Facilitating experiential learning:
Co-creating stories with better endings for clients

Michael Gass, Guest Editor

Yesterday I was playing Pizza Store with my six-year-old daughter. This involved ordering pizzas over the various phones we would build, making up unusual but satisfying combinations (e.g., chocolate, cheese, and peanut M&M pizza), coming up with imaginative ways to pay for pizzas (e.g., horseback rides are always good for this), and always returning the pizza carton so we could continue to play the game.

It was fascinating to be a part of this experience because in this store, every time we came to a part of the experience she didn’t feel was working out the way she wanted, she would change the rules of the experience, editing her story of what was supposed to happen. In her perception, we would “rewind” the story as one would rewind a video tape, edit what had occurred in order to create a better interaction, and then continue on with the game.

For many facilitators (e.g., Luckner & Nadler, 1997; Waller & Peller, 1992; White & Epston, 1990), the process of facilitation is analogous to creating stories. People make stories of their experiences, and, like my daughter, edit their stories when they are not as satisfactory or as productive as they could be.

Facilitators join together with clients during this client editorial process. Most important in helping clients to edit their stories is to recognize that they are the clients’ stories, not the facilitators’. In the storyline, clients are both the characters and the writers. Facilitators must recognize that the initial script of the story, as well as the final version, is the client’s, and the one they will continue to possess after the experience is completed.

In this vein, we have quite purposefully begun this issue of the Journal of Experiential Education with a client’s story, whereas we usually begin with opening commentary from the editor or guest editor. In Gayleen Ellers’ article, the voice in her story is the heart of her experience. As professionals in experiential learning, we all have our own ideas about what the important features are in our work. But here in this issue focused on facilitation, it is important to sit back, read, and listen to what this client feels is important. In her story, Gayleen leads us over concepts many of us have visited before (e.g., challenge by choice, the concept of unfamiliarity in adventure experiences, typical challenge course elements), but the important essence of her story can be found in how these concepts contributed to the editing of her story.

Recently several authors (e.g., Mack, 1996) have criticized the work of others (e.g., Bacon, 1983), labeling such approaches as “imposed” and ill-fitting for certain client populations. Mack is correct in her assumptions when such a framework makes little sense to a client’s reality; that is, when it has little connection to a particular client’s issues. Her work reminds us that the editing process must be derived from what clients bring to the experience.

However, it is just as important to remember that facilitating experiences involves more than just deriving a client’s story. The editing process truly becomes a co-creation process involving both the client and the facilitator on the basis of what the clients need. Such co-creation is usually necessary for functional change to occur (most clients who would “self-facilitate” such change would generally not be seeking out the services of a “facilitator”). It is not an “either client or facilitator” process; rather, it is a “both client and facilitator” editing process. In Gayleen Ellers’ story, this co-creation process is evident. In several places the facilitator enters into the story, adding elements for consideration.
that seem to make her experience more beneficial.

How do we find our proper roles as facilitators? The answer generally resides in the very essence of the purposes of facilitation. Facilitation is the process of augmenting the qualities of clients’ experiences based on an accurate assessment of clients’ needs. The typical intended outcomes of facilitation are to: (1) enhance the quality of the learning experience; (2) assist clients in finding directions and sources for functional change; and (3) create changes that are lasting and transferable (e.g., Gass 1993; Priest & Gass, 1997). Facilitation techniques are employed when they can produce one if not all of these outcomes.

I found myself playing Pizza Store again today. I asked my daughter if she liked or even minded me adding ideas to help her make a better story. She said that when I had some good ideas she added them into the game. I asked her if some of my ideas weren’t helpful as part of her story, and what she did with these. She said she listened to them, but didn’t use them because they didn’t “work.” This learning from my daughter reminds me of how important it is to position clients so they can be in control of the editorial process. Dan and Dennis Garvey’s work in this issue provides wonderful insight around this concept. Unfortunately, clients don’t always find themselves in situations where the editorial process is so easily self-facilitated as my daughter’s Pizza Store, or in situations where what they want may not be what they need. In such situations, facilitators must center efforts around the purposes and outcomes of facilitation outlined above, utilizing what clients bring to experiences and what is working for clients. Lisa West-Smith’s article on therapeutic communication provides an example of the importance of this concept.

One final thought on the analogy of facilitation as an editorial process. I am reminded of the flaw in the maxim “Practice makes perfect.” Many of us know clients who have been practicing behaviors for a long time and not achieving the results they desire. More accurately stated, we want to facilitate clients in situations where they would be looking at “Perfect practice makes perfect” (understanding that nothing is ever perfect). Possibly this may provide some insight into the rationale behind the need for facilitators to take on a more active editorial process with clients, obviously being centered on clients’ needs in the manner I have stated earlier.

The remainder of the articles all address several critical issues associated with facilitation. They center our thinking around how are our efforts are perceived by clients as well as how we can make our editing process more targeted around clients’ needs. As a reader, I encourage you to examine the various authors’ perspectives and see how they add to your own editing processes.

References


Imagine yourself as the leader of an all-women’s backpacking trip in the Allegheny Mountains during the late spring. There are six trip participants. Three of the women have done some hiking, two are experienced wilderness guides, and one is a novice participant, whom I will call “Jan.” Each participant is recovering from depression.

This trip has been arranged as an adjunct to their outpatient counseling program at the local women’s therapy center. The goal of this trip is therapeutic: to provide the participants an opportunity to experience self-efficacy and develop self-esteem in a physically and emotionally safe and supportive outdoor adventure environment.

Although things have gone very well from pre-trip planning to early group formation stages, the temperature has steadily dropped from 50 degrees Fahrenheit yesterday evening to 12 degrees overnight. The afternoon is cloudy and has not warmed noticeably. Jan seems to be having some difficulty. Her face is pale, she has slowed her pace considerably, and she almost looks as if she is limping. But Jan is no complainer. She has quickly learned new outdoor skills and has made a significant contribution to the spirit of cooperativeness and to the group norm of keeping a positive attitude. As the trip leader, you have been diligent on today’s six-mile hike in suggesting stops for snacks, foot inspections, and clothing changes. The last stop was thirty minutes ago. Just as you begin to walk toward Jan, she says to you, “It’s a little cold, isn’t it?”

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Is she just making conversation, is she wondering how you are feeling, does she need to stop and put on her parka, or might she possibly have frostbite on her feet? The reply that Jan receives at this moment could be important on many different levels. How would you respond?

The primary purpose of this paper is to provide theoretical and practical information to enhance “basic” therapeutic communication skills with trip participants in outdoor adventure settings. Discussion of what some might consider gender-based language style, and commentary on issues of physical and emotional safety, will preface suggestions for facilitation of basic therapeutic communication.

For the purposes of this article, basic therapeutic communication is defined as exchanges that facilitate a climate of trust and empowerment within and between trip participants and leader. Given this definition, such communication should be useful for outdoor adventure trips regardless of overall trip goal, and may be appropriate for practitioners with any level of clinical training. This article will outline a philosophical perspective for engaging in therapeutic communication, rather than “therapy,” reiterate Denise Mitten’s (1995) discussion of affirmations, and describe the commonly used responsive listening techniques of reflection and clarification; these topics will be further illustrated through a dialogue and examples. The philosophical perspective and affirmations illustrated suggest a foundation for the development of a theoretical and practical model for facilitation of “basic” therapeutic communication in outdoor adventure settings; the responsive listening techniques illustrated may denote a point of movement from “basic” toward more “advanced” therapeutic communication, or therapy.

It is important to note that this article does not comprehensively address the important issue of how much clinical training is “enough” to employ what
Coates (1989) expounds on the topic of "hedges." She sees their use in women's speech patterns as indicative of interactive cooperation and respect, rather than a lack of confidence in the truth of a message. Hedges may also even serve to give both speaker and listener a way out if a message becomes uncomfortable for either. For example, one trip participant may say to another: "Our leader seems sort of distant today." The listener may not agree with or even like the speaker's comment. Yet the use of "sort of" may provide space for both speaker and listener to explore further or to back out of the discussion. Cameron et al. (1989) also suggest that "tag questions" serve an important interactional function by their ability to encourage further conversation, and may occur just as frequently in men's speech. Whether or not "tag questions" and "hedges" are tentative, more common in women's speech, and/or reflective of low levels of confidence, their usage provides both practitioner and client opportunities for non-threatening and empowering clarification of issues. Through continuation of a fictitious dialogue with Jan, this paper will further illustrate how these language patterns may occur and can be utilized for basic therapeutic communication in outdoor adventure settings.

"Tentative" language: Gender based? Deficit or opportunity?

Much controversy in the feminist literature has followed Robin Lakoff's (1975) argument that women's language patterns, especially "tag questions" can be considered a gender deficit. Tag questions are short questions included at the end of a statement, such as "Isn't it?" which Jan, in the opening scenario, used at the end of her comment, "It's a little cold." The discourse in feminist literature on women's language patterns has continued long since her controversial book, Language and Woman's Place. Lakoff's argument that women speak differently than men, and in a non-assertive manner that suggests uncertainty or weakness by the speaker, has been criticized in subsequent feminist linguistic research (Cameron et al., 1989; Coates, 1989). According to Lakoff's analysis, "tag questions" occur more frequently in women's speech. She contends that "tag questions" are problematic because they suggest the speaker's need for confirmation, a dissociation with one's own views, and an avoidance of conflict with the listener. Lakoff further argues that "hedges," such as beginning sentences with prefaces like "I guess" or "I wonder," or using words such as "you know" or "sort of," instead of just stating something outright, also occur more commonly in women's speech because of socialization that proscribes assertiveness as "unfeminine."

Awareness of participant needs for physical and emotional safety

It is important to note that physical safety implications are present in the opening scenario. Clarification of Jan's statement should provide the leader with information on if and how to intervene if the problem is of a physical nature, and the leader's wilderness emergency medical competence should allow the appropriate response. The leader's awareness of and response to Jan's seemingly "tentative" language can contribute significantly to establishing a climate of physical and emotional safety. It may be that Jan is a trip participant who is reluctant, for whatever reason, to speak assertively about physical or emotional needs. The leader's utilization of basic therapeutic communication skills is one way to facilitate both empowerment of the participant and to help establish the climate of interpersonal trust between participants and leader that is necessary for a sense of physical and emotional safety.

Vincent (1995) suggests that one definition of emotional safety is a sense of "a real or actual freedom from psychological harm." Because feelings of emotional safety can fluctuate according to the situation, and between individuals:

Defining emotional safety as a perceived [italics added] freedom from psychological harm puts more of an emphasis on individual reactions to situations. Emotions are depen-
dent on individual perceptions. Each person has a different reaction to situations based on experience, personal abilities, comfort level in new situations, temperament, cognitive abilities, perceived abilities to verbalize boundaries or needs, perceived options, etc. Focusing emotional safety on individual perceptions can help therapists identify how emotionally safe someone is by examining the individual as well as the situation. (p. 79)

Further exploration of Jan’s individual perceptions, for example, can afford the leader an opportunity to ascertain the nature of the difficulty and to make an intervention decision.

Although the appropriate use of basic therapeutic communication can facilitate feelings of trust between group members and leaders, Mitten (1995) cautions that premature self-disclosure and bonding around the common challenge and stresses of outdoor experience might sometimes lead to dependency relationships rather than healthy ones based on mutual “trust and respect” (p. 85). The ability to maintain communication at the appropriate level in recreation, education/training, development, and psychotherapy groups is a complicated task for practitioners. For example, in Jan’s case, it could be that she is feeling ready to discuss a traumatic event for the first time, and her sense of feeling “overwhelmed” by fatigue and the weather is related. Perhaps she had attempted suicide prior to her involvement with the women’s center therapy group, and has not yet been able to talk about it with anyone. In this circumstance, an outdoor adventure practitioner who is trained as a therapist, and familiar with depression and suicide issues, may be more comfortable initiating a deeper level of therapeutic communication with her than would a differently trained practitioner.

A comprehensive discussion of many advanced skills necessary for the complex task of managing the psychological depth of a wilderness experience according to trip goals is well presented by Ringer and Gillis (1995). The difficulty in actually accomplishing this task is further illustrated later in this paper through the dialogue example. It is important to mention here that the level of psychological depth the leader will move to with Jan is appropriate because of the therapeutic purpose of this trip; responsive listening skills are utilized by the leader in this dialogue to facilitate that movement.

**Basic therapeutic communication**

For the purposes of this paper, basic therapeutic communication is defined as exchanges that facilitate a climate of trust and empowerment within and between trip participants and leader. Chase and Priest (1990) provide important additional information on the communication process, and Mitten’s (1995) research, on which a significant portion of this paper is based, offers valuable insight into some basic therapeutic communication techniques. Of course, many other factors influence a leader’s ability to facilitate this type of environment on any given trip, some of which depend on the participants. Three important elements of basic therapeutic communication are the focus of this discussion: a philosophical perspective for engaging in basic therapeutic communication, affirmations, and responsive listening techniques for clarification of messages.

**A philosophical perspective for engaging in therapeutic communication**

The widely renowned theory and practice of client-centered or person-centered therapy was originally developed by Carl Rogers (1951). His belief that people have within themselves the ability, resources, and knowledge they need to grow and make positive change is widely accepted. Genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathy, each effectively communicated to the client by a therapist, are necessary and sufficient for positive growth to occur (Rogers, 1951). These qualities allow for the creation of a therapeutic environment of trust and acceptance. Genuineness can be described as the realness or congruence of a therapist. To be genuine with clients, professionals must have the ability and courage to not put up a “front,” work to have agreement between their verbal and non-verbal messages, and understand and appropriately utilize personal thoughts and feelings in the context of the therapeutic relationship. Showing unconditional positive regard means communicating full acceptance of a client (even if the client’s behavior is unacceptable) in a non-possessive manner that reflects caring for the individual as another human being. Empathy is displayed by the ability to communicate understanding of clients’ thoughts and feelings from their frame of reference. Although Rogers’ thesis has generally been criticized as being too simplistic and non-directive, it is widely believed that under-
standing and embodiment of the qualities of genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathy are central to the practice of psychotherapy, and form the foundation for most therapeutic relationships (Corey, 1985). Outdoor adventure professionals who approach trip participants from this philosophical perspective may find that their communication is “therapeutic” and quite appropriate, regardless of their level of clinical training or the overall trip purpose or goal.

**Affirmations: Supportive and nurturing messages about “being,” “doing,” and “improving”**

Denise Mitten (1995) defines affirmations as “messages that are supportive and nurturing and can be used by the recipient to increase self-esteem” (p. 86). When delivered from a basis of genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathetic understanding, affirmations can “help create group norms that reflect healthy relationships” (p. 85). According to Mitten (1995) and Clarke (1979), affirmations can be extended by trip leaders to women about “being,” “doing,” and “improving.” Affirmations frequently include “I” statements or “permission” statements, as in these examples: “I like you” and “I like watching you climb,” or “You can explore” and “You started the stave well.” Mitten explains that “being” affirmations are used at the beginning of a trip to help participants begin to feel welcome and secure, and to build group cohesion. They can also set the tone on an intrapersonal level for therapeutic change to begin. Examples of “being” messages (offered with congruent non-verbal such as eye contact, handshakes, and appropriate physical proximity) include: using women’s names, answering questions, and making statements like “I’m glad to see you, Jan”; “I am so happy you are here”; and, “I was thinking about you this morning.”

“Doing” affirmations are added later in the trip after participants have become more comfortable with the group and the experience. Specific feedback relating to a participant’s skills or activity can reinforce positive behavior and bolster feelings of positive self-esteem. Some examples of “doing” affirmations are: “I really like the way you take time to help filter water for the group. That helped us all to be ready to leave on time this morning”; “I like the way you organized your pack this morning with your rain gear on top”; and, “I appreciated you sharing your feelings in our group session last night.”

“Improving” messages are carefully added and respectfully given later in a trip after “being” and “doing” affirmations are a norm. They are intended to address participants’ behavior that may need to be changed. For example, the statement, “Jan, it would be better if you poured out the dishwasher over here. If you do it there it may flow down to those plants and I know how much you care about the environment,” expresses an “improving” message. Though the concept of “solution focused” interventions (Gass & Gillis, 1995; DeJong & Miller, 1995; Priest & Gass, 1997) is a bit more complex and contextually varied than is illustrated in this example, the “improvement” message does seem to be delivered on a solution-focused basis, rather than on a problem-focused one, and consequently implies that the participant has the ability and desire to change.

Additionally, for many clients, the receipt of such messages, when appropriately delivered, may be a novel or infrequent occurrence. To receive an affirmation simply for “being” present, or even just being alive, can be a powerful experience for individuals who have learned to get positive feedback primarily from “doing” something. For novice outdoor adventure trip participants, “doing” affirmations can contribute to feelings of increased self-confidence while learning new skills in an unfamiliar environment.

“Improvement” messages, delivered respectfully, can help increase participants’ self-esteem and provide opportunities for setting limits for physical and emotional safety. Affirmations are a component of basic therapeutic communication that can and should be used by outdoor adventure professionals, regardless of overall trip purpose or goal, or practitioner’s level of clinical training.

**Responsive listening techniques for clarification of messages**

Okun (1987) defines responsive listening as the process of “attending to the verbal and non-verbal messages and the apparent underlying thoughts and feelings of the client” (p. 62). It may be that this is one place where basic therapeutic communication begins to move toward more advanced counseling-type therapeutic intervention, yet responsive listening techniques are employed by individuals in many contexts.
For example, couples in relationship counseling are commonly taught these techniques to improve their communication, and responsive listening is often a component of business sales and management training (Whetten & Cameron, 1984). Responsive listening techniques for clarification of participants' messages in outdoor adventure settings can facilitate personal growth and enhance feelings of trust and self-worth; they also may be important in terms of assessing safety—as with Jan in the opening example.

Although there are a wide variety of counseling techniques employable for responding to clients' clear and not-so-clear expressions of thoughts and feelings, this section will focus on the responsive listening techniques of "reflecting" and "clarifying," given their importance to therapeutic communication in wilderness settings. Reflection and clarification are basic counseling skills that are widely practiced, and from the Rogerian perspective, afford both clinician and client the opportunity for better understanding of presenting issues and potential solutions. When professionals reflect the content or feeling of a client's statement, an attempt is made to communicate and demonstrate understanding of their concerns and perspective. Reflection of content includes a restatement of the facts; reflection of feeling is a restatement of the emotions expressed. Clarification is an attempt to further question and better understand the actual nature of the client's statement. With Jan, the leader needs to be aware of safety issues from a physical and an emotional perspective and to decide whether to utilize this opportunity for therapeutic intervention, as this trip has a psychotherapeutic goal. Responsive listening techniques can aid the trip leader in this process. For example:

Jan: "It's a little cold, isn't it?"

Leader: "A little cold?" said with a smile and pleasant tone of voice. (This is a reflection of content and feeling, based on observation of her non-verbal shivering, limping, etc., and, of course, the weather. This comment relies heavily on non-verbal signals, as the leader does not mean to imply that Jan is wrong, or that she is feeling something that she shouldn't be feeling. This comment is also an effort by the leader to be genuine, as she was willing to acknowledge that it was cold for her, too. Note that the tag question "isn't it" used here by Jan facilitated further discussion.)

Jan: "Actually, I'm very cold, tired, scared, and almost wishing I hadn't even come on this trip."

Leader: "It sounds to me like you are feeling a bit overwhelmed." (Reflection of feeling.) "Could it be that you need to stop and put on more clothes so you'll be more comfortable, or is it more than that?" (This is a clarifying response, delivered with a tentative respectfulness, that also demonstrates the leader's unconditional positive regard and empathy. Additionally, this response could be considered an "improving" message, as a suggestion for action is given. Notice that the leader is moving toward a deeper level of clarification here.)

Jan: "I guess I am feeling overwhelmed. Even though my feet are warm and I don't have any blisters, I am just so tired I feel like I can't pick them up. I would like to stop and put on my parka, but I don't want to hold up the rest of the group. We have six more days of this trip left, and I'm wondering if I can make it."

Leader: "I'm so glad you told me how you are feeling, Jan." ("Doing" affirmation given as they stop to pull her parka out of her pack.) "It sounds like you are feeling as if you have been working very hard to keep up the pace even though you are cold, tired, and doubtful. You don't think you can do it much longer?" (Reflection of content and feeling.)

Jan: "I don't know. I always seem to give up on things."

Leader: "Always?" (Clarifying response, said empathetically. This is also a "solution-focused" (Priest & Gass, 1997) attempt to look for strengths—times when Jan has not "given up.")

Jan: "Well maybe not always." (Now Jan is smiling.)

Leader: "Can you tell me about a time when you didn't give up?" (This is an appropriate response by the leader of a wilderness experience with a psychotherapeutic goal. The intention is to help Jan identify strengths she can access now to get through..."
this trip if she chooses, and hopefully to inspire a knowledge that she can transfer this ability to new situations and relationships. If Jan does have a deeper issue to explore, she may wish to discuss it now. Perhaps she will begin to tell the story of her suicide attempt and realize that if she had “given up” by not accepting help that day, she might not be here now. A trip leader who opens dialogue of this nature should be prepared to take time for processing. On a trip with a purely recreational goal, a “doing” affirmation such as “It seems to me like you’ve been doing what it takes to stay healthy on this trip; I like the way you stopped right now to put on your parka” might be used here to keep the conversation more task focused and less psychologically exploratory. Additionally, regardless of the overall trip goal, they could discuss Jan’s options in terms of continuing the trip if she doesn’t get more comfortable. This may or may not be the trip for her, and it would also be important to check out the possibility that Jan may be serving as a barometer for other group members.

In this example the leader used the techniques of reflection and clarification to encourage Jan to ask for what she wants and needs, to display empathy, to assess her physical safety, and to begin a therapeutic exchange of an empowering nature. Appropriate use of “being” affirmations were implied by the time and attention the leader offered Jan. A “doing” affirmation was well delivered as it specifically stated approval of Jan’s ability to say how she really felt. The trip leader risked admitting through her tone of voice that she, too, thought it was cold (didn’t put up a tough “front”), was genuine verbally and non-verbally in her feeling of relief that Jan had told her how she was feeling, and suggested her positive regard for and belief in Jan’s ability to succeed by her statement of doubt that she always gives up. If such an exchange continues, the results for Jan will probably be very empowering. Figure 1 illustrates additional examples of client statements and proposes appropriate basic therapeutic communication responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Statement</th>
<th>Message Implied</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Facilitator Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Hello! I guess I’ve made it to the right trailhead?”</td>
<td>Now what do I do?</td>
<td>Tentative statement, looks quickly around area, little or no eye contact.</td>
<td>“Hello _____. I’m so glad you are here. (“Being” affirmation). We are just now getting ready to ____.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I’m having a great time on this trip, and I’d like to do more ____.”</td>
<td>I am comfortable stating that I have some unmet needs/expectations.</td>
<td>The statement made.</td>
<td>“I’m so glad you told me how you are feeling.” (“Doing” affirmation; demonstrates the leader’s regard for the client’s needs and acceptance of the person’s assertiveness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I’m wondering how much more of this trail is so near the edge of the cliff.”</td>
<td>I’m not feeling safe.</td>
<td>The question asked, nervous gestures, client’s apparent need to remain close to leader.</td>
<td>“It almost seems as if you are feeling a little unsafe. (Reflection of feeling, used for clarification) Or is it just that you are curious about the canyon?” (Reflects only the content of the question; also illustrates a clarification response.)</td>
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Conclusion

Although this paper does not comprehensively address the important topic of how much clinical training is "enough" to employ what some may consider therapeutic intervention by non-clinically trained practitioners, and covers only a selected number of factors related to successful therapeutic communication, some important theoretical and practical elements of basic therapeutic communication in outdoor adventure settings are proposed. What has been described by Lakoff (1975) and others as "tentative language," whether gender based or a deficit, often occurs in regular conversation. "Tag questions" and "hedges" can afford speakers and listeners with opportunities for further exchange and clarification, and result in personal empowerment. Trip leaders' use of clarifying statements can facilitate a climate of physical and emotional safety in wilderness settings, especially when such clarification appropriately addresses the needs and perceptions of individuals. Genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathy in practitioners constitute a philosophical perspective for engaging in basic therapeutic communication with trip participants, regardless of trip purpose or the level of a facilitator's clinical training. When this perspective is the basis of relating to trip participants and is combined with appropriately delivered affirmations and the responsive listening techniques of reflection and clarification, the outdoor adventure practitioner's basic therapeutic communication can help to establish a climate in which trip participants can be further, and respectfully, empowered to grow.

References


The perspective interview: Facilitating meaning-making in one-to-one conversations

David J. McGough

Facilitation in experiential learning settings may bring to mind images of individuals gathered together at the beginning or end of an activity to share reflections or anticipations, questions, and sentiments regarding the enterprise at hand. A group of participants may sit in a circle in the pine duff after a ropes course session, or on the tarmac next to the van at the end of a service learning project, or under a low tarp high in the mountains on the last evening of a wilderness expedition, as the group leader poses questions, models active listening, and directs a reflection activity. Images of facilitation may also be less subdued, as when a group experiences a hard day filled with struggle or encounters a situation requiring a democratically generated consensus decision. These sorts of all-group and individual-to-group processing situations are characteristic of experiential work. Learning about facilitating such sessions is a fundamental pursuit of experiential educators.

Another type of facilitation situation occurs in experiential learning settings: the one-to-one conversation. Group leaders may spend time with a participant while paddling across a lake, belaying at a rock climbing station, returning home from a field trip, or during a quiet moment after a day full of activities. One-to-one conversations present occasions for many types of interaction. The theme may be casual banter as a necessary and enjoyable component of relationship building. Or the group leader may use the time for inquiries into the individual’s experience of the flow of activities, the ubiquitous personal check-in. As well, more formal occasions for one-to-one conversations may present opportunities for transformative deliberation about one’s outlook on life and self-meaning. This article discusses facilitation of deep reflection on personal meaning as a critical educational practice, and draws attention to the “perspective interview” as a method of guiding one-to-one, meaning-making conversations in experiential learning settings.

Much of the insight and self-awareness that serves as the foundation of reflective learning may be formed more through contemplation of one’s underlying beliefs, assumptions, and constructed pathways of knowing than through reflection on concrete experience.

Reflection for meaning-making

Reflection on direct experience as a means of drawing out points of learning for the sake of future application is a recognized value in experiential education. Kolb’s (1984) learning cycle is often used as a theoretical foundation for such facilitation. Kolb’s model depicts learning as occurring in four discrete stages of a linear, closed loop progressive sequence: concrete experience leads to reflective observation leads to abstract conceptualization leads to active experimentation, which feeds back to the next concrete experience. With prominent attention to the value of reflection upon direct experience, questions may persist about the overall utility of reflection on personal world-views for the sake of meaning-making. Is the

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realm of meaning-making a viable focus for experiential educators? Is reflection on meaning as educative as reflection on direct experience? Is facilitating reflection on meaning worth the time and effort? Current thinking in reflective learning theory strongly supports the use of facilitated deep reflection on meaning systems as within the purview of an educator’s repertoire when working with adults and adolescents (Brookfield, 1986, 1990; Candy, 1991; Jarvis, 1987, 1992; Mezirow, 1991, 1996). Guidance in thinking about the meaning of an activity is also appropriate for younger children (Rogoff, 1990).

For example, Brookfield (1986) highlights the finding from his own research that not all adult learning is problem solving or performance oriented. Indeed, much of the insight and self-awareness that serves as the foundation of reflective learning may be formed more through contemplation of one’s underlying beliefs, assumptions, and constructed pathways of knowing than through reflection on concrete experience for the sake of application. This line of study does not remove the importance of experience from learning; instead, it highlights the importance of reflection on meaning systems in addition to the importance of reflection on direct experience. Yet, in order for the potential of personal reflection on meaning to be realized, a participant’s underlying meaning system must be accessed and considered. It is not enough to engage in unfamiliar, dramatic, holistic, and consequential activities or to reflect upon one’s experience of those activities; learning through meaning-making requires reflection on the underlying thinking, basic assumptions, and foundational ideologies of one’s interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in those activities. While it may seem to some that such deep reflection can occur through private volition, the learning theorists cited here believe that it is bolstered by, and may even require, shared dialogue. This makes the work of facilitation more challenging, both in collective settings and one-to-one conversations.

**Catalysts for meaning-making**

The premise of meaning-making through shared dialogue is straightforward: individuals engaged in a focused conversation with the genuine intention of speaking about underlying values, beliefs, assumptions, and previously established points of knowledge are likely to enter a realm of meaning construction and reconsideration. However, opportunities to engage in such conversations in an equitable and open manner do not seem to freely present themselves in typical work, social, or even educational settings.

Fortunately, a number of factors support the potential for experiential educators to enter the realm of meaning-making with participants. The disqualifying and corporeal nature of many experiential education settings provides a favorable environment for priming the pump of meaning-making. Novel situations tend to spur thoughtfulness. As well, participants in experiential learning settings often come prepared for, or grow to expect, reflective dialogue. Reflection on direct experience serves as an initiator to reflection for meaning-making.

The likelihood of entering the realm of meaning-making is further enhanced when the aim of a conversation is mutual interconnected knowing, instead of, for example, democratic consensus, problem solving, or therapeutic counseling. This type of self-similar knowing, often referred to as intersubjectivity (Whybrow, 1997), can be cultivated through inquiry about meaning systems while suspending critique and judgment. Listening to another as a speaker of valid personal truth, while suspending judgment and analysis, is not common in the deductive paradigm of technical-scientific culture and may take some practice. However, it is an approach that many experiential educators find inviting and refreshing due to its inductive nature. Facilitators will sense the presence of mutual interconnected knowing when, in the process of coming to understand another’s perspective, they find that their own underlying assumptions, beliefs, and feelings have been accessed and are being nudged toward reconceptualization. This openness to personal reflection is a hallmark of the experiential educator and can serve as another support for facilitating meaning-making conversations.

In essence, then, a number of the catalysts for meaning-making learning are potently present in experiential education settings: a novel and engaging environment, an inductive and inquiring stance, and an openness for surfacing (making public) and reconsidering one’s own underlying assumptions. Nevertheless, even when such opportunities do arise, the resulting conversation may be as likely to veer toward a practical problem-solving conference as toward a meaning-making one. The employment of a perspective interview may aid experiential educators to escort the conversation toward meaning-making.
Attributes of the perspective interview

A perspective interview is a semi-formal one-to-one conversation focused on surfacing underlying beliefs, values, assumptions, or previously established knowledge around a particular topic. In an interview mode, one member of the conversation, typically a group leader initially, proceeds through a series of questions meant to uncover and clarify the other’s perspective. Throughout the conversation, the questioner listens closely to, and perhaps takes notes on, the respondent’s commentary and allows it to serve as an agent for evincing his or her own perspective. While interviewing may bring to mind disparaging encounters, such as characterizations of news reporters, it can also convey more poised images of genuine and caring exchanges. The idea of conducting an interview about a participant’s perspective provides the semi-formal style necessary for seeking understanding through information exchange. As well, considering oneself to be conducting an interview creates a mind set for learning through inquiry and listening. Also, many educators and participants are comfortable imagining themselves conducting one-to-one interviews, whereas it may seem inappropriate to enter a deeply reflective one-to-one conversation if it is thought of as a counseling session (Kalisch, 1979).

An initial concern may be when to commence a perspective interview. Listening for meaning-making commentary among participants may provide an important cue. Another approach involves studiously seeking out activities which tend to move participants toward consideration of underlying ideations. For example, the classic solo activity of a wilderness expedition is frequently meaning-invoking for adult groups, while conversations with an unfamiliar individual are often meaning-inducing aspects of service learning activities, and an activity during which the boss becomes a follower is often meaning-inducing among corporate groups. A group leader might choose an apropos one-to-one moment to interview a participant about his or her perspective on a topic which arose during such a priority point. Or, a group leader may have participants interview each other in dyads around their interpretation of the meaning of a relevant topic. Perspective interviewing can also be used as a guide for an intermittent conversation running through an entire learning session. It should be remembered, though, that reflection on meaning is a matter of personal construction and cannot be fully predicted or directed. Meaning-making is a challenge-by-choice enterprise.

Another concern is how to initiate a perspective interview and how to maintain its focus. There are a number of interview routines which can serve as aids to meaning-seeking inquiry. It is important when using these routines to keep interconnected knowing present as an aim of the conversation. Two such routines are reviewed in the next section.

Considering oneself to be conducting an interview creates a mind set for learning through inquiry and listening.

Interview routines

The social science research method ethnography provides an abundance of information for designing meaning-seeking inquiry (Dobbert, 1982; Spradley, 1979). "Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people" (Spradley, 1979, p. 3. original italics). Spradley (1979) provides an outline for meaning-seeking inquiry and sample questions. His basic format includes three categories of questions which are integrated throughout a conversation: descriptive questions, structural questions, and contrast questions. Descriptive questions are broad and encourage the respondent to talk extensively about his or her background or ideas. These questions provide the footing for the conversation. "Tell me about what you think of..." "Tell me what it is like for you to..." Structural questions are more specific. They explore the way in which a respondent organizes thoughts, beliefs, or feelings. These questions often ask a respondent to further describe a particular point or to list all the descriptors for a mentioned idea. Or they may involve using a respondent's notion in an example as a test for understanding. "So, based on what you have said so far, I am wondering if this would be a proper statement: When you think of...what comes to mind is...." Contrast questions present two or more of a respondent's previously mentioned ideas and ask for a confirmation of the similarity and difference between them. "How is...different from...?" One of the facilitation principles of ethnography is to use the words and phrases of the respondent when asking follow-up questions. By embracing the respondent's language and learning to use it appropriately, the facilitator will come to understand the other's perspective more fully. The method outlined by Spradley can be used to guide brief or extensive conversations.

Another effective format for one-to-one meaning-seeking inquiry is the life history method. McAdams (1993) gives a full development of the life history approach and proposes seven sections for the life history interview:
1. describing one’s life in chapters

2. describing eight key events of one’s life: peak experience, nadir experience, turning point, earliest memory, an important childhood memory, an important adolescent memory, an important adult memory

3. describing four of the most significant people in one’s life

4. describing one’s future script

5. describing two areas of current stress in one’s life

6. describing one’s personal ideology

7. describing one’s life theme

The life history approach generally requires an extended block of time but may also be conducted intermittently over the course of a learning session. Variations on the approach can be designed around narrower realms such as a participant’s professional or school career, previous important learning experiences, or the current experiential learning session.

After some practice with formal interview routines such as these, a facilitator will begin to develop a preferred format. However, as anyone who has ever had a deeply rewarding conversation knows, there is more to meaning-making than a good interview format. Some of the other important elements are discussed next.

Dynamics of the perspective interview

Perspective interviewing is a guiding concept rather than a set of specific techniques. Therefore, it may be most helpful to consider the workings of perspective interviews from a systemic view. To do so, one can regard a perspective interview as an intermingling of four participating dynamics. Facilitators will want to pay attention to each of these dynamics in order to enhance the meaning-making potential of the conversation. The structural dynamic considers the outline or types of questions employed and provides the interview format. What questions do I want to ask about this topic? The procedural dynamic considers the developmental sequence of the conversation, that is, the conversational flow. How should the questions be arranged? Generally, it is best to begin with open-ended questions, then move to more specific questions. The relational dynamic considers the rapport, confidence, and trust which grows between the partners in the conversation, the feel of the conversation. What can I do to help the conversation feel compelling? Use of respondent’s language, appropriate eye contact, and affirmation can serve to build rapport. And the symbolic dynamic considers the depth of cognitive conceptualizing taking place, the formulations of meaning constructed by each converser. What interpretations of meaning surround this topic? Greater meaning-making is likely to come with more intense conceptual probing and will keep the conversation interesting.

These dynamics interweave like the strands of a rope. As questions are asked following a structured, or semi-structured, format (structural dynamic), the conversation proceeds through developmental phases (procedural dynamic), building a greater feeling of relational rapport (relational dynamic), and delving deeper into cognitive formulations of meaning (symbolic dynamic). The energy of the conversation is balanced as the dynamics push and pull each other creating an overall harmony. The facilitator serves as the weaver of the dynamics, making sure that each dynamic remains present, by paying attention to each, but allowing the conversation to emerge of its own volition.

A typical perspective interview would begin with broad descriptive questions meant to produce a conversational comfort and cognitive awareness of the topic to be considered. As the conversation proceeds, questions are asked which seek to clarify and verify a questioner’s grasp of the points made by the respondent. This clarification produces a feeling of confidence and brings on a willingness to extend the conversation into deeper cognitive dimensions. Next, questions may move to probe and prod a respondent’s statements while continuing to suspend judgment. If done well, this challenging phase can give rise to feelings of courage and a cognitive readiness for perspective transformation. The final questioning phase will involve attempting to articulate one’s own underlying ideations in light of the conversation at hand. This period leads to wondrous curiosity about one’s new outlook and how to make connections between it and other aspects of one’s meaning system.

It is important to remember that a conversation is organic and idiosyncratic. The four dynamics will all contribute to a meaning-making conversation and the conversation may move smoothly and incrementally. It is likely, however, that movement will be more irregular.

Attending to the intricacies of the dynamics and how they merge together is a complex and rigorous undertaking. Eventually, as a facilitator learns to weave the four strands together—format, flow, feel, and formulation—a sense of the dynamic symmetry of a meaning-making perspective interview becomes more clear. It has proven helpful to begin by adopting an existing interview routine such as those previously described. However, over-reliance on a specific ques-
Implications for experiential education

The promise of meaning-making learning lies in moving beyond a grasp of another's description of an experience or idea toward an understanding of the assumptions, beliefs, and notions that support the interpretation that a person gives to the experience or idea. Pursuing a rich understanding of another's foundational ideology serves to highlight one's own personal construction of truth and may inspire a reformulation as well. Participants often express joy at the end of a deeply intersubjective conversation and comment on its intensity and value. Such conversations can have long-term and transformative effects, just as with other elements of experiential learning sessions. As experiential educators continue to seek potent means of enhancing participant learning, the importance of one-to-one meaning-making conversations should play a prominent role along with reflection on direct experience. The perspective interview serves as a guiding notion for facilitating such conversations.

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Dialogue, reflection, and community

Susan Wyatt

The field of experiential education has traditionally focused on individual rather than community development (Flor, 1991). However, the rapid growth of the use of experiential programs in organizations in recent years (Miner, 1991) offers an unparalleled opportunity to extend the experiential education paradigm toward creating community in organizations. The humanist ideals of experiential educators such as Kurt Hahn provide a foundation for this extension of the vision of experiential education. Paolo Freire (1972), the great Brazilian educator saw experiential education as a way of developing communities that transcend existing definitions of social units. However, implementing this vision calls for experiential educators to develop new approaches and new facilitation skills. This article explores the basic concepts of how individuals and organizations learn in order to propose a framework for facilitating the development of community in organizations. The article focuses on reflection, a basic skill that has always been part of the experiential education repertoire, and dialogue, an approach proposed by physicist David Bohm (1990) for creating the shared meaning that holds a community together.

Experiential programs for building community usually take place in organizational settings. Organizations are defined by their boundaries, structure, and processes. In a community, however, participants have a sense of themselves in relationship to a larger whole. Community is an achievement, not a given. It is created by its members and exists through their voluntary participation (Deutsch, 1992). Defining community is somewhat difficult because, to a large extent, what a community is depends on what its members intend it to be. One of the findings of my research study was that it is essential for experiential program designers and facilitators who want to create community development programs to have a clear and well-articulated vision of community themselves. The Highlander Research and Education Center, a pioneer in community development work, has a vision of community in which people support each other in taking collective action to shape their own destiny. They work to promote democracy, diversity, equity, and economic and political justice (Highlander Mission Statement). The basic elements of a vision of community in the workplace are cooperation, interdependence, shared meaning, and a sense of collective identity (Brown & Isaacs, 1995). Another vision of community emphasizes harmony, spontaneity, creativity, individual uniqueness, and effectiveness (Cicco, 1994). One of the best sources of a vision of community for experiential educators is M. Scott Peck (1987). A Different Drum: Community Building and Peace.

Individual learning

The experiential education paradigm has traditionally focused on individual learning rather than on community development. Most program designs are based on David Kolb’s four-stage cycle experiential learning model (see Figure 1): active experimentation involves trying something to see what happens; concrete experience consists of involving oneself fully and openly in new experiences; reflective observation involves observing these experiences from many perspectives; and abstract conceptualization involves creating concepts and generalizations and integrating observations into logically and emotionally sound theories. A new learning cycle begins with active experimentation to

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test the implications of these theories in new situations to make decisions, and to solve problems.

Research in organizational learning expands this model in ways that provide useful perspectives for experiential educators. Argyris (1982, 1994) develops the model by adding the concepts of mental maps and single- and double-loop learning.

Mental models are programs or sets of rules that represent how we see the world. We use mental models to design our actions and interpret the actions of others. They represent a person’s view of the world which provides the context to interpret new material and determine how stored information relates to a given situation. While mental models help us make sense of the world, they restrict our understanding to categories that make sense within the models. They influence how we involve ourselves in new experiences, how we interpret experience, how we develop generalizations from experience, and how we act on the theories. Although the term “mental model” is in common use, these models actually reside in our bodies as well as our minds. One reason that experiential programs are effective in changing “mental” models is because they involve the body in the process.

Single-loop learning involves achieving intentions or correcting errors without examining the underlying mental models. Usually single loop learning skips the reflection phase of Kolb’s model. The individual takes an action and experiences the response of the environment. Based on the response, the individual draws a conclusion about the experience and corrects the action to obtain another response. In single-loop learning, an individual’s mental model is the lens through which the individual interprets experience and derives concepts on which to base action.

Double-loop learning involves individuals examining the underlying programs that they have in their heads. They diagnose incompatibilities between their mental maps of the world and the response of that world to their actions and update their models accordingly. In double-loop learning, new experiences can lead to new ways of doing tasks. Likewise, the theories and concepts developed from new experiences can lead to new frameworks in the mental model. Double-loop learning actually adjusts the lens through which we see the world and interpret our experience.

The outcome of experiential programs is often individual double-loop learning. An example is the experience of a young engineer who was a participant in a program which included both a high ropes course and several indoor experiential exercises. His mental model of his relationship with his organization was an exchange model in which he worked hard and productively and was rewarded by being promoted. At the time he participated in this program he had tried several times unsuccessfully to be promoted to management. Each time he was not successful he drew the conclusion that he was not working hard enough and worked harder and harder to be more productive. This single-loop learning process made him more and more indispensable in his current position. He eventually drew the conclusion that his inability to get promoted was due to external factors that he could not control. An opportunity for double-loop learning arose when he participated in an Electronic Maze exercise. He was indispensable in helping his teammates navigate through the maze, but was unable to get himself through before the time limit. He was stunned by this outcome into reflecting on his work patterns and concluding that the obstacle to promotion was his own limited mental model of his relationship with his organization. He was able to catch a glimpse of a different kind of relationship in which promotion was based on his willingness to commit to taking more responsibility in the organization and to developing skills that the organization needed such as delegation and coaching. This willingness to commit oneself to a larger purpose is one of the core processes of community building in organizations (Brown & Isaacs, 1995).

Reflection

The experiential educators who participated in this study believed that the key to double-loop learning is reflection, and all of them included reflection as part of their experiential programs. However, in Western culture, where people are trained in rapid, linear left-brained thinking, they found that they could not assume that participants in experiential programs know how to go about reflection. Facilitators can increase the effectiveness of their programs by including experiential exercises in the basic elements of reflection.
SUSPENDING JUDGMENT

Participants learn to quiet the small voice in their head that doubts, criticizes, and censors. They practice looking for multiple interpretations of their experiences and balancing themselves in the tension between accepting and making meaning of their experiences.

IDENTIFYING ASSUMPTIONS

Once they are aware that they are seeing the world through the lens of mental models, participants learn to identify what those models are.

ASKING QUESTIONS

Instead of reacting, participants learn to ask themselves, “Why am I thinking or feeling this way?” They practice exploring the reasons for their points of view.

LISTENING

Participants learn to listen not just with their ears, but with all their senses to their whole self—mind, emotions, body, and spirit.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Even if an experiential program results in a profound personal transformation, the learning may not translate back to the community. Peter Block (1994) goes so far as to say that individual learning “doesn’t stick” because it is overwhelmed by organizational culture. For organizations to develop as communities they must learn as organizations as well as individuals. Argyris and Schon (1978) believe that there is a paradox in organizational learning. Organizations learn only through the experience and actions of individuals, yet organizational learning involves more than the learning of its individual members. In order for experiential education to achieve a greater potential in community building, experiential educators need to move beyond their current paradigm to a model of organizational learning.

Learning is fundamentally more complex and dynamic at the organizational level, and theories of organizational learning are relatively new. Learning at this level can be pictured as a four-step analogue of the individual learning model (see Figure 2): public reflection is a process in which members talk about their mental models and beliefs. Shared meaning involves the organization members in refining their shared vision and values and coming to a mutual understanding; joint planning entails choosing and refining an approach to action; and coordinated action involves the members in trying something to see what happens. The cycle then begins again with the members designing action steps and testing their updated mental models.

The concepts of single- and double-loop learning apply to organizations as well. Daniel Kim (1993) introduced the idea of shared mental models as the basic mechanism for organizational learning.

Shared mental models include the organization’s view of the world, the culture, norms, values, and assumptions as well as its standard operating procedures and rules of behavior. They define what an organization pays attention to, how it decides to act, and how it interprets its experience. The shared mental models exist in the minds and bodies of the organization members. One of the reasons that experimental programs have such great potential to change shared mental models is because exercises can be designed to use touch as a means of communication.

Organizational single-loop learning occurs when the members take concurrent action to achieve intentions and correct errors. Most organizational problem solving involves single-loop processes. The members experience the response of the environment to the action and learn to correct the action to obtain another response, but they do not examine the underlying values of the organizational culture. There is usually no public reflection involved in organizational single-loop learning.

Organizational double-loop learning occurs when the organization members update their individual mental models based on the response they experience from the environment, and the individual mental models become incorporated into the organization through shared mental models. The shared mental models are publicly tested to correct errors and ensure consistency. In double-loop learning, new experiences can lead to the organization developing new configurations of governing values in the shared mental model. Or the new experiences can lead to the organization taking action that is more consistent with the values of the shared model.

These organizational processes are illustrated by the experience of a group of school teachers participating in a low ropes course program. The teachers had a shared mental model of their school as committed to continuously improving the quality of education that it provided. The school had instituted a program to monitor their results against academic standards. The school administration developed policies designed to correct the perceived shortcomings and improve the academic program. An opportunity for organizational double-loop learning arose during a Spider Web exercise when the facilitator gave the team responsibility
for monitoring their own performance. During the exercise, the teachers frequently looked for ways to bend the rules and to cover up when they touched the web. In the course of processing the exercise, the teachers explored not only the school’s commitment to quality education but also their own shared ethical model. They concluded by sharing a vision in which the administration, teachers, students, and parents collaborated in defining educational goals and standards. This interest in building collaboration across multiple stakeholders is another of the core processes of community development in organizations (Brown & Isaacs, 1995).

Anyone who has facilitated an experiential exercise such as a Spider’s Web is aware of the power of shared mental models. Neither the web nor the spider actually exist; they are created from rope and bungee cords by the facilitator in the minds of the participants. In framing an experiential exercise, the facilitator creates a metaphor for reality. By its nature, metaphorical learning is double-loop, forcing individuals and organizations to confront the self-imposed limitations on their mental maps of reality. “Metaphor involves an extremely perceptive state of intense passion and high energy that dissolves the excessively rigidly held assumptions in the tacit infrastructure of commonly accepted knowledge” (Bohm & Peat, 1991, p. 25). It is this intense passion and high energy that experiential education brings to building community. As organization members are stirred into exploring their shared mental models, they create the shared meaning which gives them a sense of relationship to something larger than themselves.

Implications for program designer and facilitators

Many of the standard experiential approaches were developed for applications in education or therapy to help individuals cope with an unchanging social system (Flor, 1991). Programs designed for community development stretch the experiential education paradigm to help individuals and organizations learn new behavior to cope positively with a changing world. The greatest challenge for experiential program designers is designing programs and framing metaphors that create experiences of community.

The greatest potential leverage for adapting experiential education programs to community building lies with experiential educators themselves. A skilled facilitator can create an experience of community even with simple experiential exercises by involving the group members in the program design and execution. Framing exercises creatively can assist learning and encourage members to take responsibility for building community. Facilitation of an organizational learning experience, however, requires not only a knowledge of concepts such as shared mental models and double-loop learning, but also the processes by which shared meaning and convergent thinking are developed.

Dialogue

Although the processing phase of traditional experiential programs usually takes place in a group setting, it encourages participants to reflect on their individual experience. In the organizational learning model, the key to organizational double-loop learning is public reflection. Dialogue is an approach to public reflection developed by physicist David Bohm (1990) that is a powerful technique for facilitating double-loop learning. Although dialogue is referred to as a new form of conversation, its roots reach far back into human history. One of the models that Bohm used for developing his theory was the reports by anthropologists on communication patterns of Native American tribes.

When dialogue is used to process experiential exercises, the participants publicly reflect on their experiences, talk about their mental models and beliefs, and inquire to gain insight into each other’s mental processes. They reflect together to understand the gap between the way the organizational dynamics worked during their experience of community in the program, the way they work on a day-to-day basis, how they want them to work in the future, and why the gap exists and how they can close it. The dialogue provides the basis for the next phase of learning which involves developing shared meaning by coming to a mutual understanding, and redefining their shared mental models, vision, and values.

The basic procedure of dialogue involves participants sharing their mental models and perceptions, inquiring and listening to understand other mental models and perceptions, and enlarging their under-
standing to discover areas where they share meaning. The goal is not to impose or
conform, but to bring order and coherence to the power of the human collective.
The elements of a dialogue are the group analogue of the reflection process. Facilitators can introduce dia-
logue into their programs by including experiential exercises in these basic elements.

Suspensing judgment.
Participants can learn to listen to others without judging them as good or bad and without trying to
change someone's opinion. They can practice acknowledging and seeing the meaning of the assumptions of
others, neither suppressing them nor acting on them, nor believing nor disbelieving them.

Identifying assumptions.
Participants learn to identify and share the assumptions of their own mental models and their perceptions of the shared mental model of the group.

Asking questions.
Participants learn how to ask questions which help others to identify and verbalize their mental models. They practice exploring the viewpoints of others and expressing appreciation for their sharing.

Listening.
Participants learn to listen not just with their ears, but with all their senses, physically, emotionally, and spiritually as well as mentally to what the other person is communicating.

The role of the facilitator in dialogue is to encourage awareness of the mental models that underlie behavior. The facilitator initiates the dialogue, provides guidance as long as it is required, and explains what is happening. It is important that the facilitator guide the learners in processing the experience of the dialogue as well as the experiential program. Only after dialogue is complete does the facilitator guide the participants in achieving a consensus. This is not an easy role. It is not a linear process, it has no agenda and no goal beyond developing shared meaning. The frustra-
tion level dealing with so many opinions without judging or attempting to change them can be high. For many
people exposing their mental models is more frightening than a high ropes event. Creating and sustaining an
atmosphere of respect, support, and caring is essential.

The ultimate goal of facilitating a dialogue in community building is for the participants to learn to do
without the facilitator. “The lifeblood of the organization as community is the
capacity for dialogue” (Brown & Isaacs, 1995, p. 512). The most important
learning that an experiential program can transfer to an
organization is an understanding of the learning process that members experienced during the program.
Programs intended for community building should be carefully planned to transfer what the members learn
about dialogue experience during the experiential program to the establishment of the practice of dialogue in
their organizations.

Conclusion
The purpose of this article was to propose a framework for using experiential programs to facilitate com-
unity building through individual and organization learning. Although the current focus of experiential education is on individual learning and change, there are facilitators who are using experiential programs this way, and their experience tends to confirm that the theory presented in this study is a valid approach to developing community. However, experiential educators who wish to experiment with this approach need to learn a new set of facilitation skills that support organizational learning. Fully implementing the theory also requires the design of new experiential exercises and new metaphors that create experiences of community in organizations. Without communication, we cannot have real community. Perhaps by creating the experience of dialogue in organizations and transferring the capacity for dialogue from experiential programs into communities, experiential educators can ignite real social change in the world.
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Facilitating learning with older adults

Daniel Garvey and Dennis Garvey

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to sound a gentle alarm within the adventure education profession in the U.S. The current unrealized potential for programming with the older-adult market (age 65+) caused by the steady aging of the baby-boomers (born 1946 - 1964) has produced a dramatic impact on the types of outdoor programs that are offered and the ways these programs are conducted. A failure to anticipate and understand aging clients will have profound negative results on the numbers and kinds of adventure education programs that exist in the future.

In this article, the authors examine changing demographics, review the limited writing that has been done in this field, examine the bias that exists against older people and how this unintentional bias often hinders the facilitation of learning for older adults and staff. The article ends with a few brief suggestions for improving the learning experience for older adults.

Definition of facilitation

Since the overall theme of this issue is “facilitation,” we offer a brief definition. The term facilitation is used in a broad context within this article. John Dewey (1938) referred to the “tools of education” as everything that was needed in order for an educative experience to occur. This might include: books, lighting, warmth in a classroom, pencils, etc. Like Dewey’s “tools of education,” we are using the word facilitation to refer to all of the structures that are intended to aid—facilitate—the learning process. These may include such things as: the attitude and values of the educator(s), the policies and historical focus of the organization, or even the environment within which activities occur.

We are not restricting our definition of facilitation to the rather narrow focus of an educator or therapist helping to draw out the learning from one or more isolated or related experiences. We cannot separate the act of facilitation from the larger context within which it might occur. We would all agree that the most talented facilitator is of little value if his/her bias toward the client group is condescending or ill-informed. We believe many of the attitudes that currently exist regarding older people are ill-informed. Therefore, the act of aiding or facilitating learning must include examination of one’s attitudes and beliefs and a realistic appraisal of an organization’s capacity to work with a given group. The broad question of how to improve facilitation must be connected to the techniques of group interaction and the larger systems within which the act of facilitation occurs.

Our aging society

At the turn of the century, barely 4 percent of the U.S. population was over 65. Today, almost two out of ten are 65 or older (Barrow, 1996).

There are now more than 31 million people aged 65 years and older in the United States. This group represents the fastest growing age group in the U.S. If the U.S. population of those 65 and older were grouped together, they would make up the most populous state in the nation, exceeding California. There are more people aged 65 and older in the United States than the combined total populations of New England and the Mountain States.

Current US Census Bureau projections indicate that the growth in the population of people over 65 will continue well into the 21st century. By the year 2000, two in five US citizens is expected to be 65 or older (The US Census Bureau Reports, 1990).

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Life expectancy is increasing. From birth, life expectancy for women is approximately 78 years of age and 72 for men. As we negotiate our ways through our youth and young adulthood, our life expectancy increases because we have lived through those things that could have killed us earlier: childhood illness, war, etc. In 1991, if a person reached their 60th birthday, they could expect to live to 81, and if they lived to be 85, life expectancy jumps past 91 (Barrow, 1996). For the aging population, the big killers—heart attack, stroke, cancer and other life-threatening events—are increasingly understood as related to lifestyle decisions. Increasingly, aging people understand the connection between lifestyle and life expectancy. As life expectancy continues to rise with the advances in nutrition, medical technology, and exercise, it is no longer an exception to be long-lived. The focus is increasingly being placed on developing “life quality.”

What will we be doing with these extended years? The average age of retirement is 62, and it’s dropping. In 1900, 70 percent of American men over the age of 65 were still working. By 1960 only 35 percent were employed. In 1976, 22 percent worked. And in 1992 only 15 percent were employed. This figure is expected to fall to below 14 percent by the year 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1991).

Combining the changing life expectancies and the anticipated “free time” of the aging population, it is easy to see why the President’s Commission on Americans Outdoors found the average age of outdoor participants getting older (Alexander et al., 1987). As we spend more time in retirement, one of the challenges becomes how to continue learning in the second half of one’s life. Finding ways to bring meaning to their years is the goal of many older adults. For older adults meaning is often found through education, and this includes both traditional and experiential models of learning. This demand for continued education is often at odds with the prevailing educational orientation of the U.S. system. “Our approach to education involves an intense dose early in life with no organized effort to continually update knowledge and skills throughout adulthood. But it’s not like a measles immunization that, once given, lasts a lifetime” (Birren, 1989, p.135).

How has this trend toward meeting the educational needs of an aging population affected the adventure education field? Gradually, the dominant cultural themes of what is popular and important have been authored by older members of our society. This movement from a “youth culture” to a “mature culture” has followed the aging of the baby-boomers. This phenomenon can also be seen within the broad field of adventure education.

A quick overview of a few growth spurts within the broad field of adventure education may prove revealing. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the American camping industry reached one of its high points when record numbers of children were enrolled in summer camp. The other major institutions of the day, such as education, business, family, and religion, were focused on the needs of the young. These were the days of intense marketing to the young and their parents about the value of the out-of-doors. For example, many young children of the 1950s wore “coon-skin hats” like Daniel Boone. Surely, one could look at the late 1950s and early 1960s as one of the “golden ages” of outdoor programming for children. The national commitment to youth fitness, reflected in President Kennedy developing the President’s Council on Youth Fitness, was a sign of the nation’s attention to youth. If we were to compete with the Russians in science and “win” the space race, we needed fit and trim young people to carry the day. (Outdoor Education for America. A Report to the President and to the Congress by the Outdoor Recreation Resource Review Commission. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1962).

In the early 1970s, as the baby-boomers traded in their coon-skin hats for college books, a need emerged to meet the demands of college students interested in outdoor education. Outward Bound was enjoying great success as a program for teenage participants. Eventually, and inevitably, the focus turned to college aged students. On February 10, 1974, faculty members from many colleges and universities came together for the First North American Conference on Outdoor Pursuits in Higher Education. This first conference addressed the challenge of linking Outdoor Education to the curriculum for college students. From this initial gathering came the Association for Experiential Education (Garvey, 1990).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, it can be argued that corporate training using outdoor experiential activities became the fastest growing segment of the field. Indeed, hundreds of start-up companies have emerged to meet this still unsatisfied need for outdoor experiential activities. Where it was once the domain of the very young, today one is not surprised to see corporate executives in their 40s, 50s, and 60s dangling...
from belay ropes on high challenge ropes courses.

Stating the above sequence in another fashion, if you happened to be born as a baby boomer in the year 1950, summer camping was at its zenith when you were 12. Outdoor education became integrated in the college curriculum when you were in your early 20s. And corporate training gained popularity as you entered your 40s or 50s. If this trend continues, and there is little reason to assume the contrary, there will be a corresponding increase in the numbers and kinds of programs focused on meeting the educational and psycho/social needs of people in their 60s and 70s—the older adult population.

The implications should be fairly obvious. If the adventure education profession is to continue to maintain its current connection to the larger society, it will do so through programming aimed at an increasingly aging population. We need to understand that at least part of the future of this profession is linked to an appreciation of the aging process, as well as the adaptation of adventure education activities for this aging client group.

**Adventure education and aging participants**

While it may be important to understand the inevitability of an aging client base, it is quite another thing to be able to respond to these changes. Are we as a profession prepared for this aging client base? In looking at the following factors, our readiness as a profession is probably suspect:

1. Little discussion or writing has focused on the particular needs of aging clients in adventure education.

2. Our profession is operating with many of the negative stereotypes that are embedded in the larger U.S. culture regarding aging.

3. The facilitation of adventure education activities for older adults needs to adequately connect with the capabilities of this group.

We would like to examine each of these three limitations in more detail.

**Little discussion or writing has focused on the particular needs of aging clients in adventure education.**

To date, little has been written about working with older–adult participants using adventure education approaches. Sugerman (1990) wrote a wonderful article on the unique biological, psychological, and sociological aspects of working with aging participants in outdoor settings. Her article brings together much of the literature about outdoor activities and aging clients. Ewert (1983), Teaff (1985), and Kennison (1985) have contributed to the knowledge pool of information regarding outdoor education and aging participants.

Despite these exceptions, comparatively little of the adventure education profession’s attention is focused on aging clients. A review of the *Journal of Experiential Education* Index of Articles over the past 20 years reveals there are less than five articles addressing the topic of working with older adults.

Contrast this against the over 100 articles dealing with youth-at-risk. At the most recent Association for Experiential Education Conference in Spokane, Washington, of the 66 workshops selected to be featured in the *Proceedings Directory*, none specifically dealt with the topic of aging or older clients (Baker, 1996). Similarly, in Miles and Priest (1990), considered to be one of the most comprehensive collections of articles in the adventure education field, only one of 53 articles examines the unique needs of older adults. This lack of writing is supported by a lack of training at the staff level. It is still a rare program that routinely offers staff training concerning the unique educational needs of older adults. As a profession, we are only now beginning to acknowledge the need for greater training concerning the medical needs of older adults and how certain medications, routinely taken by older clients, can produce complications in diagnoses in an outdoor setting.

**Our profession is operating with many of the negative stereotypes that are embedded in the larger U.S. culture about aging.**

Ageism can be seen as a systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin color and gender. Old people are categorized as senile, rigid in thought and manner, old-fashioned in morality and skills. Ageism allows the younger generation to see older people as different from themselves; thus they subtly cease to identify with their elders as human beings. (Butler, 1969, p. 243)

Facilitating the education of older–adult clients necessitates an understanding of this client group. Many misguided and false assumptions exist regarding this age group, among them the myth that as we age, we all become the typical grouchy old men or cranky old...
women, a homogeneous group defined by our increasing dependence on others. This impression about aging in our society was well documented by Barrow (1994) in his study of college students' opinions on aging. In this study, students were asked to list the first three words that came to mind upon seeing the word "aged."

A salient point of the study was that students paid attention to the changing physical appearance and capabilities of older persons. The following words describing physical conditions account for the largest proportion of responses:

- wrinkled
- gray haired
- slow, less energy
- helpless, dependent, weak
- deterioration, body broken down, over the hill.

(Barrow, 1994)

The beliefs about aging held by college students can be found in the adventure education field as well. However, these beliefs fail to take into account that, "There are significant differences in attitudes and interests among (and between) the 'young old' (ages 65-74), the 'old-old' (ages 75-84), and the 'oldest-old' (over 85)" (Riley & Riley, 1986, p.53).

Our attempt to lump the "old" into one large category misses the point that individuals over 65 are very different from one another. Their life experiences include a broad range of activities and learning that inform their concept of self. Our images of aging are primarily influenced by the print and electronic media. The same media that did so well capturing the attention of the youth market, ages 16-21, has a much more difficult time depicting the breadth and depth of the older-adult market.

High school students, with their apparent differences in dress, hair, interests, etc., are a direct result of the choices each student has made in their lives to produce this unique individual. Although these differences may appear to be significant, they are mostly surface differences. The relatively small amount of life experience of the high school student often does not allow each student to form a well-developed sense of who they are independent of their peer group. Indeed, one of the central issues of adolescence is to begin this process of self-definition.

The opposite is true for older adults. They appear at first to be alike when in fact they are very different from each other. They may share the common physical signs of aging (white hair, wrinkles, etc.) but it is a mistake to assume this similarity goes much further. The accumulated life experiences of the older adult population gives this cohort group a wide range of possibilities and presents us with unique challenges in program design. For this population, our typical notion of "group" is clearly inadequate to appreciate the complexities of the different life experiences represented by clients assembled in a group of people over 65.

Further, not only is a 65-year-old participant different from other 65-year-olds, they are also dissimilar from people older than they are.

Young adults appear on the surface to be different when in fact they are very much alike. Older adults appear on the surface to be similar when in fact they are very different from each other.

These differences between aging groups are manifested in biological, sociological, and psychological characteristics that are shared with other group members of similar age, but not shared across the large group of those over 65. Any attempt to homogenize an adventure education program to meet the needs of older people which fails to factor in the age ranges and interests of the clients may be doomed to failure. Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of previous writing about aging clients and adventure education is the tendency to prescribe methods for older participants without understanding the importance of segmenting the older-adult market.

This tendency to lump older people together is but a symptom of the larger problem of ageism found in the U.S. society. Remarks and attitudes that would never be voiced in reference to other groups are routinely used to devalue older adults. This ageism is so ingrained in our social experience that it is an accepted part of how we celebrate birthdays. Sending black birthday cards with condolences for getting one year older reinforces ageist attitudes under the guise of humor.

As we age, people often adopt the prevailing negative aspects of aging into their feelings about themselves. As a result, many people have a hard time accepting the idea that they are aging. Indeed, whole markets are being developed to help us "defy" the process of aging, from make-up to plastic surgery. Ageism, unlike sexism or racism, however, carries with it an even farther reaching bite. Aging people do not generally see themselves as perpetuating the myths that degrade them. But the definitions and beliefs about aging envelop the old and the young—both groups actively create and support the limited view we have for aging people in our society. These beliefs about aging are found in all areas of our society, including the adventure education profession with its emphasis and value on physical ability.

The facilitation of adventure educational activities for older adults needs to adequately connect with the capabilities of this group.

Despite the above-listed reasons for viewing aging participants as unique individuals who represent vast-
ly different life experiences and expectations, it is true that certain patterns or themes begin to emerge when working with aging clients. Using the expanded definition of facilitation we offered at the beginning of this paper, we recommend the following be considered as a starting point for working with aging clients.

Create experiences early in the program that allow participants to explain and validate who they are.

We have learned it is critically important to allow a group of older adults to share parts of their life histories and successes with each other prior to any attempt at group problem solving. One of the best techniques we have used is a time-line. We place a long piece of paper on the wall with a straight line running from left to right. At ten-year increments we draw a short line across this line. We then ask participants to place two major life successes on this time-line and be prepared to explain these events to the entire group.

Another activity that has been successful is to ask participants to create a mural of three pictures. One picture represents something they have done that they are proud of; the second, something they are currently doing that they are proud of; the third, something they have yet to do that they will be proud to have accomplished.

These simple activities allow participants to report to other members of the group accomplishments they have had in their lives and those deeds that have value to them. Until a group of older adults has had a chance to share some of their personal life stories, we have found it difficult to use group initiatives effectively.

Focus on framing the activities

One of the best ways to ensure the learners are connecting the results of an activity to the internal knowledge base they possess is to allow the participants to frame the experience. By framing, we are referring to the explanation that is given to justify the activity and answer these simple questions: Why are we doing the activity? and What do we hope to learn from the activity?

Whenever possible, group members should be encouraged to co-frame the activity. This style of co-creation is beneficial for all groups, but has a particular relevance for older adults. If we are introducing a group to elements on a low ropes course for instance, we have found great value in allowing the participants to create the storyline for particular elements. This can be done by asking two of the members of the group to write the storyline to accompany an activity. The results can be very revealing.

One example occurred on the Spiders Web activity. The Spider's Web is a common initiative found on low ropes courses. Participants are faced with a series of ropes suspended between two poles. The ropes are roughly in the shape of a spider's web. The task for the group is to pass all the members from one side of the web to the other using the spaces created in the web, but not allowing anyone to touch the web. The web can have different symbolic meaning for various groups. When we asked one group of older adults to create the meaning of the web, they framed the web as the passing from employment to retirement. Group members worked with each other on this task that represented a successful transition from the world many had previously enjoyed based on their careers, to a new enjoyable world of retirement.

The important concept to keep in mind as we facilitate is that the aging participant is in a good position to control the focus of the activity by creating an appropriate framing. If we fail to use the capabilities of group members to “front-load” the educational experience, we miss an opportunity that is available because of the unique capabilities of aging participants to make meaning in their lives.

Allow participants to create their own metaphoric links.

Because of the differences in life experiences represented by members of any group of aging participants, the meaning each person will draw from the experiences is unique. This statement is of course true for participants in most other groups and has been well covered by Bacon (1985), Gass (1985), and Kolb (1976). However, the unique role life experience plays in the ways in which aging individuals transfer learning from experiential activities cannot be underestimated. We should hold back from attempting to find the links for new learning that may have occurred during a adventure education experience. Recognizing that by allowing the aging participant to create their personal learning connection, the chance of this connection being the most appropriate one is heightened. Our life experiences create the fabric upon which new experiences are affixed. Aging participants often have a fabric much more extensive than the younger facilitators working the group. This recognition should influence how we as facilitators frame and conduct the activity.

The use of personal journals is one technique we have found to be particularly effective in helping clients create metaphoric links. Older adults often require more time to reflect on and transfer the knowledge they have gained from an experience. Because of this reality, we encourage participants to carry personal journals with them during the day. We will provide time in the normal day's schedule for reflection and writing in the journals. At the end of the day, we will often re-visit the activities we experienced and ask participants if they have gained any additional insights or clarity through their journal writing. Participants often
have deeper and different reactions to the activities they experienced after they have had this additional time to reflect and organize their thoughts.

Whenever possible, co-facilitate with an older adult partner

We in the field of adventure education have long accepted the need to involve representatives of the groups being served in leadership positions during programs. We have come to see that mixed-gender facilitation is best for mixed groups, and representatives from various ethnic groups are needed as co-facilitators to adequately serve the needs of the diversity of client groups. It is still the case, however, that many adventure education programs intended for older adults are facilitated primarily by “younger” staff.

The reasons for this inability to place aging staff with aging participants are many. Two possible factors discourage programs from using aging staff. First, it is always easier to use the staff we have at our sites for programs rather than hiring contract staff. It is rare to find people over 60 as regular staff members in most programs. Older staff might be called on a course-by-course basis, but they are not, generally speaking, part of the regular staff group. Is this because there are no qualified older staff available? Or is it that younger program staff would have a difficult time integrating older staff into the culture of an adventure education center? Based upon the limited number of aging staff who stay connected to AEE as a professional organization, and the confusion they have expressed concerning their proper place in a predominantly young people’s organization, it should be no surprise that older staff are scarce.

The second reason for the exclusion of aging staff may be a bit more controversial. We have found a tendency for adventure educators to view experiential education as a relatively new set of methods. Many practitioners in the field are unfamiliar with the works of Dewey, Kolb, Hahn, and others. Given this perhaps unconscious belief that adventure education is within the domain of the young and progressive, it would be difficult to appreciate aging staff because they would represent the “old way” of doing things. It is true that certain techniques within the profession of adventure education have evolved and are being perfected; however, the theory base has remained remarkably unchanged.

A story to illustrate this fact: during one program with older adults, the authors spent a great deal of time explaining the philosophic roots of adventure education to a group of participants who were very interested in the theoretical underpinnings of our activities. The links between John Dewey and the Progressive Education Movement were carefully explained to the group. It was not until the final program gathering several days later that it surfaced we had three of twelve participants who had taught in Progressive Schools during their careers. One of the participants had done graduate work at Dewey’s Lab School in Chicago. Our inability as facilitators to understand our place in the continuum of experiential education precluded us from using the expertise within our group. Had we co-facilitated with an aging staff member that person might have understood the historic relevance of group members and their relationship to the theories we were explaining. That staff member would have known that some of the participants must have lived through the Progressive Education era.

Include aging awareness as part of the staff training for the entire organization

If we assume the average age of program participants will rise in the adventure education field, it becomes increasingly important for organizations to critically examine how they are constituted to meet the needs of this client group. What bias or prejudice exists within the attitudes of staff and the organizational structure?

Businesses such as banks, shopping malls, and insurance companies are beginning to look at their organization from the viewpoint of the aging participant. Does it really make sense for a bank to require all depositors to use those tiny deposit slips where the numbers are supposed to fit in small little boxes? An often-quoted adage in the social change field is that “powerful people vote with their feet.” Banks that make the deposit process easier for aging customers stand to be making windfall profits as aging customers simply walk across the street and deposit their money in a bank that makes it easier for them to do so. Many businesses understand it is in their interest to view their product from the perspective of older adults.

In the adventure education field, we have developed a whole industry around the construction and maintenance of high element ropes courses. And yet, the most difficult strength moves required for participants is often the combination of moves needed to get
up on the course. Often, participants can move fairly easily from one activity to another once they are up on the course, but the initial gaining of elevation can be difficult for some aging participants. Those programs that understand this reality and take appropriate steps to ensure the facility is “user friendly” have the best chance to continue to attract participants. This might involve slight assistance for people climbing onto the course. The notion of “universal access” may play a stronger part in our profession when it becomes obvious that the population we need to sustain our programs is not able to use the courses we have ready for them.

An assessment of the attitudes and beliefs of staff concerning the topic of aging and their own aging should also be a part of the developing organization interested in serving aging participants. We should recognize that many adventure educators are, to a large extent, impressed by physical prowess. The demands of many of the activities we engage in (rock climbing, whitewater sports, hiking, etc.), require a level of strength and conditioning beyond what is expected from most professions. This reality carries with it a potential unrecognized bias against the aging process and those who are currently demonstrating the effects of this process. Without a comprehensive assessment of staff attitudes, an organization could grossly underestimate the physical capabilities of aging participants and communicate this limited view in both program design and implementation. This phenomenon of underestimating older adults may have more to do with our belief that only the fittest and strongest could handle the demands of the activities we lead. The overwhelming majority of outdoor activities offered within our field can be successfully accomplished by aging participants in reasonably good shape, provided we as staff begin to take a more informed approach to an understanding of aging.

An internal audit of our age-discriminating policies, practices, and facilities should be considered as our programs attempt to better address the learning needs of aging clients. The language that is used in our written materials should be reviewed. We should consider the size of the print and the colors that are used in marketing products. As we age, certain colors are commonly more difficult to distinguish. This audit should also include a review of our program manuals and staff training offerings to determine if our staff is adequately prepared to meet the emerging needs of an aging population of clients. One way of achieving an audit is to invite a team of aging people to review your program. If we view aging people as resources to our programs, we may learn valuable information about how our methods, materials, and facility encourage or discourage older adults.

Conclusion

The first step toward meeting the needs of the emerging aging market is to recognize the need for more informed dialogue and writing on the subject. The creativity and dedication of professionals in the adventure education field is well documented. The question remains whether this creativity will be applied to the need to work with this client group. The authors predict that a shift in programming will be necessary to meet the needs of an aging client group. Will the profession face this developing need?

Perhaps of utmost importance is a review of our personal beliefs and attitudes regarding aging and how these beliefs and attitudes affect the programs we offer and how we work with our clients. To successfully facilitate programs with older adults, we need to re-examine the entire structure and attitudes within which our programs are offered. If we are successful, our organizations will ride this change into the next century. If we are unsuccessful, many organizations will find themselves competing for a rather small share of the youth market.

References


Association for Experiential Education. (1996). International conference program, Spokane, WA: AEE.


Notes

3. See Natalie Goldberg, Writing down the Bones, 1986
4. Gardner suggests an eighth intelligence encompassing the moral or spiritual domain, which may be "an amalgam of inter- and intra-personal intelligences with an added value component", and depends for mobilization on cultural context (p. 46).

References


Appendix 1: Tables

(Editor's note: contact author for tables and source material.) The following are a list of tables available:

Table 1: Total number of students writing each day, and the number choosing to write a sustained piece on a particular topic.
Table 2: Number making statements
Table 3: Total number of statements
Table 4: Average of statements per student
Table 5: Occurrence of topic choice and concurrence of variables on Day Three
Table 6: Occurrence of topic choice and occurrence of variables on Day Four
Table 7: Number of insight statements for students writing about Writing compared with average of such statements across days for these students.
Table 8: Frequency of occurrence of pattern of statements expressing aspiration, barrier, generation of ideas, and positive self-esteem, across days
Table 9: Number of ideas generated, students making statements, mean per student, students showing "sequence"

Appendix 2: Source material

Source material for all tables and figures are available from the author, by electronic transfer or diskette. The Project Document Folder contains: (1) Numbered journal sentences; (2) sentence codes; (3) sequence data; and (4) variables.