
Empowering Clients

Activities from AEE Workshop November 2009

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Morning Activity: Circled Chair/Rope Loop Transfer

In small groups of 7-8, each group is charged with the task of repairing a machine inside a rope circle. Anyone inside the rope circle is blindfolded, the second circle out people can see but cannot talk. Within "home circle" people can both see and talk. Additionally, groups are given different stories: a metaphor about TAPG, a metaphor about diversity, a story about Elite Scientists, an analogy to mental health goals, and one group receives no additional directions. The principles of empowerment are processed throughout the activity.

Five Basic Principles of Empowerment:

1. Empowerment is a PROCESS, as well as a GOAL
2. Allow client to name the problem and the conditions, in their own language....to assess the interface between their personal skills and abilities, their motivations, and the qualities within their environment.
3. Where support exists for empowerment, use strategies to educate participants about access to power.
4. Where barriers to power exists, use advocacy and social action strategies.
5. Where power is denied, strategies that involve the client in:
 - a. Defining the situation, conditions, or problems the client faces
 - b. Developing and experimenting with the solution
 - c. Acting on the decisions they have made

Strategies naturally deal with three components of ecological competence:

- o capacities and skills
- o motivational aspects: hope, self respect, efficacy or potency in controlling one's destiny
- o environmental qualities

Conditions which lead to competence and empowerment:

1. Trust in the users of the service....treated as co-designers of the service
2. Recognize people's skills and abilities
3. Assess present and potential environmental impact along with assessment of the individual
4. Use support groups to generate mutual support, consciousness raising, and social action
5. Create partnerships

Thoughts on Empowerment

“Traveler, there is no road. The road is made as one walks.”

(Machado cited by Freire 1998)

- **Breton:** According to Swift & Levin 1987, these three strategies constitute the cardinal principle of empowerment: 1. Define the situations, conditions or problems which they face, 2. Participate in the elaboration of the solution, and 3. Act on the decisions they have taken.
- Solomon 1976- *“a process whereby the SW engages in a set of activities with the client...that aim to reduce the powerlessness that has been created by negative valuations based on membership in a stigmatized group.*
- **8 Empowerment Principles**
 1. All oppression is destructive of life; challenge them all
 2. Maintain holistic view in situations of oppression. Develop multifocal vision; see both forest and tree and attend to both
 3. People empower themselves; we assist
 4. Those who share common ground need each other to attain empowerment (the power of collectivity)
 5. Establish a mutual and reciprocal relationship with clients; value their unique personhood
 6. Encourage client voice
 7. Encourage person is victor rather than victim
 8. Maintain a social change focus; work towards structural change, human transformation, justice and liberation
- **Empowering Roles** (*partner, collaborator, co-teacher, co-investigator, dialogist, critical question poser, bridge builder, guide, ally and power equalizer, co-builder, co-activist, coworker*)
- **Central Processes**
 - Developing individual potentialities and critical consciousness in the context of relationship through consciousness raising and praxis
 - Strengthening individual capabilities and problem solving skills
 - Building group, collectivity and community
 - Taking action to change oppressive conditions

- **Relationship building skills**
 - Conveying reciprocal levels of empathy
 - Mutual contracting: Shulman (1992)- helping clients to manage their feelings/problems
 - *Tuning in*- worker prepares to enter the life process of client using prior knowledge and empathy (Freire- "*gathering thematic*")
 - *Using multifocal vision...*
 - "*Looking with planned emptiness*" (Middleman & Goldberg Wood); "*jigsaw puzzling*", "*looking from diverse angles*"
- **Contracting or "What brings us here?"**
- **Meta-categories (Hollis & Woods 1981))**
 - Sustainment, direct influence, exploration, description and ventilation, person/situation reflection, pattern dynamic reflection, developmental reflection,
- **Problem solving skills (Freire)**
 - Consciousness raising- developing heightened awareness and knowledge base about situations of oppression
 - 4 attributes: motivation, psychic comfort, problem solving, self-direction
 - Work that promotes motivation + problem solving + psychic comfort= self-direction = empowerment
 - Praxis- action, reflection, return to action
 - Critical education- posing critical questions, information giving,
 - Maintaining equality
- **Group Empowerment Skills**
 - Making a clear mutual contract
 - Establishing the common ground
 - Challenging the obstacles
 - Lending a vision
 - Reaching for each participant's maximum participation in the process

Assessment and Empowerment

“The process by which the client reconstructs his experience is not one the worker creates; he simply enters, and leaves...He is an incident in the life of his client. Thus the worker should ask himself: what kind of incident will I represent...How do I enter the process, do what I have to do, and then leave?” (William Schwartz)

Phases of the Empowering Helping Process

- (Schwartz 1974): preparatory tuning in, beginning, work, transitions and ending
- (Germain & Gitterman 1980, 1996): Initial (worker preparation, entry including exploration, problem definition, contracting); Ongoing; Ending/Termination
- (Lee 2001): Preparing to enter the client’s world; Entering and joining forces; Mutual assessment, problem definition, and contracting; Working on the problems; Leaving and evaluation
- (Alvarez & Stauffer 2007): Assess Point A; Assess and attend to the environment; Match with an intervention; Facilitate the challenge; Guide the learning; Evaluate the process

▪ **Assessing individuals**

- (Germain & Gitterman 1996): 3 interrelated spheres of living- life transitions; interpersonal relations; environmental negotiations; also must assess physical and social environment for nutritive/toxic qualities
- (Lum 1986): Must also assess- Manifestations of oppression, including discrimination, disempowerment, powerlessness or powershortages, inequality, conflict caused by acculturation, and loss of cultural solutions; Presence of stereotyping and bias in the client’s life
- (Alvarez 1982): 4-Corners- person and functioning in home, work/school, peer and community domains
- Ego Assessment: an assessment of a client’s coping behaviors- helpful to determine strengths and areas for improvement
- DSM IV; Narrative Assessments;
- Equal attention given to the client and the environment
- Content: Basic information; Life transitions; Health and Mental health; Interpersonal patterns; The environment- physical and socioeconomic; Manifestations of oppression; Areas of powerlessness or inadequate power; Focus on the strengths;

▪ **Assessing families**

- **6 levels of family life**: Content; Family processes; Family structures; Family history; A focus on the separate parts; The environmental context

METAPHORS IN THE FACILITATION PROCESS

Current practice in adventure therapy:

- Facilitators develop metaphors FOR clients: The classic example by Gass (1991) in his JEE article, Enhancing Metaphor Development in Adventure Therapy, launched the approach of assessing behavioral issues in clients and presenting an activity that is metaphorically similar to the problems, and that requires similar solutions.
- Facilitators attempt to create isomorphic frames for activity presentation: Priest and Gass (2007) offer research supporting the hypothesis that programs presented with isomorphic, metaphoric frames and debriefs were more effective than other styles of facilitation in adult education and training programs. It is a reasonable jump to think that this practice may also enhance the effectiveness of therapeutic applications.

An alternative view of how to use metaphor to go deeper in Adventure Therapy has been presented by Johan Havelynck (1998), in an article titled Facilitating experiential learning as a process of metaphor development:

- Facilitators work to develop the metaphors presented (enacted) by participants. These metaphors come out of the action and represent a demonstration of the beliefs/life metaphors that clients live by. Rather than present metaphors BEFORE the activity, the emphasis is in identifying and working with the metaphors that develop during the activity.
- This approach hinges on some core beliefs:
 - Participants enact their life metaphors as part of the experience.
 - Participants frontload their own situation into every activity
 - Participants also work to realize their metaphors in every activity.
 - Metaphors are viewed as figures of thought (not simply figures of speech) that act as guiding images for individual behavior.
 - Experiential learning (and therapeutic change) is seen as the process of changing these “metaphors we live by”.
 - We cannot offer clients experiences. At most we offer them activities.....clients construct their own experiences. Experience is viewed not as what happens to us, but what we do with what happens with us. Consequently, there is an equivocal nature to experience that results in individuals responding differently from one another and in uncertain, unpredictable ways. This aspect of experience is minimized by the current practice of metaphoric introduction and isomorphic facilitation of the activity, i.e., it is less experiential in nature.

Major question: What aspects of facilitation leads to metaphor development, and consequently, personal change?

1. Create an open, safe learning space where participants are free to enact their life metaphors. (The importance of creating an environment conducive to learning and change is affirmed again!)
2. Watch the action level of participants for signals about “metaphor development”:
Immersion: (when clients are highly engaged and moving forward on the task)
 - Watch for a time when participants are completely engaged, that is immersed, in the activity.
 - Take note of when, what, how, and other interpersonal aspects of that moment.

Stuckness: (when no progress is being made toward the interpersonal or physical goal of the activity)

- These situations mark opportunity for metaphor change and for increased receptiveness to intervention.
- Indicators include disengagement, silences, repetition of actions, facial expressions, changes in voice tone, negative verbalizations

Generating Movement: (when the clients are just starting to move)

- Attempts to deal with or cope with the frustration resulting from stuckness or other aspect of the experience at hand
- The beginning movement is often triggered by jokes or a break from the action.
- Language switches to support emerging generative metaphor

Renaming and Reframing: (when physical action toward the goal is temporarily on hold as participants engage one another in accepting new objectives)

- Changing language to reflect a new metaphor
- New mind-set about the problem and potential solutions

Mapping: (When the action of the clients is producing an emergence of new rules, directives, plans, approaches and options)

- This phase often follows renaming and reframing. It is those exciting moments when participants are communicating and clarifying what is working and how they want to continue moving forward.

New Solutions/metaphors: (at the moment of completion or success) The task or process of bringing the development of the generative metaphor to completion

3. Appreciate the potential of existing life metaphors, not just the need to change to new ones.
 - People connect through appreciation
 - The expression of genuine appreciation is part of how to create a safe learning space
 - We need to see the unrealized potential in existing life metaphors and help participants “live up” to them.



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The following strategies are offered as a starting point to matching your activity with your client in the hopes that they help you adapt activities for environmental, developmental, cultural, and clinical considerations resulting in a more informed, intentional decision-making process during facilitation.

Connect with your client on multiple levels:

- Environment (props and space)
- Clinical goals, activity purpose, stage of change (including motivation and hope), previous experience
- Client's interest, strengths, and limitations (capacity and skill)

Matching through Facilitation

- Activity Structure: Choose to match the actions, movements, or energy level of your client with the actions in an activity or the exact opposite in order to create a paradox or a paradigm shift.
- The experiential functioning of your client: Use your client's words and actions to adapt interventions that match his/her experiential functioning at that moment in the session.
- Presentation: Rules, guidelines, safety considerations, space, and time considerations, are all issues that you can adapt to meet the needs of your clients. Tailor the activity to fit the specific needs of the client.
- Level of risk: Physical safety and emotional risk.

Activities

- **IDENTITY EXCHANGE HEART STRING** (Ref Unknown): Invite people to think of their favorite book or movie. Meet someone else in the group and share this information. Then exchange it with the person they meet. Example, Person A likes the movie "Top Gun" and shares this with Person B who likes the movie "Golden Compass". Person A now takes on Person B identity. So Person A meets Person C and says Person B's name and movie! Phew! All sorts of things can be discussed, such as confusion, strategies, changing information.
 - **CLOTHES PIN TAG** (Ref Unknown): Mark off a play area and give all participants 5 clothes pins. Let them pin them to their shirts or pant legs. Have them all spread out before starting. The object is to try to put clothes pins onto someone else's back without getting any more on yours. You can only take on clothes pin at a time from you. Discuss safety, risk, strategy, etc.
 - **ZIP ZAP POP** (Ref Unknown): Invite participants to "pass" the zip with their right hand pointing to the left across the chest. Practice this a few rounds. Add in the "pass" of the zap with the left hand pointing to the right across the forehead. Add in the "pass" of the pop with both hands together pointing to anyone in the group. Discuss balance, multi-tasking, strategies, performance stress.
 - **60 SECOND HISTORY** (Ref Unknown): In dyads or triads invite each person to share his/her entire life history in one minute. The other person listens as intently as possible without verbal feedback. Switch roles after a minute. Debrief listening skills, honoring another story – especially by allowing him/her to choose the direction without our questions, connecting to others, etc.
 - **SLOW MOTION TAG** (Ref Unknown): Invite participants to find a partner. Round One: Choose one person to be peanut butter and one to be jelly. One is "it" and one is being chased – in slow motion! When tagged, make a 360 turn and switch roles! Round Two: link arms and face another pair. Same idea! Notice strategies, different definitions of "slow motion", differences between round one and round two.
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Empowerment Through Choice

by Suzy Strempeke

What is the one thing that will always make you feel empowered?

It is the ability to make a choice. The problem is that we often forget **that there is a choice in absolutely everything**. Even if external circumstances prevent us from doing what we prefer, we have a choice in how we are going to approach the situation. We have control over our attitude, thoughts and feelings.

Being "Stuck"

I often hear people talk about being "stuck" at their jobs. When asked why they don't move to another job that would be more fulfilling, their reply: "I can't because I need the health insurance" OR "I can't because I've built up my retirement" and it goes on.

Do you notice anything interesting about those responses? They all revolve around the word "can't". **The word can't is disempowering**... it's pretty reasonable to assume if your thought processes around your job involve the word can't, that you would feel "stuck", because according to you, you can't do anything about it.

What else did you notice about those responses? The one thing that I find interesting about them is that if you really dig deeper, you often find that these individuals place high value on their health insurance benefits or retirement packages and although they are unhappy and dissatisfied, the value of these benefits outweigh their dissatisfaction. So, essentially they have made a choice... the benefit to cost ratio tips in favor of the reason they stay.

Empowerment Via Choice

Here is how we are empowered through choice:

We are empowered when we are aware that we are choosing something.

Instead of being "stuck" - ask yourself:

- **What reasons do I give for staying in the current situation?**
- **What do I gain?**
- **What do I lose?**
- **What is more important to me right now?**

Once you answer those questions you will have made your choice AND as you are going through the questions and answers you will become aware of the fact that you are making a choice.

The next step would be to ask yourself:

"How do I choose to feel about this decision?"

This is where attitude comes in....

You Have The Power To Choose!

<http://www.growthinaction.com>

Challenge by Choice (as defined by Project Adventure)

Challenge by Choice is a concept originated by Project Adventure. It asks that participants challenge themselves and participate fully in the experience. Recognizing that any activity or goal may pose a different level and type of challenge for each group member and that authentic personal change comes from within, **Challenge by Choice creates an environment where participants are asked to search for opportunities to stretch and grow during the experience.** The determination of what kind of participation represents an optimal learning opportunity is the responsibility of each group member. **All are asked to add value to the group experience by finding a way to contribute to the group's efforts** while also seeking to find value in the experience for themselves.

Accepting Challenge by Choice encourages all to **respect thoughtful choices.** Its use provides a supportive and caring atmosphere in which participants can stretch themselves. It recognizes the need for individuals and the group to **accept responsibility for decisions.** It creates opportunities for learning about how to **set goals that are in neither the comfort nor the panic zone,** but in that slightly uncomfortable stretch zone where the greatest opportunities for growth and learning lie. While the specific language may change to match the unique needs of a group or learning environment, the philosophy remains the same throughout all Project Adventure programs.

Challenge by Choice is a cornerstone concept of Project Adventure.

The Impelling Principle in Challenge by Choice

by Christian Itin, MSW, PhD

In the last issue I had republished a piece I wrote entitled "Challenge by Choice as Professional Enabling." In a recent issue of the Northeast Regional newsletter Charles Parry questioned the validity of "challenge by choice" as a principle of practice. In several recent discussions on the internet the notion of "challenge by choice" as a basic principle has been put forth, almost as doctrine. I continue to remain intrigued with how "challenge by choice" remains for me both a viable yet problematic principle. In this article I will outline how understanding and living the basic philosophical tenants of experiential education can help in correctly applying the principle of "challenge by choice."

In an attempt to further illuminate the principle of "challenge by choice" I've reviewed some of Kurt Hahn's writings. For those unfamiliar with him, Kurt Hahn is the founder of Outward Bound, Gordonstound, the Salem School and numerous other educational institutions based on the philosophy of experiential education. Hahn's ideas still serve as the foundation for most (if not all) adventure-based experiential education programs. One particular passage from an address given by Hahn in 1965 speaks to the delicate balance in the notion of "challenge by choice." Hahn said in this address:

"I have been asked critical questions lately in this country. They surprised me and reminded me of attacks to which I had been exposed in Germany in the 'twenties, when Educational theory and practice were obsessed with the danger of repressing the young. I was interviewed by a journalist in Wales. He asked me: 'How can the methods you believe in do justice to the Indoor-type?' He was horrified when I said, 'by chasing him outside.' Then there was another journalist, a very distinguished one who said 'How can Gordonstoun do justice to the Introvert?' An introvert is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as someone who is mainly interested in his inner processes. I answered: 'By providing circumstances which turn him inside out.' And a third one wondered how we deal with the extrovert. My answer shocked him: 'By turning him outside in.' Let me define, in general terms, the conviction which is behind these answers. It is the sin of the soul to force young people into opinions - indoctrination is of the devil - but it is culpable neglect not to impel young people into experience."

For Hahn one essential component of education (and it has been suggested as a central component of experiential education) is to urge students into value forming experiences. **Hahn holds out an ideal where students are challenged to experience themselves differently, to move out of their "known."** The key for Hahn appears to be in the gray area between forcing and urging. Impelling implies "a force," but not "to force." This is a subtle yet important distinction. For me it marks the true distinction between experiential learning and experiential education. Let me diverge for a moment to consider and clarify this distinction between experiential learning and experiential education, because I believe that it is imperative in using the principle of "challenge by choice" effectively.

Experiential learning has been correctly defined by Chickering (1976) as "changes in judgments, feelings, knowledge or skills [resulting] for a particular person from living through an event or events" (p. 63). At the core of experiential learning is that the student

defines and creates the learning. There is no necessary role for the teacher in the experiential learning process.

Experiential education on the other hand has been less clearly defined. In fact, the recent AEE definition of experiential education incorrectly defines it using the language of experiential learning: "experiential education is a process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill and value from direct experience" (AEE, 1994). A better definition of experiential education can be derived from the Association for Experiential Education's (AEE), Principles of Experiential Education (1994):

Experiential education is a holistic philosophy, where carefully chosen experiences supported by reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis, are structured to require the learner to take initiative, make decisions, and be accountable for the results, through actively posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, constructing meaning, and integrating previously developed knowledge. Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, politically, spiritually, and physically in an uncertain environment where the learner may experience success, failure, adventure, and risk taking. The learning usually involves interaction between learners, learner and educator, and learner and environment. It challenges the learner to explore issues of values, relationship, diversity, inclusion, and community. The educator's primary roles include selecting suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, supporting learners, insuring physical and emotional safety, facilitating the learning process, guiding reflection, and providing the necessary information. The results of the learning form the basis of future experience and learning.

In experiential education we recognize that the teacher plays a role in the educational process. That a part of this role is the influence the teacher has in the process (the influence, or power, is attributable in part to the teacher's experience, knowledge, and perhaps wisdom). The issue of power, defined as the ability to influence, is clearly a force and factor in education and especially experiential education. **The role of the teacher is to challenge, not "by force" but to influence and use the position to help the student move outside of what is known.**

The notion of "challenge by choice" I think exists to remind us that we do not wish to indoctrinate students. We do not want to force a student into any situation. **Ultimately the students must decide to accept or decline the challenge, and we must always remember it is their choice.** Unfortunately I believe that "challenge by choice" may have become its own doctrine, that we have abdicated our position to one in which we question our role in impelling students.

The question raised by Charles Parry and me appears to be how to make "challenge by choice" real and not another doctrine. **I believe the secret lies in our authenticity as teachers, educators, facilitators, instructors, or whatever role we have.** The key element in experiential education is recognizing the relationship inherent in the process. When we are real and genuine, when "challenge by choice" is no longer a program dictum, but a reminder to us to be aware of our power, then it becomes real. As adventure programs have flourished (especially those who only know "ropes courses") it appears that many

practitioners may have failed to understand the philosophical grounding for the programs they are implanting. Perhaps we have all been so focused on policies and procedures that we have failed in impelling our staff into value forming experiences, but rather have forced them into opinions.

Being authentic or real is not easy. You can't get there by following some simple rules, reading a book or going to a training (though these can and are steps in the process).

Being authentic does not mean abandoning policies and procedures, concepts like "challenge by choice" or "full value contract," or facilitation and leadership skills. It does, however, mean that these become incorporated into our own experiences and that we are able to share them with students as a genuine part of the relationship. I think a part of it is being committed to the same process we are asking our students to explore: the exploration of the unknown. We must constantly be turned "outside in" and/or "inside out."

To close let me share a quote from Margery Williams' *The Velveteen Rabbit*, which captures a part of the process of becoming real.

"What is REAL?" asked the Rabbit one day..."Does it happen all at once, or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the skin horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

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Challenge by Choice

By James Neil

... As an adventure programming principle, Challenge by Choice can be compared and contrasted with the more hard-line "**impel into challenge**" principles, exhibited classically by Outward Bound programs and evident in the active character-building philosophy of the founder of [Outward Bound, Kurt Hahn](#). Hahn's view was that youth were suffering from the demotivating ills of modern life and that it was the responsibility of educators to impel them into educative challenges ([ltin, 1997](#)).

Collectively, these various emphases on extent of participant choice suggest an underlying, fundamental tension in adventure-based and experiential education, which can be depicted on a continuum, as in Figure 1.

