

In 2017, with the support of a generous investment from the S.D. Bechtel Jr. Foundation, Outward Bound launched the Outward Bound Professional Learning Lab to continuously improve our student experience, enhance training and professional development for staff and add rigor to our evaluation techniques. At the center of the Lab's work is defining and measuring the social and emotional skills that students develop on an Outward Bound course and the practices staff use to support this growth. In 2019, Outward Bound saw statistically significant changes in all 12 social-emotional outcomes measured by the Outward Bound Outcomes Survey, including perseverance, self-awareness, and teamwork. The Lab continues to lead the Outward Bound system to implement effective SEL practices and use data to evaluate and improve our impact on SEL outcomes for students.

Document Purpose: to provide updated copy-and-paste ready language for fundraisers and sales professionals to answer common stakeholder questions about the Lab and its work, and to drive more revenue and engagement.

Audience: Foundations, school and community organization leadership, teachers, possibly other funders (individuals, corporate)

Updates: This is a living document and will be updated annual at least. Particularly the impact sections will get updates as more data becomes available.

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Boilerplate

Outward Bound USA is at the center of a fundamental shift in the nation's educational paradigm; more than two decades of research has shown that success in life is dependent on the development of social and emotional skills. The Outward Bound Professional Learning Lab is poised to help educators, families and students achieve the key social and emotional skills that students need to enter and graduate from college; succeed in their careers; have positive work and family relationships; better mental and physical health; and become more engaged, compassionate participants in their communities. Through collaboration with educational partners, innovation in experiential learning, and evaluation of program outcomes and instruction, The Learning Lab aims to provide the best Outward Bound experience for every student, every time. To learn more, visit

<https://www.outwardbound.org/about-outward-bound/philosophy/outward-bound-professional-learning-lab/>

What is the Lab?

Established in 2017, The Outward Bound Professional Learning Lab ("The Lab") is a collaborative effort of the Outward Bound USA system. The Lab's purpose is to continuously improve the student experience and Field Staff instruction so that every student has the best Outward Bound experience, every time. We do this in three intentional ways.

First, we ***focus on how students learn***. Outward Bound's educational approach is the compass that has guided students for 50 years. Now, we are connecting it to the science of learning and development. Our responsibility is to ensure the next 50 years are just as impactful by applying current research in youth development, education, and social emotional learning, and by keeping our students at the center of our work.

Second, we facilitate ***collaboration to strengthen staff practice***. The Lab merges the wisdom of 11 different regional Outward Bound schools with current research on learning and development, and provides professional learning resources and training to support staff development. We then encourage field observation to ensure that instructors are supported in applying best practices. Finally, these learnings and observations are shared across the country.

Third, we ***use data to drive program improvement***. Regional Schools collect data from observations of staff practices in the field and from the Outward Bound Student Outcomes

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From 2017-2020, The Lab worked with Gil G. Noam, Ed.D., Assistant Professor, Harvard Medical School, and founder of the Partnerships in Education Resilience (PEAR) and the NOAM Institute, to complete a program evaluation. This process built a shared understanding of proven social and emotional learning practices, developed and tested tools to measure impact for students, created a system of field observations to see staff in action, and provided feedback to help us improve. The Lab now supports the regional Outward Bound Schools as they incorporate these tools and systems into their regular operations.

As we look towards the future, the Lab is committed to supporting the Outward Bound system with its shared goals: deepening our commitment to equity, inclusion, and diversity; reaching more students who traditionally have not had access to OB experiences; and continuing to deliver high quality programming that supports students' social and emotional development.

What is the Domains of Thriving Framework?

To Accompany the Domains of Thriving Image

The Domains of Thriving framework and tool combines Outward Bound's 50+ years of experience facilitating life-changing experiences with the latest insight and research on social-emotional development. The Domains of Thriving highlights the four areas of human development that are impacted on an Outward Bound course: Courage, Belonging, Reflection, and Physical Engagement. It also identifies eight specific social-emotional skills that our students are supported to develop: Perseverance, Assertiveness, Group Relationships, Teamwork, Self-Awareness, Social-Responsibility, Self-Regulation and Physical Confidence. Surrounding all of this are our Conditions for Learning, which provide the foundation for transformative learning experiences.

Short version:

The Domains of Thriving framework and tool combines Outward Bound's 60 years of experience facilitating life-changing experiences with the latest insight and research on social-emotional development. Developed in partnership with Dr. Gil Noam, the Domains of Thriving highlights the four areas of human development that are impacted on an Outward Bound course:

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Courage, Belonging, Reflection, and Physical Engagement. Each domain includes two specific social-emotional skills that Outward Bound focuses on.

The Domains of Thriving guides our instructors by naming key practices to support the development of each social-emotional skill. The tool also allows us to measure the presence of these effective practices and coach staff on using them, leading to a system of continuous program improvement.

Full version:

The Domains of Thriving (DoT) framework and tool combines Outward Bound's 60 years of experience facilitating life-changing experiences with the latest insight and research on social-emotional development and resiliency. The DoT is based on the Clover Model, developed by Dr. Gil Noam and the Partnerships for Education and Resilience (PEAR). The Clover Model defines what all people need to learn, grow, and thrive and supports the development of social-emotional skills. The Domains of Thriving highlights the four areas of human development that are impacted on an Outward Bound course: Courage, Belonging, Reflection, and Physical Engagement. Each domain includes two specific social-emotional skills that Outward Bound focuses on:

Courage: Perseverance, Assertiveness

Belonging: Group Relationships, Teamwork

Reflection: Self-Awareness, Social-Responsibility

Physical Engagement: Self-Regulation, Physical Confidence

In addition to providing a framework for social-emotional development, the Domains of Thriving defines Outward Bound's Conditions for Learning. These conditions are the "how" of what happens in the field: Structure, Progression, Staff and Student Relationships, and Exploration.

The Domains of Thriving guides our Instructors by describing key practices to support the development of each social-emotional skill for their students and a common language to communicate and give feedback on these proven practices. Instructors may use the Domains of Thriving as they are designing their courses and creating lesson plans, or when they notice that students are struggling with a certain skill, like teamwork.

Using a coaching version of the Domains of Thriving, trained staff can observe courses and coach instructors on the use of specific practices. A measurement version of the tool allows Certified Observers to collect quantitative data on the presence of the practices, which is an

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What is the Outward Bound Outcomes Survey (OBOS)

The Outward Bound Outcomes Survey (OBOS) measures self-reported change in key social and emotional skills at the end of an Outward Bound program. Participants fill out the survey after their course and reflect on their skills when they started the course compared to after the course; what is called a "retro-pre and post survey." Students answer questions like "If I fail to solve a problem, I try again until I find a solution" and "I feel like other students understand me in this group" that are tied to the outcomes we measure below. The OBOS measures 12 key indicators of social and emotional development for young people ages 10-23.

One and two day programs use a shorter version of the tool with the six scales that are most relevant to these programs.

Standard Survey Measures: Emotion Control, Perseverance, Assertiveness, Teamwork, Empathy, Learning Engagement, Physical Confidence, Self-Regulation, Group Relationships, Self-Awareness, Social Responsibility, Staff and Student Relationships

Short Survey Measures: Perseverance, Group Relationships, Teamwork, Self-Awareness, Physical Confidence, Learning Engagement

You can download a document with the scale definitions and read the answers to Frequently Asked Questions about the OBOS here: <https://outwardboundlab.wixsite.com/home/obos>

What is Social-Emotional Learning?

Research shows that **all learning** requires a holistic approach across three interconnected areas: Cognitive, Social, Emotional.

From The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL): "Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective

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goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities.”

How do we relate to the greater SEL sector?

It is true that Outward Bound's internationally-renowned expeditions have always taught participants so-called “technical or hard skills” like navigating with or without a map, how to manage and mitigate risk in the wilderness, and tying the most secure rock climbing knots. We have also always excelled in the far more difficult task of teaching “inter/intra-personal or soft skills” like resilience, compassion, and leadership, referred to today as social-emotional skills. We find ourselves at the center of, and leading, a much-needed shift within the U.S. educational paradigm. Schools and teachers, as well as parents and students, are realizing that academic outcomes are fundamentally dependent on these social and emotional skills, which have always been at the center of Outward Bound courses.

According to a 2019 study by The National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development, and based on more than two decades of research and thousands of interviews with students, parents, and teachers around the U.S.: “Young people who have stronger social, emotional, and cognitive skills are more likely to enter and graduate from college; succeed in their careers; have positive work and family relationships, better mental and physical health, and reduced criminal behavior; and be more engaged citizens.”[1]

[1]The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. From a Nation At Risk to A Nation at Hope, Chapter 1: “How Learning Happens.” <<http://nationathope.org/report-from-the-nation/chapter-1-how-learning-happens/>> (2019).

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How does the Lab work relate to Equity and Inclusion?

COMING SOON

Impact: What do the results tell us now?

Our program evaluation process uses two primary data sources: 1. student outcomes through a self-report survey and 2. observations of staff practice. Together, these tools provide information on the changes students experience through Outward Bound and on what instructors do that may lead to these changes. We began collecting this data in 2019, and while we will learn more as we gather more data, our initial data supports what our alumni tell us every year: Outward Bound changes lives.

The Outward Bound Outcomes Survey (OBOS), designed and validated by the Partnerships for Education and Resilience (PEAR), measures student change in 12 areas, including perseverance, teamwork, and self-awareness. Students take the survey one time, at the end of their course, and report on each area. In 2019, 5,676 students took the OBOS. An analysis by PEAR showed statistically significant increases between students pre and post-test scores in all 12 areas. Additionally, over 60% of students surveyed on courses of 3 or more days reported positive change in each of the following areas: Perseverance, Group Relationships, Teamwork, and Assertiveness.

Regional Schools use the OBOS data to inform their program improvement process. For example, for most schools Emotion Control and Empathy were the skills that had the lowest percent of students reporting a positive change in 2019. A regional School may make a plan to focus on these areas in staff training or adjust curriculum in an attempt to make a greater impact on these skills.

Our data in 2019 indicated that student outcomes were stronger on courses longer than two days than on one- and two-day programs. It is logical that less change will happen in one or two days, especially when the program is trying to support the development of 12 different skills. In response to this data, we narrowed our focus and created a short version of the survey that focuses on six areas instead of twelve. As a result of learning from the data, several regional schools are adjusting the curriculum for one- to two-day programs to provide greater depth on more targeted outcomes.

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In 2020 and early 2021, we collected very little data because of a pause in most programming due to the Covid 19 Pandemic. The data we did collect tells a compelling story. The students who participated in in-person programming during this time were almost exclusively young adults (18-24) on long courses (>20 days). This population of students has been especially vulnerable during the pandemic as a result of losing school and workplace connections. Over 80% of the students reported gains in each of these areas: Perseverance, Assertiveness, Group Relationships, Self-Awareness, and Self Regulation. These skills will help them navigate the uncertainty and challenges of young adulthood.*

The outcome of Learning Engagement is also of particular interest with this group of students. Students in the 18-24 year-old age group often come to Outward Bound when traditional education has not met their needs. Nine of ten (89.2%) of these students reported increases in Learning Engagement during their Outward Bound course, indicating that OB can positively impact how students engage with learning.*

*Note: Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the Lab and do not necessarily reflect those of PEAR.

Character Development vs Social-Emotional Learning

*Please note that any opinions provided in this section are those of the Outward Bound Professional Learning Lab staff. Outward Bound USA and the regional Schools will continue to grapple with this language, and we don't intend to portray this answer as a directive for the system.

Through the development of our evaluation tools and the evolution of the Learning Lab, we have generally shifted from talking about "Character Development" to talking about "Social and Emotional Skill Development" or "Social-Emotional Learning." The term "Character Development" has historically been prevalent in much of Outward Bound's marketing and educational materials, and it is logical for one to ask - "why the shift in language?" and "what's the difference between the two?"

We'll start with the second question, which doesn't have a very clear answer. There are a number of definitions of Character Development and Character Education and differing opinions of the values and shortfalls of these approaches. In general, Character-focused educational programs tend to focus on the development of moral identity or moral responsibility. This is not

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a defining characteristic of Social-Emotional Learning or other variations on that term.

Social-Emotional Learning is generally focused on the development of knowledge, attitudes, and skills. One way to think about the difference is that a Character Education approach might encourage students to embrace a specific value, while a Social-Emotional Learning approach would provide the skills for students to reflect on the connection between *their* values and their behavior. [2] Another way you might think about it is that the Character Education approach is about "making good choices" while the Social-Emotional Learning approach is about "being good at making choices."

When you look closely at Outward Bound, aspects of both approaches are present throughout our programs. For example, we do teach and embrace specific values; for example, we empower students to live lives of purpose and compassion. However, our approach is not directive; we provide experiences that allow students to consider how these values fit for them. We also explicitly provide opportunities for students to gain the knowledge and skills to support their development of social and emotional skills, like teamwork and self-awareness.

There are criticisms of Character Development and Character Education that we were aware of as we considered what language to use. One criticism is that they can advance the values of the dominant culture or a culturally-specific set of virtues that is not relevant for all students and communities. A broad definition of character, like is provided by Angela Duckworth's Character Lab, "We define character as everything we do to help other people as well as ourselves"[3] might be fitting for Outward Bound, but some other definitions reach into moral imperatives. A quick Google search will show that "Social-Emotional Learning" is also not without criticism, both from those who see it as an overreach of the educational system and those who think it does not do enough to account for the contexts of systemic racism and other forms of oppression that impact students' lives and communities.

So how did the Lab decide to focus on Social and Emotional Skill Development rather than Character Development? First, we wanted to focus on what we can measure, and skill acquisition is more easily measured than broader attributes or values. Second, we wanted to be clear that we are supporting the development of skills that can be used by the student to support themselves and their community in the ways that are most relevant to them. This was important as Outward Bound USA and the regional Schools seek to be more equitable, inclusive, and culturally-responsive.

[2] <https://www.cfchildren.org/blog/2018/07/character-education-and-sel-what-you-should-know/>

[3] <https://characterlab.org/character/>

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