

Announcing the Character Education and Outdoor Education  
Pre-Symposium Session at the Seventeenth Biennial Coalition for Education in the Outdoors  
Research Symposium

CEO Research Symposium: February 6-8, 2026  
YMCA's Blue Ridge Assembly Conference Center in Black Mountain, NC, USA  
(<https://blueridgeassembly.org/>)

Pre-Symposium Session: Friday, February 6, 9:00 am-1:00 pm

Facilitated by Pete Allison (Penn State University) and Laurie Pearson (American Camp Association)

Character has a long history in outdoor education. – sometimes contested, sometimes popular, sometimes unpopular! Character has also been used in a wide range of meanings and morphed into different terms to fit a variety of socio-political and cultural contexts. Terms such as personal and social development, personal, social and emotional learning, and non-cognitive skills are just a few examples. Kurt Hahn, one of the founders of outdoor education, was committed to influencing character in young people and saw it as a moral responsibility of those involved in education (formal and non-formal) in large part because he was concerned about the decline of civic society and wider trends of international peace, or otherwise, between countries.

Notwithstanding semantics of terminology, it is abundantly clear that character, or components of it, is essential and has gained increasing attention in the last decade. The popularity of Angela Duckworth's work on *Grit*, Carol Dweck's work on *Mindsets* and David Brook's book, *The Second Mountain* are all examples of a growing interest in different forms of character.

In the UK the Jubilee Center for Character and Virtue have led over the last 15 years significant developments in both theory, policy and educational practices in Character Education. Similarly, Wake Forest's Educating Character Initiative (ECI) has grown at an exponential rate.

This 4-hour pre-symposium session will provide an overview of current conceptual approaches to character education and then focus in on two large scale studies. First, a four-year study of Outward Bound as a Character Building Organization emphasizing cross cultural approaches, similarities and differences (supported by the John Templeton Foundation). Second, the American Camp Association's Character at Camp initiative, a 6-year project that includes a grant program for camps looking to start, improve, expand, or celebrate character development efforts at camp. The remainder of the session will be given to dialogue around character, character education outdoors and potential implications for research and practice.

#### REGISTRATION INFO

Please consider arriving on Thursday evening and engaging in this focused pre-symposium session. Additional fee of \$50 (including lunch Friday). Registration information is available via the symposium coordinators at [2<sup>nd</sup> Nature TREC](#)

**Schedule and Presenters.** Information about the Coalition for Education in the Outdoors including previous symposia Book of Abstracts and Open Access copies of *Research in Outdoor Education* can be found at the [CEO website](#). The tentative symposium schedule is available on the [2<sup>nd</sup> Nature TREC](#) website. A detailed schedule including symposium presenters will be available by November 2025.