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Summary of Individual/Personal Growth Discussion

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Report from the Individual / Personal Development and Growth Group

Simon Priest and Alan Ewert

Fifteen researchers gathered for two hours to discuss the directions of future research in outdoor education concerning individual or personal growth and development. To begin, we brainstormed a list of twenty five constructs believed to be impacted by outdoor educational programming. Each researcher then "voted" for those constructs deemed to be of greatest importance or in need of more research. The four concerns of self-efficacy, coping with stress, behavioral changes, and transference issues topped the list. The discussion which followed centered on what we know about these four concerns, what we need to know about them, what our central research questions ought to be and how we should go about answering these questions. Recommendations were as follows:

1. Conduct more research focused on the impact and lasting effect of outdoor education on self-efficacy and on the long term transference of specific changes in self-efficacy to more general or to other specific efficacy situations.

2. Conduct research to track changes in observable behaviors such as: scholastic achievement, attendance, recidivism, DSM criteria, productivity, treatment levels, vandalism, disciplinary instances, depreciative statements, skill acquisition, and the frequency or quality of social interactions.

3. Conduct research to determine the key program attributes, and the best combinations of these attributes that contribute to the behavioral changes. Program attributes might include: environments, activities, sequencing, facilitational styles, and the ethnicity, culture, gender and age of subjects.

4. Research needs to incorporate more base-line data, before and after treatment, by including more single subject or group time series designs.

5. Research needs more participant observation using clinical practitioners outside the outdoor field and more observer reported rather than self-reported measures.

6. Researchers need to be tolerant and accepting of alternate paradigms of inquiry and need to mix quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

7. The building of new theory and testing these models should be a priority. Modelling must be multivariate and the use of regressive prediction and structural path analyses (like LISREL) ought to be a consideration.

8. Instrumentation must have established trustworthiness and researchers are encouraged first to seek out existing instruments, and second to create instruments specifically designed for outdoor situations. Instruments need to be tested for validity, reliability, factor structure, and other such considerations.

9. Researchers need to begin tapping funding sources such as the Forest Service (grants in tourism, urban forestry, and leisure benefits), drug-free school money, corporations, OSAP, Department of Education (special education and training), and potentially the National Parks Service or the Department of the Interior.

10. Lastly, as a profession, either under the auspices of CEO or under the umbrella of another organization like AEE, a clearinghouse must be established for sharing instrumentation, funding sources, and opportunities for publication or presentation of research results.

Proceedings 14