

Note: This document was originally written in 1991 shortly after I had taught my first course at the Hurricane Island Outward Bound School. The course was a 2-week sea kayaking course, and included rock-climbing, ropes course, team activities, both team and individual solos and other aspects of the Outward Bound Experience. It was written as a personal reflection on education. I made spelling changes, have included explanatory endnotes where I thought necessary and have changed the text to clarify some of the more cryptic text. I have also removed or modified any personal information that might help in identifying any of our students.

"I regard it as the foremost task of education to ensure survival of these qualities: an enterprising curiosity; an indefatigable spirit; tenacity in pursuit; readiness for sensible self-denial; and above all compassion."

Kurt Hahn (founder of Outward Bound)

"To Serve, To Strive and not To Yield"
(Outward Bound motto)

I have just finished my first course at HIOBS and have to write down some of my impressions and reflections on the experience. The excitement that I had felt when I first visited participated in S.U.R.G.E.ⁱ and Project Adventureⁱⁱ was rekindled and burst back into bright flame. The potential for the concepts of adventure education to invigorate and revitalize students in the classroom has again become apparent to me.

One of the most depressing memories of my own education was the tedium and predictability of instruction. Very few of the teachers I had in elementary or high school were able to communicate a passion for their subject or to raise the atmosphere of learning to any particular height of excitement. The classroom model was entirely traditional and rather dull. The teacher sat almost always in front of a roomful of students at their desks and imparted knowledge to the captive students. There was no recognition of the needs of the individual student and no acknowledgement of the value of the group as a learning organism. The class was seen as a group only in the sense of being a single receptacle of content. If the student was unable to understand the subject, there was sometimes extra help, which mainly consisted of the same delivery, but in a smaller group or face-to-face. Tests and papers and homework determined the grade, with everyone plugging away at the same tasks. There was little room for individual creativity in the form of the product. My impression of the way the children I know are being taught indicates that, for most of them, this is still the case, unless they are lucky enough to be in a special program or school that has embraced different ideas.

The exceptions that stand out from the grey mass of instructors usually did so because of individual idiosyncrasies that brought renown or infamy, but not necessarily a radical difference in instructional style. (I am reminded of Tom Lehrer's old math teacher.ⁱⁱⁱ) There were a few, however, who truly tried to instill passion for their subjects in their students. I remember that most of these were willing to take teaching out of the classroom into the world or who would accept a demonstration of

understanding^{iv} that went outside of the usual. There are several examples that come to mind. In fifth grade, for instance, Miss Laylor took our science class outdoors to collect and study as often as possible. She allowed a wide range of products for assignment, including drawings, dioramas or models, and papers. She demonstrated the concepts of environmental conservation and protection by involving her classes in a project to save an old oak tree near the parking lot.^v She also recognized my own learning differences (I was an undiagnosed ADD case) and allowed a certain amount of leeway in classroom fidgeting and deadlines. As a second example, in 11th-grade biology I was allowed to demonstrate my understanding of the ciliates by making a detailed model of a generic *Paramecium*, rather than writing a paper like most of the class. Finally, there is the example of the third grade teacher with another undiagnosed ADD sufferer who, in a traditional classroom, allowed the student to sit slightly isolated, where he was able to writhe in his seat without unduly disturbing the other students. (I remember him with his feet on the seat back and his head on the desk, looking upside-down at the teacher.)

What do these examples have to do with Outward Bound and what can adventure education teach the teachers? The primary component that I find so invigorating is that learning is doing, that doing is adventure and that adventure leads to personal growth. The difficulty for a classroom teacher is to instill in his teaching this sense of excitement and to still be able to get the students to absorb the content. Miss Laylor managed to do this by taking her subject out (literally!) into the real world. Another aspect of the OB experience is that the instructor serves as a senior member of the watch, as well as a leader. In the acquisition of knowledge and in the physical activities, the instructor leads “from the front,” to borrow an old military concept. Teaching by doing, by example, not by lecturing. The instructor models the activity, and by this demonstrates competence and a willingness to engage in the most strenuous or onerous aspects of the activity. On Hurricane Island, this meant the instructors were the first on the ropes course or up the cliff, the earliest up and the last to bed, the first into the frigid water at 5 AM. The instructor needs to do this in a way that her students do not find intimidating and that encourages them to learn by trying and through self-discovery.^{vi} The idea behind Outward Bound is that all members of the watch are important. All members can succeed. It is the responsibility of the instructor and the rest of the watch to help insure this. Success is different for each individual, and the instructor must be aware of this and must support the individual’s goals, while at the same time molding those goals into congruency with the goals of the course. B____’s problem with running is a good example. The ultimate goal was not changed, but the changes we made to help him reach that goal were critical.^{vii}

We had some very different people on this course, including two women in mid to late middle age and college and high school students ranging in age from 16 to 22. While they were all white, there was a range of backgrounds from poor suburban to wealthy urban. Despite the differences, I believe that

my co-instructor and I were able to bring all together and that each felt respected as an individual and a contributing member of the group. One technique that made this possible was the debriefing, which was a watch-wide discussion whenever things got too tense. This is one technique that can't be used very often in a classroom; as a matter of fact, a clever person could create a debriefing situation to disrupt whatever was going on.

Besides exhibiting competence, a teacher must also be prepared and able to accept instruction and correction from the students. I can remember teachers saying something in class that I knew was wrong, but I never remember having the sense that it was OK to question a teacher. This, of course, was probably to cut back on debate that could disrupt a class. Ultimately it had a negative effect on learning, I believe. Questioning authority, developing an individual sense of knowledge, and seeing learning as a process rather than as a mountaintop to achieve and then stop were all hampered by this. As a watch participant as well as leader, I was a guide on a shared journey, not an ultimate source of all knowledge. It was our job to provide the tools for the students, and their ultimate goal was to take those tools and create a successful final expedition. On this last trip, my co-instructor and I turned the process entirely over to the students, while we went along as facilitators and for safety supervision. What a change in education it would be if teachers in the classroom could see themselves as providers of tools rather than of fountains of wisdom!

Working with M_____, my co-instructor, was a revelation of what education could be. She is a professional teacher during the school year and is at HIOBS during the summer. If she leads her classroom as she did her watch, it must be a joy to be in her classes. Coming, as I did, from a skill training background, I was very results oriented and directive in my teaching style. It was humbling and very instructive to watch the compassion for the whole person, the humor, and the delight she brought to the teaching process. In many ways, my style was an outward flow, enthusiastic, yes, but still going from me to the students with not much coming back. With M_____, it was clearly a 2-way process. She picked up with great subtlety and caring on the styles, strengths and weaknesses of the various students and was able to craft her reactions and modify her style to elicit from each student his best effort.

Finally, to comment on the statements quoted above, ultimately, the teaching of content is only a small part of the educational process. The important thing is to teach students why they should learn, how they can learn, and why they need to extend the learning process throughout their lives. They must face new information and new tasks with courage and undaunted. The teacher must also inculcate in his students the idea of the nobility of service, not necessarily as patriotic service, but in a larger sense as a server of mankind. In this way, the teacher is aiding students to become more productive and concerned citizens.

To sum up, I believe that classroom teachers could integrate the ideals of adventure education in general and of Outward Bound in particular in several ways:

1. By being intensely aware of the differing abilities and inclinations of each student and by having several ways in which a student could show his or her understanding of the topic of study.
2. By demonstrating passion for and excitement in the subject.
3. By introducing a sense of adventure into the subject.
4. By setting reasonable, challenging goals, and by making sure that each student has the opportunity to reach those goals in a way that makes the best use of his or her abilities.
5. By integrating as much as possible real-world issues that relate directly to the lives of the students.
6. By creating lessons that involve each student as a productive member of the ambient group, either in subgroups or the entire class.
7. By being aware of the interactions of her students in class, and by keeping track of any potential issues among her students, using debriefing and other interactional methods, if necessary, to defuse potentially explosive or even non-productive situations.
8. Finally, by modeling good citizenship, caring, courage, and a love of learning, by never using cruel or sarcastic language to a student, and by maintaining a supportive and positive attitude even when forced by circumstances into a disciplinary role.

TEKIJEK – Free Spirits of the Sea

August 18 to August 31, 1989

Watch name: Tekijek – Derived from Northwest Indian mythology.

Expeditions:

1. Trial Run Around Fox Islands
2. Final Expedition
 1. Day 1
 - Food and Gear prep and check.
Transport to Isle Au Haut, Overnight at Seal Trap
 - Lunch at Birch Point
 2. Day 2
 - Overnight on Harbor Island
 - Explore Merchant's Row

3. Day 3
 - Overnight on Sand Island
 - Explore the Basin
 - Lunch at Dunham Point
 - Major Crossing of Eastern Penobscot Bay
4. Day 3
 - Overnight on Sloop Island
 - Lunch on Calderwood Island
5. Day 4
 - Overnight in Carver Cove
 - Lunch on the Sugar Loaves
6. Day 5
 - Overnight on Bald Island
 - Fog crossing back to Hurricane Island

Watch Emphasis was on the 4 pillars:

1. Leadership
2. Physical Fitness
3. Craftmanship
4. Self-reliance
- 5.

Also Peter Willauer's^{viii} emphasis on HIOBS:

1. creativity
2. community service
3. search & rescue
4. environmental awareness

The final activity before leaving the Island was to have each student write a letter to him or herself about the Outward Bound experience. These letters were mailed to the students 6 months after the completion of the course.

ⁱ S.U.R.G.E (Survival, Urgency, Recreation, Growth, Enthusiasm) was an adventure education program at Boston University developed by Michael Jeneid, an ex-Royal Marine and Outward Bound instructor who had taught OB in England, Wales, Australia and Maine. He also coordinated a cooperative program between Phoenix House, a drug rehabilitation program in New York City, and the Hurricane Island Outward Bound School. S.U.R.G.E. consisted mainly of short, 1 week programs for B.U. students, consisting of winter ski and camping in Vermont and rock climbing on Shawangunk Ridge near New Palz, New York. There was also a Hudson River Expedition, from the sources on Mt. Marcy in the Adirondacks to the Battery on the southern tip of Manhattan Island by foot, raft, canoe and kayak. This latter course earned 12 master's credits from the B.U. School of Education.

ⁱⁱ Project Adventure is an "an innovative teaching organization" whose mission is "to provide leadership in the expansion of Adventure-based experiential programming. Project Adventure seeks to develop responsible individuals, productive organizations and sustainable communities." *Mission and Vision*. Retrieved 03/27/2010 from Project Adventure website: <http://www.pa.org/about/mission.php>
I took a one-day seminar with them in 1974 when they were based at the Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School. The program at that time was a required part of the curriculum.

ⁱⁱⁱ "The guy that taught us math,
Who never took a bath,
Acquired a certain measure of renown,
And after school he sold the most amazing pictures
In my home town." Lehrer, T. (1953) *Songs of Tom Lehrer: My Home Town*. Lehrer Records: Boston.

^{iv} Or what we might now call "showing mastery of the subject."

^v The oak tree was on a small hill near where the busses dropped students off. The earth around the tree had been heavily compacted by students' feet. We broke up the soil, built terracing to prevent runoff, added mulch and planted shrubs and flowers, then built a small chain fence to keep people away. This was in 1961!

^{vi} This was a learning experience for me. With my background in white-water skills instruction, I was far more directive than was considered acceptable at Hurricane Island. I was called on this, and had to examine and modify my own teaching technique to allow the students more leeway for self-discovery, rather than giving them the answers. While difficult (a white-water instructor's primary concern is safety, so there is a LOT of direction given), I was able to back off considerably. This had an unexpected advantage, in that the students and I were able to practice rescue and recovery techniques a lot more than I had originally planned!

^{vii} He was not fit and had real trouble keeping up with the watch. The modified run I worked out with him was that we would start several minutes before the rest of the watch, who would follow later with my co-instructor. We would run a certain number of steps, then walk, then run again until we had completed the full course.

^{viii} Peter Willauer founded the Hurricane Island Outward Bound School in 1963.