

David Eden
AMC Whitewater Kayaking Instruction Trip
Message to instructors

You Had Better Know What You Are Doing

Anyone who volunteers needs to remember that even before we get on the water we must establish confidence and comfort in our students. The best way to do this is to have confidence in your own skill in both overall technique and rescue. Most of us have been through this program at some point, and I'm sure everyone remembers how it felt to get on a class 2 river for the first time. The coolness of the instructors in situations that we found entirely nerve-racking was very helpful. I know that when I was at this early stage, the security I felt because of the perceived abilities of my instructors was very important for my willingness to risk capsize and extend my capacities. This feeling of confidence made me take their directions seriously. The knowledge that if I blew it and ended up swimming there was sure rescue available was critical to this feeling of security. Projecting this sense in your students is only possible if you are a master of class 3 whitewater. Even though this section is considered class 2, you must be completely comfortable at the next level up. The reason is that you will be moving all over the river continuously, demonstrating, fetching and even rescuing students as your group works its way down. This means that you are comfortable in any situation you find yourself in on the day, that you have a mental image of each drop, each eddy, each point on the river that you will be using for your teaching moments, and that you have imagined yourself in every sort of situation you might find yourself in at that point, including the results of an all-in rescue situation. How you structure your use of the teaching areas will depend on the potential for disaster and your confidence that you will be able to respond promptly and effectively.

Your skill is not the only important aspect of your success as an instructor. You must also be able to analyze what it is you do when you are bouncing down the river, and to be able to communicate that to your students. Most of us have been boating for long enough for most of our movements to have become almost instinctual and we concentrate on the water. Now you need to go back in your mind to when you had to think about where you placed your paddle and how to position yourself, to break down your strokes, leans and other body positions and to explain these to your students. Both skill and the ability to analyze and communicate are critical for effective instruction.

Even before you get on the water, you need to go over each student's gear and boat to make sure that all are properly prepared. I use this time to explain concepts like how the kayak is not sat in, but worn about the hips, and that the ideal white water fit is a boat that can be gripped by the feet and knees so that it responds to movements below the waist. I usually talk a bit about Greenland sea kayaks and how tight they are. The Inuit never intended to come out of their boats on the water. This is obviously not safe in a whitewater boat; however, you should be able to

tension your feet and knees for action, and then loosen and slip out if necessary. There is plenty of room at the put-in to have you students practice this on dry land before launch.

To wrap it up, if you as a teacher have supreme confidence in your own ability, you will project this confidence to your students. You need to be able to imagine yourself in every conceivable situation to have your responses to questions and emergencies ready for instant retrieval. It is useful to know enough about kayak construction, fitting and history to be able to answer student's questions about these subjects. You need to be able to dissect your own actions and explain them effectively. In other words, to be an effective instructor, you had better know what you're doing!