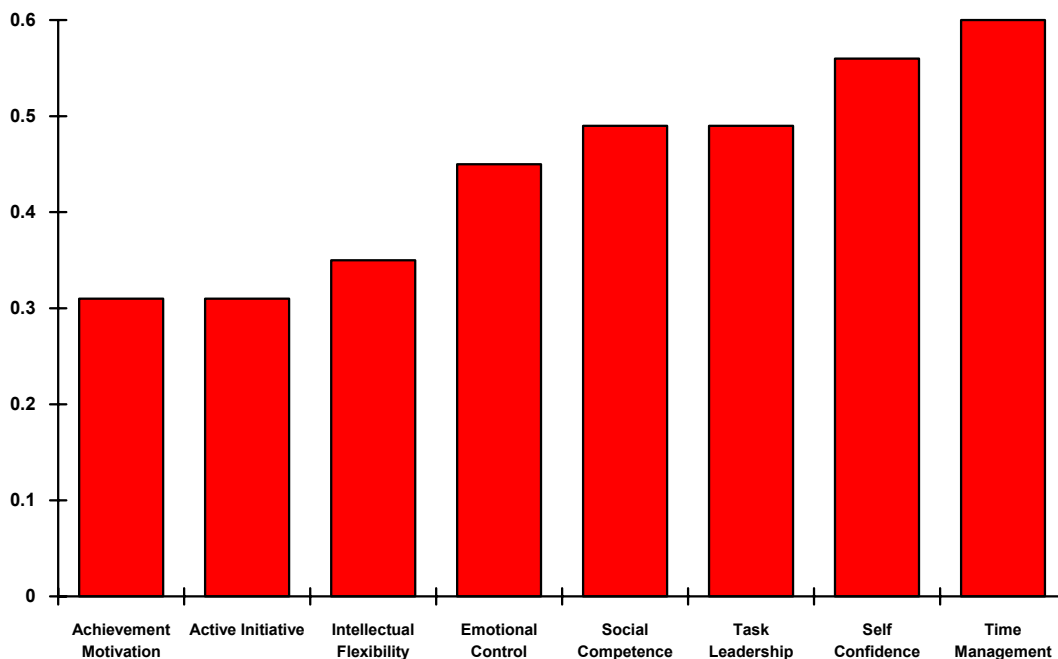


Figure 5. Effect sizes for different outcomes on OUTWARD BOUND programs (Neill, 1998)<sup>3</sup>

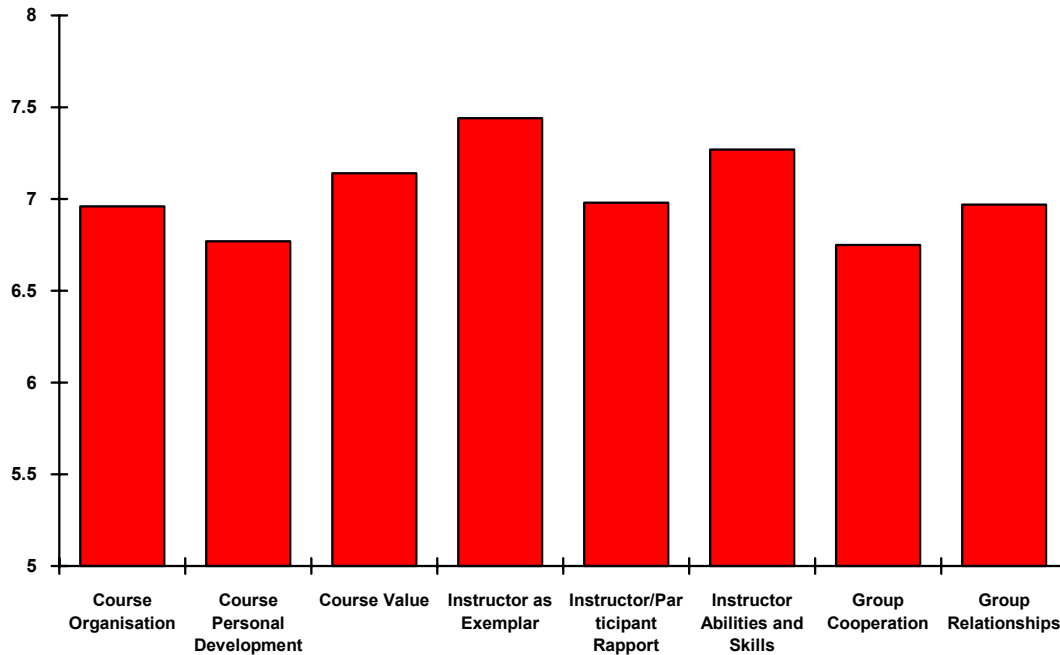
*Profiling of outcomes provides the designers of Outward Bound programs with vital diagnostic feedback about how to adjust and improve program quality.*

*This information also facilitates the tailoring of programs to individual participants and organisations, depending on their goals.*

<sup>3</sup>This figure is based on the responses of 2762 participants to the “Life Effectiveness Questionnaire” before and after Outward Bound Australia programs.

## What do participants think of the program?

An important indicator of the quality of a program is not only the amount of positive change that it effects, but also how participants felt about the experience. Participants on Outward Bound Australia programs are asked to honestly rate the program, the group experience, and the instructors. The results of over 4000 evaluations are illustrated in Figure 6. On all aspects, participants on average believed that it was between “true” (7) and “very true” (8) that the Outward Bound Australia program delivered high quality.



*Participant evaluation information for each program is used to provide feedback to instructors and programmers as a mechanism for quality assurance.*

## Summary

Outward Bound Australia has been conducting research on its programs for some 30 years and with many thousands of participants. The aim has been to gather the knowledge necessary to design and deliver the most effective outdoor-based personal development programs possible. This is an unusual effort from a non-profit organisation. The value of this commitment has paid off, as demonstrated by the short and long-term effectiveness of its programs.

Comparisons with other types of intervention and outdoor programs demonstrate that Outward Bound are particularly impressive. The strongest outcomes of all are for Outward Bound's 22-day "Challenge" courses, while even the smallest outcomes for "Schools" courses are stronger than the average outcomes for outdoor education.

Outward Bound appears to have different effects in different areas, working most powerfully on participants' ability to manage their time and their self-confidence. This sort of information is valuable when helping participants and organisations formulate their goals for an Outward Bound program.

It is also important to consider the feedback and perspectives of the Outward Bound participants. On average, they have consistently positive responses the quality of the program, the group experience, and the instructors. This information is used for the ongoing development of the unique educational experiences offered by Outward Bound.

## References

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