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OUTDOOR EDUCATION AND SPIRITUALITY

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Man is like a bird with two wings that potentially can lift him to the pathway-of-the-stars (spiritual life). Too often, however, he is like a bird with a broken wing. One wing is physical consciousness thinking process, and the other is the spiritual, including the sub-conscious dream pattern. When both the wings are functioning with the rhythm of the Beauty path (spiritual path), they have mighty power, and can carry the soul to joyful heights.

David Villasenor, *Tapestries in Sand*

The question at hand is that of researching the impact of outdoor recreational and educational experiences on the spiritual development of the individual. I approach that question from the perspective of a facilitator of personal growth who has long advocated the methodologies considered as experiential outdoor/challenge/adventure education. I must admit from the onset that I also approach that question with some reservations, for I wonder if it is premature to advocate research when the theory and practice of experiential outdoor challenge/adventure education (hereafter referred to as challenge/adventure education) have given so little attention to the impact of their programs on the spiritual development of clients. One of the important issues before experiential and outdoor professionals is that of appropriate focus on the "spiritual quest" of clients and the potentials of the evolving methodologies of challenge/adventure education for enhancing spiritual development.

One has to wonder why the spiritual journey has received so little attention in challenge education. In an assessment of the impact of experiential education on students, Conrad and Hedin concluded that the methodology contributed to psychological, social, and intellectual/academic development of students (1981). There was no attention to, nor mention of, the impact of experiential

programs on the spiritual development of the youth. One can only wonder, if they had designed their study to include assessment of the latter, would there be suggestion of a gain? A decade later, Stringer and McAvoy did find that spiritual development was an important aspect of the wilderness adventure for many people (1992).

Over 20 years ago, Rey Carlson, distinguished professor of recreation and outdoor education at Indiana University, wrote on the values of camping experiences (1975). He noted that one of the goals toward which many camp activities are directed was that of developing spiritual meanings and values. There is a long history of church camps (Graendorf & Mattson, 1984), and challenge/adventure education theory and practice have strong roots in outdoor education and camping education (Smith, Roland, Havens, & Hoyt, 1992), yet professionals have seldom focused on the spiritual aspects of the challenge/adventure education sequence.

The goals of challenge/adventure education programs are most often stated in terms of developing dimensions of self-concept (self-esteem, self-confidence, locus of control, empowerment, etc.) and/or improvement of social adjustment (communication skills, cooperation, sensitivity, etc.). Sometimes there are goals for teaching leisure skills, enhancing environmental

awareness, community service, or stimulating academic performance. In very few situations is a challenge/adventure education program offered with the stated goal of enhancing the "spiritual" dimensions of clients, although this may well be a latent goal in some programs. I believe it is time to bring this latter goal into greater focus and to recognize the potential impact of the challenge/adventure education program on the spiritual development of clients.

Challenge/adventure education can be defined as a humanistic and holistic methodology for the facilitation of growth and learning, based on innovative strategies that have roots in outdoor education, adventure education, awareness education, somatic education, humanistic education, and experiential education. The challenge/adventure education methodology has also been influenced by the concepts of cooperative games, the practices of camping and outdoor recreation, and the traditions of the rituals, ceremonies, and basic cosmological orientation of the Native Americans and other indigenous peoples (Smith et. al., 1992).

THE SPIRITUAL QUEST

The spiritual quest can be defined as an individual's attempt to clarify personal values about life, death, the universe, a Supreme Being, and/or a search for understanding, meaning, purpose and direction. It is a human endeavor that has always been part of the human experience, but it seems to have increased in importance and attention over the past decade as many people have attempted to make some sort of sense out of what some see as the nonsense that is about.

Life as a journey is a common metaphor in society. Journey as adventure or adventure as journey are often discussed by challenge/adventure education leaders and incorporated into many programs. The journey is one of searching about the wilderness beyond and also the wilderness within (Smith, 1990). The search is, in reality, a spiritual quest, as each person seeks personal answers to questions of "Who am I?" "Why am I?" "Where am I going?" and "What is my relationship to all that is?"

History is filled with cyclic trends away from organized religions and concern for spiritual development and then back again. It may well be that as the new millennium approaches, there is a re-awakening of the spiritual quest and that more people are now concerned about both personal and humankind spirituality. Many attitudinal surveys suggest this trend. Sixteen years ago, Ferguson (1980) reported on a Gallup Poll that indicated that nearly 80% of college students wanted to find "spiritual meaning." *The Journal of Holistic Education* devoted a special issue to spirituality education (Miller, 1993). One could also suggest that contemporary focus on the wisdom of Native American traditions is reflective of people's concern for finding a new cosmological orientation. This trend is reinforced by the parallels between contemporary focus on earth ethics and spirituality.

A number of authors have addressed the issue of spiritual and religious development (e.g., Fowler, 1981; Heller, 1986; Kohlberg, 1981; Meissner, 1974; Moran, 1983). Many have noted that developing young people have the need for spirituality. Robert Coles (1986, 1990) has suggested that all children are "seekers, as young pilgrims," with considerable concern for making sense out of their life and finding their place in the universe. He spent time with young people of Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and Native American heritage and found that most of them could verbalize their own "journey of faith."

As mentioned above, the stated goals of challenge/adventure education programs are most often concerned with aspects of self, others, and the self-other interdependence. Rarely are there goals for enhancing awareness of the environment and the self-environment interdependence. Even more rarely do programs state goals for enhancing awareness of The Other and the self-other-environment-Other oneness (the spiritual quest). My point would be that even if our stated program goals are basically psychological, they are related to the holistic growth and development of the client and are, thus, influential on the spiritual quest. Our clients often

internally process and interpret the experiences of challenge/adventure education in terms of spiritual awareness. It is, therefore, impossible for challenge/adventure educators to avoid attending to issues of spirituality. Even if *our* goals are restricted to the psychological realm, more is happening for our clients. We can define ourselves simply as facilitators of personal growth and learning, but we must recognize that personal growth (development/transformation of the self) involves seeking awareness and understanding of all that is in the web of life, including the spiritual quest.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Certainly, if challenge/adventure education leaders pay heed to the needs, motivations, and personal goals of their clients, and to the apparent trends of societal attitude, then there will be increasing attention to the spiritual quest as the 21st century unfolds. As programs set goals to enhance the spiritual development of clients, three patterns of research on the topic will be required:

1. *Assessment of the needs and goals of various client populations.* This will be important in helping programs set goals and design appropriate experiential sequences to address the spiritual needs and goals of clients.
 2. *Study of the contribution of various challenge/adventure experiences to various dimensions of the spiritual quest.* Such research will involve study of program sequences and also specific experiential activities.
 3. *Evaluation of program effectiveness.* An important aspect of this research on program validity will be the longitudinal study of the impact of outdoor programs on participants' spiritual discoveries and subsequent personal and social adjustment.
1. *Defining the subject/process to be re-searched.* Is the term "spirituality" or the process of the "spiritual quest" too broad? Does it mean all things and different things to everyone? Should we distinguish between religion and spirituality? How can we do so in ways that will make spiritual quest-oriented programs acceptable to authorities and yet still serve the needs of clients?
 2. *Overcoming the bias of personal/cultural perspectives on spirituality.* Challenge/adventure and outdoor educators are prone to a "nature spirituality" value system (thus the interest in Native American spirituality), but that is not the value orientation of most people. As the subject of focus is so value-laden, how do researchers become attuned to multi-cultural and idiosyncratic orientations?
 3. *Understanding and dealing with the bias of western science and experimental methodology.* In psychology, for example, a behaviorist would argue against positing unnecessary and unmeasurable hypothetical constructs such as "self," "psyche," "soul," or "spirit." Can research realistically identify and address a concept as personal—and at times ineffable—as "spirituality"?
 4. *Appropriate assessment tools for evaluation of subjects' spirituality.* Most of the writing to date on spirituality and spiritual education has been theoretical or curriculum inspired. Moving to the research question will require assessment, and it may be that the qualitative methodologies (e.g., the use of personal journals for evaluation) will be the best choice.
 5. *How do we, can we, should we deal with the issues of separation of church and state?* Is it possible for challenge/adventure educators to program for spiritual development without facing this issue?

Researchers will face a number of problems and questions as they focus on spirituality in challenge/adventure programs:

As researchers and leaders in challenge/adventure education focus more on the spiritual quest of their clients, it is important for the leaders to focus on their own spiritual de-

velopment. This cannot be overstated, because in the understanding of the self as physical being, social being, psychological/emotional being, and spiritual being, each challenge/adventure educator will become more effective in facilitating the growth and learning of others. As more and more leaders focus on their personal spiritual quests, I believe they will understand and support this call for further exploration of the relationship between challenge/adventure education and spiritual education and for increased attention to the spiritual quest of clients. Challenge/adventure education has evolved into a potentially powerful methodology for guiding humankind's transition into the 21st century. The self-search recommended for others is equally important for each of us. Krishnamurti (1981) summarized it well: "To understand life is to understand ourselves...and that is both the beginning and end of education."

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