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Philosophy Paper

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Feels Like Growth, Looks Like Change

Outdoor education is an experiential learning process that creates, transmits, and applies knowledge about the role of physical activity in the advancement of health within one's self and or society. Outdoor education may take on many forms but it essentially can be broken down into Priest's model of adventure and environmental education, which branches out to other relationships, such as interpersonal, intrapersonal, ecosystemic, and ekistic. Outdoor education feels like growth in that you choose a path, adventure or environmental, and it leads you to possibilities that can be life altering. With growth, outdoor education looks like change, meaning the things you experience can be developmental and alter your perspective or behavior by doing.

We learn who we are through processes. Since outdoor education is a type of learning that is experiential, we can feel and sometimes even see the changes within ourselves. Kolb's experiential Learning Model encompasses the idea of having a concrete experience and growing from it. Through this process, the concrete experience is reflected upon and then generalized into everyday usage to then lastly test or implicate it into new situations. Outdoor education feels like growth, which is a process that is developmental, much like what Kolb's Process consists of. With growth we have

the chance to learn and with the knowledge gained it then can transfer into new situations when applicable, sometimes even unknowingly.

Growth is the most effective in the right environment. Students might learn in a formal education setting, but it is only useful when applied to real situations (Wurdinger and Priest). In other words growth can be considered prevalent when the experience moves through the whole cycle as Kolb's Experiential Learning Model explains. If we have an experience and the model doesn't move through its cycle then the experience has no lasting effect.

Outdoor education feels like growth because we set goals for ourselves that develops us individually and consequently contributes to the larger community and society (The Journal of Experiential Education). Building our own personal and individual growth potentially can motivate people to be involved because a bigger picture is presented through outdoor education. We follow our goals in the hope to gain experience and consequently knowledge. Outdoor education doesn't look like confined spaces, but more like vast open fields with possibilities to learn in ways that will be impressionable and welcome rather than forgotten or forced. Knowledge is suppose to be transferable not specifically important in one instance or one exact moment in time, but many.

Outdoor education is learning through doing. We educate ourselves by going through the process of a experiential learning cycle. Outdoor education is not sitting and letting information run through you. Outdoor education is so effective because it is a process that is idosynetic. We create our own learning atmosphere through ourselves

rather than being told what we are learning. The experience is the teacher. “Nothing is more relevant to us than ourselves (Experiential Learning—What is it?).” In other words our own opinion is more significant than someone else’s opinion. An example of how experiences in outdoor education are more likely to change someone is the “Outward Bound Plus” curriculum model. “The Outward Bound model is so positive, profound, and powerful that it will automatically generalize to the students daily life; instructors need not be excessively concerned about [facilitating] transfer (Bacon 1987)”

By doing outdoor education someone is more likely to feel or see their own growth and change. We are more likely to gain knowledge from something that is self taught than something that is brought to our attention. This is because outdoor education is more likely to enhance one’s self esteem and because it allows the transferring of someone’s learning and insights gained during the experience into real life situations.

Each experience through outdoor education has the potential to help a person change therapeutically, “1) help focus or increase awareness on issues prior to the experience; 2) facilitate or direct change while an experience is actually occurring; 2) reflect, describe, analyze, or discuss the experience after it is completed; and/or 4) reinforce change and provide integration in lives after the experience is completed (The Evolution of Processing Adventure Therapy Experiences.” These experiences are so effective in assisting a person because they are designed to help create successful outcomes for a person or client. An example of such an experience would be an Alcoholics Anonymous activity. Essentially the participants scale over a wall and the wall represents their drug addiction. This metaphoric example exemplifies the feeling of

success that is felt when reaching the other side of that wall, like a feeling of rebirth. That it may take many tries to get there, but the satisfaction of reaching past that barrier is a goal to strive for. The people assisting them in reaching their destination over the wall represent their support in the fight of their addiction. Outdoor education is effective in this way because it is considerably specific. The activity is reliant upon the situation of the people experiencing it. Again this reiterates the fact that mainstream education is less effective because it is a type of education that follows a general curriculum that is more likely to focus on many rather than small one on one conversations and circumstances.

Outdoor education also facilitates change by creating awareness. It creates awareness of the environment, whether it be awareness of how we effect the earth or how we are connected to the earth. “How we dwell on the earth, the care of our soul—our inner psyche—with the earth, our healing as tied to our way of being and knowing the earth (The Place of Deep Ecology and Ecopsychology in Adventure Education)” is ecopsychology or “earth bonding”. It is an idea that recognizes “our lost religious impulse (Roszak 1972).” An example we could consider to this type of bonding with the environment would be Thoreau and the experience he felt hiking through the Appalachians. His deep connection with nature and the relationship he built with the mountains over his duration of time exploring them, helped him relate to life’s expectations and was a reflection period for himself (Among Shining Mountains).

Awareness, as mentioned before, can also be learned through outdoor education as environmental consciousness. This deep ecology can also be referred to as radical environmentalism ecology, which is “a grass root movement that emerges from a swell

of consciousness acknowledging our flawed cultural and self-assumptions in relation to the earth (The Place of Deep Ecology and Ecopsychology in Adventure Education).”

With this a sense of responsibility is developed for our actions. Not until there is a crisis do people look for a reason to be aware, but once aware you have a closer relationship to the outdoors. This is how ecopsychology and deep ecology work together to create a belief that encompasses the awareness of a building movement. “

If you believe our personal and cultural adventure must bring us closer toward our organic reality of living on this earth and we must reinterpret the dualistic cognitive process that creates detachments from self, other and place, then your general inquiry can ring you to ecopsychology and deep ecology. (The Place of Deep Ecology and Ecopsychology is Adventure Education)

This type of awareness and realization, not only brings about recognition, but hopefully change as well. The willingness or motivation to solve problems and how we can help is doing, experiencing the activity first hand.

Outdoor education has the prospective of creating an atmosphere of positive psychology. Positive psychology has “the goal of fostering excellence through the understanding and enhancement of factors that lead to growth. It embraces the view that growth occurs when positive factors are present (Positive Psychology and Outdoor Education).” Outdoor education and positive psychology work together to help develop or enhance a client’s strengths. Positive psychology can be reached by being placed in activities that are experiential in outdoor education. Such activities takes clients out of

their comfort zones. This extrapolation puts the client in a situation where they are left with a decision to complete or incomplete a task or activity. The positive psychology is gained when a client accomplishes a activity that they may hesitate to. The accomplishment is satisfying and fulfilling. The anxiety and uncertainty that may be created previous to the accomplishment has been argued to help facilitate change. This might not only be because it is a situation that causes fulfillment when completed, but also because it is a feeling of defeat of such an anxiety. This form of created anxiety isn't the same as anxiety felt when a life changing experience occurs in the real world, because the outdoor education type setting creates a healthy supportive community to rely upon. The experiences in outdoor education are not literally day to day life experiences, but rather fabricated ones that can be applied to the real world. The physical environment of unfamiliarity within outdoor education enables clients to gain new perspectives on the memorable environments from which they are adapted to. The wilderness type environment prevails because it is considered to promote self-awareness and self responsibility by providing "rules" in the form of natural consequences which is a better way of consequential learning because they are less likely to be considered unfair or improper (Walsh & Golins). This again is a feeling of safety and therefore better allows the client to grow and change.

The various elements of the flow experience are linked together and dependent on each other. By limiting the stimulus field, a flow activity allows people to concentrate their actions and ignore distractions. As a result they feel in potential control of the environment. Because the flow activity has clear non contradictory rules, people who perm in it can

temporarily forget their identity and its problems. The result of all these conditions is that one finds the process intrinsically rewarding.

(Csikszentmihalyi 1975: 48)

This feeling of what is called “peak performance” brings about a feeling of fully functioning individualism and promotes positive outcomes with which the achievement is related to.

Outdoor education is an experience that encompasses a feeling of growth and change. Priest’s model of outdoor education exemplifies the idea that it is an education that voluntarily allows us to choose a path whether it be adventure or environmental the point is that if growth is facilitated then change will occur. What each person feels or sees during the process of an experience in outdoor education depends on the individual’s experience and self which is why, “Whatever we find in the mountains, we took there in the first place (Boniface).”