

Adding Value to the Outward Bound Educational Process

By Dr Andrew Martin

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At the recent Outward Bound International conference in Singapore discussion focused on how programs could 'add value', or closer serve 'client needs'. Whilst these terms relate to marketing the product they also related to product development. What makes Outward Bound a premium product today? This article discusses the development of the Outward Bound educational process and provides a holistic model that aims to add value to the product in today's competitive business environment.

Development of the Outward Bound Educational Process

Outward Bound programs have aimed to remain consistent with Hahn's educational principles of a balance between fitness, skill, initiative, perseverance, respect and service. Hahn's approach to education was not only experience-centered it was value-centered. Traditional programs develop powerful learning experiences surmounting mainly physical challenges in a natural setting through which the individual builds his or her sense of self-worth. However, "adventure is individual and where facilitated for others needs to be differentiated for each participant... not everybody will enjoy the physical challenge provided by many outdoor and adventurous activities" (Boniface, 2000, p.66).

1970s: The Outward Bound Educational Process Model

Walsh and Golins (1976) developed the 'Outward Bound Educational Process Model (Figure 1), which began with the participant undertaking a series of physical activities and group problem solving tasks. This model has been particularly important in the development of an understanding of the experiential education process, as it was one of the first to list the program elements. Walsh and Golins suggested that the tasks needed to be introduced incrementally and have real consequence not vicarious ramifications. Problem solving tasks should be holistic; their solutions requiring the individual's mental, emotional and physical resources. A state of 'adaptive dissonance' whereby a person has two different and conflicting thoughts is then reflected upon, which leads to transfer of learning to future experiences.

1980s: The Metaphorical Model

Bacon (1983) described Outward Bound as a special place, linked with transformation and change. The developmental process is symbolic of a 'rite of passage'. He believed that the impact of the Outward Bound environment elicits profound childlike regression in almost every participant. Bacon identified the following components of the program: skills training, stress/hardship, problem solving, community service, reflection and evaluation, which are sequenced as a training phase, expedition phase, solo, final expedition, and concluding phase. Bacon (1987) described the evolution of the process with particular emphasis on how facilitation approaches had changed to ensure greater transfer of learning. Initially, the focus was on the experience, 'let the mountains speak for themselves'. He indicated that in the 1960s and 1970s the second generation, 'the Outward Bound Plus model', emphasized the use of group discussion and self-reflection. The third generation of facilitation approaches, the 'Metaphoric Model', stressed the development of experiential metaphors.

1990s: The Active Learning Cycle

Sakofs and Armstrong (1996) described 'the Outward Bound approach to teaching and learning' as more than a set of methods and activities. They stressed the instructor provides an important role. They suggested the process has the following elements: the instructor, the experience, consequential applications of knowledge, time for solitude and reflection, adventure, physical fitness, metaphorical significance and teamwork. Sakofs and Armstrong suggested that the holistic approach incorporate physical and emotional safety, which allows participants freedom to learn. They also believed that "personal experience and intellectual growth are drawn together through adventure and challenge to help students build an understanding of themselves and the world around them" (Sakofs & Armstrong, 1996, preface). They presented the 'Active Learning Cycle' (Figure 2), which is based on Kolb's learning cycle (1984) and emphasizes psycho-emotional, physical and intellectual engagement in a range of activities.

2000 plus: A Holistic Model

A holistic approach aims to produce programs that stimulate self-development as well as fulfill prescribed course objectives, particularly in professional development programs:

The philosophical underpinnings of Outward Bound education embrace the notion that learning is a complex, dynamic interplay between all aspects of the human experience. Thus it is intellectual and physical; rational and emotional; concrete and abstract; joyful and frustrating; tedious and exciting; noisy and quiet; active and sedentary; and the list goes on. Outward Bound educators recognize these relationships, and through the various activities presented, encourage students to embrace and appreciate learning in a multifaceted beauty (Kraft and Sakofs, 1991, p.27).

These views support my (Martin 2001a, b) empirical findings, from participant questionnaire responses on Outward Bound Czech Republic programs. These findings conclude that the key elements of the experiential education process are:

- **Course design:** This includes a holistic approach that integrates a variety of activities and involves reflection. In addition, good preparation by staff is important, to know what the course is about (objectives, issues) and to know why they are doing it (instructor motivation).
- **Range of activities:** A holistic program includes a balance of activities that are social, physical, creative, reflective, group and individual challenges. Activities that use all the senses and integrate emotional, intellectual and spiritual considerations. These program characteristics include:
 - Variety, an element of surprise, and change of pace (rhythm) of the program.
 - A progression of diverse activities that increase in social, emotional, and physical challenge. For example, a creative activity, then an activity with more demands, and finally independent preparation of a theatre performance.
 - In addition to the outdoors, holistic programs include a wider use of activities such as arts and drama. These experiential tools help reintroduce the element of the unexpected, which once featured strongly in outdoor management development programs (Krouwel, 2000).
 - A tailor-made approach offers a much more flexible and energized approach for instructors and, for participants, the benefit of programs aimed exclusively at them.
- **The atmosphere/learning environment:** This includes physical and emotional safety creating a positive and supportive atmosphere that allows participants to play. The setting is also important; the right setting governs inspiration and motivation.
- **The group of participants:** A diverse group of participants, who are willing to participate in activities and to think about themselves and others, is important to the holistic learning process. They need to be open, want to be there, and to be able to listen.
- **The instructors:** The instructors' facilitation methods and experiences are critical to the program success. The instructor team has individuals of different strengths, abilities and skills.

Figure 3 is a 'Holistic Model of the Key Elements of the Experiential Education Process'. The model illustrates the complex variables involved in developing experiential education programs (people, processes, and outcomes). The instructors, along with the development of trust and the group dynamics amongst participants, are important factors in the creation of a positive, friendly atmosphere and supportive learning environment that is physically and emotionally safe. The use of a variety of activities aims to challenge participants mentally, physically, and emotionally (mind, body and soul). Traditional outdoor activities, creative workshops and psychological, intellectual, structured and non-structured games are effectively linked to produce experiential education activities that result in a diversity of personal and interpersonal development.

In conclusion a holistic approach to the Outward Bound educational process allows instructors the flexibility to adapt programs to individual and group needs and not rely on just a prescribed approach. Whilst specific objectives, such as team building, improved communication and cooperation can be achieved it is the opportunity of greater individualized personal and interpersonal development that offers the added value of Outward Bound programs. The variety of activities provides opportunities for a range of powerful learning experiences that lead not only to the development of emotional intelligence, but multiple intelligences.

For a list of references in this article, see: http://www.outward-bound.org/staff_sub2_research.htm

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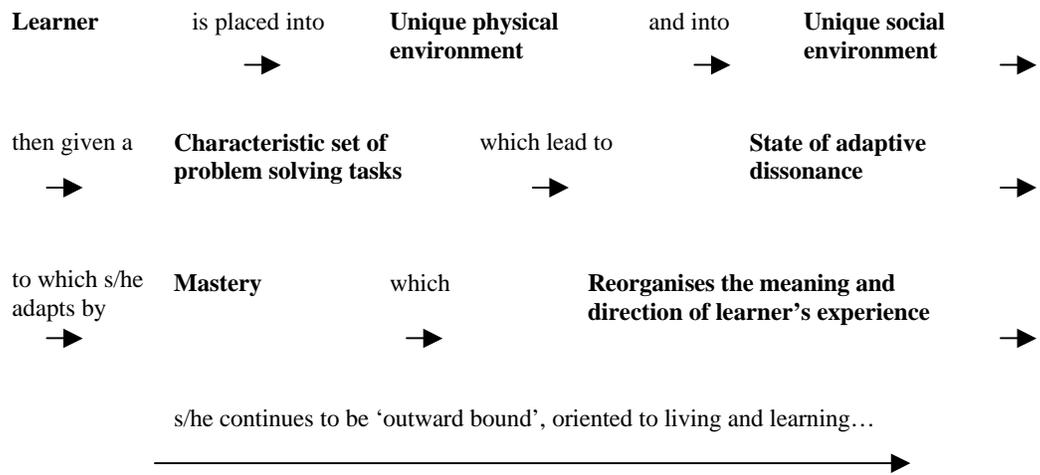


Figure 1 The Outward Bound Educational Process Model (Walsh & Golins, 1976, cited in Hopkins & Putnam, 1993, p.92)

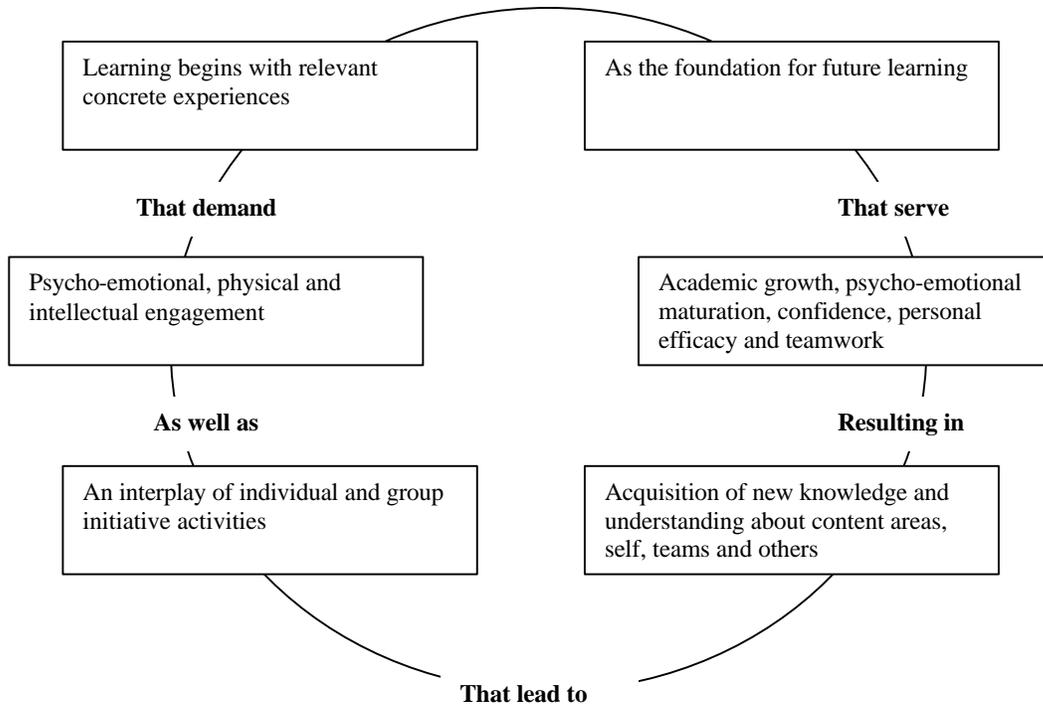


Figure 2 The Active Learning Cycle (Sakofs & Armstrong, 1996, p.20)

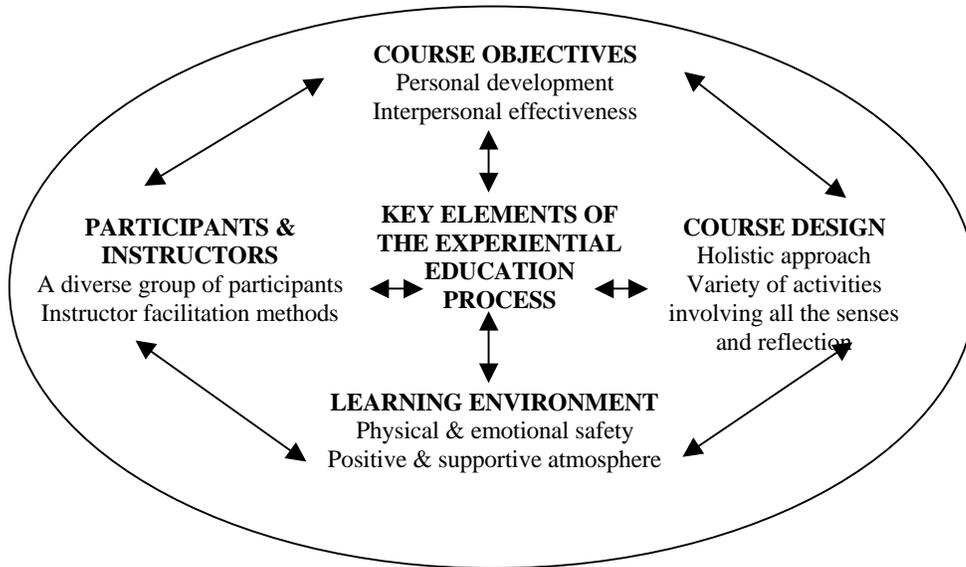


Figure 3 A Holistic Model of the Key Elements of the Experiential Education Process
(Martin, 2001b, p.266)