

Beyond Didactics: A reconnaissance of experiential learning

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Abstract

This article examines the role that adventure educators attribute to experience in learning, and as such addresses the question to what extent their practice can be understood as experiential education. It will be argued that the main constraint to experiential learning in so-called experiential education is the didactic mindset in which it is captured. A variety of activities has enlivened the teaching and to some extent remedied its focus on students, intellectual understanding, but the concept of education as a matter of teachers conveying a message has largely remained unchanged. The article proposes that there is a fundamental difference between active forms of teaching and experiential education, and documents that adventure education is increasingly adopting the didactic teaching methods that it set out to be an alternative for.

Despite the fact that experiential education has its origins in a critique of “blueprint models for learning and teaching” (Wildemeersch et al, 1998, pg. 252), in which teachers pass on their knowledge of the world with a one-sided focus on their students’ conceptual understanding, this didactic stance still is very prevalent. A variety of activities has enlivened the teaching, and probably remedied its mere cognitive nature to some extent, but the concept of education as a matter of teachers conveying a message has largely remained unchanged. This raises the question what has happened to the educational innovation that experiential education stands for?

This article examines the role that adventure educators attribute to experience in learning, and as such addresses the question to what extent their practice can be sensibly referred to as *experiential* education. I will argue that the main constraint to experiential learning in so-called experiential education is the didactic mindset in which it is captured. As a point of departure, the paper presents three examples of learning activities outside adventure education, each of which have been referred to as ‘experiential’. I will then propose that there is a fundamental difference between active forms of teaching and experiential education, and document that adventure education is increasingly adopting the “didactic teaching methods” (Hobbs, 1992, xiv) that it set out to be an alternative for.

1. Places for experience in learning and education

As a starting point for my inquiry into the role of experience in education, this section presents three instances in which teachers or instructors adopted other approaches than verbally communicating

course contents in order to stimulate their students’ learning. The first example takes place in a physics class in secondary education, the second example in a first aid course and the third one in a technical training for university students in physical education. In the three cases, the teacher or instructor links the learners’ understanding to the quality of their experience in the course. Hence, the three examples have been considered ‘experiential’. Yet the place each of the cases reserves for the learners’ experience is very different.

The Magdeburg hemispheres: a demonstration of atmospheric pressure

In 1654, Otto von Güricke placed two empty copper hemispheres together and, with a pump that he designed for this purpose, pumped the air from between them. He then hitched a team of eight horses to each side to pull the hemispheres – fitted together with nothing more than grease – apart. The horses were not strong enough to do so: the weight of the air, or the atmospheric pressure, acting on the outside of the hemispheres exerted a greater force than the draught horses.

The experiment became known as ‘the Magdeburg hemispheres’, after the town where it was first conducted, and a scaled-down version of the experiment became quasi standard in physics classes. Rather than just verbally reporting the facts, or sketching them on the black board, teachers commonly replicate the experiment in the classroom. Some of them have students take the place of the horses in the original experiment, so they can physically experience the force it takes to separate the hemispheres.

First aid courses: the role of accident simulation

Approximately 50 years ago, first aid teachers in several European countries became convinced that their students would benefit from realistic accident simulations. For this purpose, they gathered people who were willing to study the symptoms of injuries and illnesses and the response of victims to treatment in order to imitate them during first aid courses. Today, the contribution of these 'fakers' allows students to familiarize themselves with aspects of the accident scene that are difficult to convey in words. First, the simulations help to bridge the gap between having learned the symptoms of injuries and illnesses by heart and actually recognizing them when they occur. One may argue that this can nowadays be achieved through the use of videotapes, for example, but the simulations also give students a sense of how their intervention affects accident victims, and hence address the fact that recognizing symptoms doesn't suffice to accurately help. As first aid instructors sometimes put it: "Helping is not so much a matter of knowing, but a question of doing."

Single rope techniques: experimentation with equipment

A last case takes place in a training session in so-called 'single rope techniques', in which physical education students who specialize in outdoor sports learn to handle the equipment they need for vertical caving. One of the pieces used, a Dressler descender, tends to initially confuse many students: even after repeatedly demonstrating their ability to place the descender on a rope after instruction on the ground, beginning cavers have failed to do so when hanging on rope.

A way to address this observation, which proved effective at a number of occasions, is to have students figure the descender out by themselves. Rather than expecting them to apply what they were taught, instructors in this case require that the students – within clear safety guidelines – develop their own understanding of the equipment which they are manipulating.

Atmospheric pressure, accident scenes and the Dressler descender: the role of experience

While the three examples have a lot in common, they also differ in a number of respects. They share the characteristic that the teachers propose a learning activity, which adds to the quality of their students' experience in the sense that their teaching isn't

merely conceptual. In this respect, the three cases can be considered 'experiential'.

At the other hand, the place which the teachers give to the students' experience is very different in each of the three situations: the scaled-down Magdeburg hemispheres serve as a *demonstration*, the accident scenes are set up as a *simulation* and the Dressler descender requires *experimentation*. While the three cases *can* be considered experiential in the specific meaning of the word that I mentioned, the fact that all three *have* indeed been called 'experiential' seems indicative of the limited role which so-called experiential education reserves for students' experience.

The demonstration of the Magdeburg experiment adds to the quality of students' experience in the sense that it calls on their visual perception or, in case the students are the ones to pull the hemispheres apart, to their kinesthetic awareness. It de-emphasizes the importance of conceptual understanding. But, while it is a more active and lively form of teaching, it fundamentally remains a transmission of information.

The simulations in the first aid courses view students' experiences somewhat differently. To some extent, they provide a demonstration of the course contents that were covered earlier: the symptoms listed by the instructor are made visible, audible and touchable by the 'simulant'. Yet, the simulation also requires that the students take appropriate care of the victim. Therefore, the helpers must impose the pattern of the first aid procedure on the hectic accident scene and this involves an interaction which evokes a whole other realm of experience. Students may forget parts of their procedure in the confusion, may be confronted with non-cooperative victims, become aware of their impatience, or be vividly reminded of the recent sickness and death of a close family member, for example. In other words: the simulation is not presented merely as a more active way to transmit information that could have been communicated verbally, but as a chance to practice. First aid instructors commonly think of the simulation as a first opportunity for students to apply what they were taught in preceding lectures.

Experimentation with the Dressler descender is again of a different nature: here the instructor doesn't expect the students to apply what they were taught, but to develop an understanding of the equipment by trying it out in practice, hanging on a rope as they would be when caving.

While the students' experience has a place in the above examples of demonstration, simulation and experimentation, its place is limited: the teacher will only attend to their experience to the extent that it supports his or her outline of the course contents.

The physics teacher will explain the observed phenomenon. The first aid instructor will 'debrief' the simulation in the original, military sense of the word: he or she will give feedback on whether or not students have fulfilled the task successfully and which aspects of their accident response need further attention. The rope technique trainer, finally, will inquire what the students found out by manipulating the descender and verify whether or not they are able to use the descender correctly. Hence, a common characteristic of the teachers in the three cases is their didactic stance. In the remainder of this paper, I will clarify the notion of a didactic stance, explore the role of experience in this context and argue that experiential education is increasingly adopting the "didactic teaching methods" (Hobbs, 1992, xiv) which it was meant to be an alternative for.

2. Experiential and didactic approaches to students' learning

A first understanding of the word 'didactic' can be found in the dictionary. Webster (1981) defines "didactics" in terms of "systematic instruction" and explains "didactic" as "intended to convey instruction and information." The practical understanding of these terms by physics teachers, first aid instructors and sports trainers, however, seems anchored to the lesson plans which they are required to make for teacher training and evaluation, and which are more or less strictly enforced by the education systems in which they work. Essentially, the lesson plan is a written preparation of their class. It articulates the theory, the skills and the attitudes that the students are meant to acquire in the course, and an outline of how the teacher intends to reach these learning objectives. Hence, the meaning of didactics can be concretized with an example of a lesson plan, such as the one in Frame 1, which I adopted from a teaching manual for first aid instructors.

Frame 1: Example of program goals in a first aid lesson plan

KNOWLEDGE	SKILL	ATTITUDE
◇ Students can list the sequence of concerns to be assessed and addressed in any emergency situation	◇ Students can identify relevant safety concerns in pictures of accident scenes	◇ Students demonstrate a willingness to help in a (simulated) emergency situation
◇ Students know the European emergency number	◇ Students can assess co-students' vital signs	◇ Students demonstrate appropriate care for the accident victim as a person
◇ Students can list the conditions under which they are legally allowed to discontinue CPR	◇ Students can perform CPR on a CPR mannequin	◇ Students demonstrate an awareness of the risk of infection in first aid
◇ ...	◇ Students can put an unconscious 'simulant' in the safety position	◇ ...
◇ ...	◇ ...	◇ ...

(Adapted from Red Cross course instructor manuals)

While lesson plans may perfectly suit the purpose of instructing first aid, as well as teaching physics or rope techniques, there are at least two problems associated with such an approach in experiential education. First, experiential education claims to be holistic, which means that it conceives of cognition, aptitude and attitude as an integrated complex rather than as separate – or even separable – aspects of behaviour. Holism implies that experience cannot be understood in terms of either knowledge, skill or attitude, but necessarily comprises all of those simultaneously, and is embedded in relationships (Hovelynck, 2000, pg.21).

Second, and of greater importance to this article, is that experiential education primarily intends that students learn from their experience. This is not the case in either one of the three educational settings presented above. Simulations in first aid courses, for example, give rise to a wide range of experiences, largely impossible to predict and control, which instructors will disregard because they do not fit the accident reality that they intend to convey. Rather than exploring the feelings of powerlessness, which may arise when students find themselves in a chaotic simulation, or addressing the mourning process, which may occur when the class is confronted with a CPR mannequin, the instructors will direct the class's

attention to proper technique and to first aid procedures. Hence, in order to reach the course objectives, first aid instructors purposefully neglect significant experiences. Regardless of the number of learning activities included in the program, such a stance can hardly be considered 'experiential'.

The demonstration of the Magdeburg hemispheres and the experimentation with the Dressler descender bring up similar issues. In both cases, the role which the teachers attribute to the learners' experience manifests itself especially clearly when the learning activity doesn't work out as anticipated. In the demonstration of the Magdeburg hemispheres, this happens semi-regularly: the scaled-down version of the hemispheres isn't quite as solid as von Güricke's original, dents may cause leaks, and any leak will eventually make the hemispheres fall apart even without pulling. Put simply, such a course of events confronts the teacher with the choice whether to go by the physics book or with the students' experience. Admittedly, the dichotomy in which I present this choice is an oversimplification. Many physics teachers will acknowledge their students' experience, by explaining about the leak breaking the vacuum, for example, and still convey von Güricke's laws as if the hemispheres had stayed together. Yet the dichotomy seems helpful in clarifying the different roles that teachers give to experience in the processes of learning and teaching.

In the rope techniques training, students who experiment with the Dressler develop an understanding of how this piece of equipment functions. By the time they manage to descend, using a technique that they developed, they have tried various ways of threading the rope through the descender and concluded that some serve their purpose better than others. In the debriefing, the instructor acknowledges their experience by exploring the advantages and disadvantages of these variations with them. However, the assumption remains that the instructor's experience is more accurate than the students' and he or she won't hesitate to discard specific variations as 'wrong' for reasons of safety, ease of handling, longevity of ropes and so on. To be clear: I support this practice, yet I want to question the tendency to consider learning activities in which the instructor considers the learners' experience to be less valid than his or her own, 'experiential'.

3. Adventure education: active teaching or facilitating experiential learning?

The dichotomy that I presented in the last paragraph has been described by several authors and in various terms. Some of their terms are listed in Frame 2. While the distinction made in any of the contrasting pairs cannot fully account for the complexity of

learning and education, the dichotomy does go back to the origins of outdoor education and presents one of its core characteristics. Kurt Hahn (cited in Miner & Boldt, 1981, 54) expressed it as follows: "It is a sin of the soul to force young people into opinions but it is culpable neglect not to impel them into health-giving experiences." This quote can be – and has been – read with an emphasis on "forcing" and "impelling", or with a focus on "health-giving". The way I read it, this quote mostly specifies that adventure education was not intended to convey "opinions" through activities¹.

For all its incompleteness, the dichotomy that Hahn and several more recent authors have presented clarifies that experiential education is essentially different from active forms of teaching, in the didactic sense of the word. Experiential education does not "consist of adding a layer of experience onto conceptual knowledge" (Raelin, 1977, pg. 564). It is not a matter of diversifying and enlivening the ways in which teachers pass on their blueprints to students: "experiential learning is concerned with the experience of individuals, not just with their participation" (Woolfe, 1992, pg. 1).

Looking at adventure education in these terms, the field has unmistakably bent toward a didactic stance. Judged by some of its guidelines for facilitation, the question how to impel people into experiences without forcing them into opinions has largely lost its significance. A quote that can document this statement, is the following paragraph of a recent publication in the field: "When a program consists of several experiences, these need to be sequenced in an order that optimizes the learning. (..) List the lessons to be learned from their experiences and organize these in a linear arrangement. (..) Add a conclusion with learning summary and generalization for future change" (Priest, Gass & Gillis, 2000, pg. 56). In terms of the dichotomy presented above, the quote goes without explanation: if the lessons to be learned from an experience can be listed before the experience has taken place, and thus independently of the learners' experience, it seems misleading to call the learning 'experiential'.

¹ This interpretation somewhat downplays Hahn's conviction that certain activities were conducive to the emergence of prosocial values. In this sense, "the Hahnian approach to education was not only experience-centered, it was also value-centered" (Kimball & Bacon, 1993, 13) and, in the light of the epistemological groundwork that has been done since, the experiential nature of Hahn's philosophy was ambivalent (see e.g. Hovelynck & Wittrockx, 1996, 321). That does not deny the point of the quote, however.

While this particular quote is not at all exceptional in its didactic interpretation of facilitation, it is in its clarity and conciseness on the matter. It is worth noticing that the only word that distinguishes the recommended approach from the lesson plans described above is 'experiences'. Its use deserves closer attention, as supposedly this is what makes the program experiential. Whereas in the terminology that I used so far, program design may involve sequencing learning activities, but experiences cannot be programmed (Leijssen, 1990, 228; Proudman 1995b, 21; Gilsdorf, 1998a, 135), the quoted paragraph does not make that distinction: it treats the words 'experience' and 'activity' as synonyms. In this regard the quote exemplifies a significant trend in the English language literature on adventure, which bolsters didactic approaches to learning (Hovelynck, 1999, 20-21). Authors such as Martha Bell (1993) have questioned this tendency several years ago, yet this crucial issue has barely been addressed: experience continues to be reified, treated as if it had the concreteness of a 'thing', that can be observed, delivered, measured...²

Among the conditions that foster such a reification of experience are, one, the distinct place of activities in adventure education, two, language, three, the increasing professionalization of the field and, four, the nature of its research. As these conditions seem to play a significant role in the increasingly didactic stance of adventure educators, I will briefly comment on them.

- ◊ A first issue that plays a role in this reification process is the particular nature of adventure education: the attraction of outdoor activities, and the necessity for adventure educators to be highly skilled in this area, has contributed to a focus on activities. In this context, expressions such as 'learning by doing' took a specific, and in many respects very restrictive meaning (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 31). It situated learning in physical activities, and often in the encounter of physical limits. In some ways the more recent notion of 'experiential activities' epitomizes these assumptions. While this term may be helpful to refer to the type of activities that adventure educators tend to propose in their programs, it is likely to further mask the experiencing process unless there is a clear understanding that it is not this type of activity that makes a program experiential. In this regard, it seems crucial to realize that the concept of 'experiential activities' does not have a *pendant*: in a process perspective, the ideas of non-experiential activity or non-activity are

meaningless. As such, I suggest that the notion of 'experiential activities' is mostly an expression of adventure educators' *romance* with activities at the expense of experience.

- ◊ Another issue that plays an important role in the reification of experience is language. A first aspect of that is the use of the noun 'experience': Eugene Gendlin (1964, 111-116) pointed out that an understanding of experiential processes is better served by the verb 'experiencing'. In addition, as English is *the* vehicle for international communication in adventure education, I find it increasingly significant for our understanding of 'experience' and 'experiencing' that English doesn't have synonyms for either word. Dutch - my native language - in comparison, offers several: 'beleven', 'ervaren', 'ondervinden', 'meemaken'... As it seems obvious that the meaning of these words affects my perspective on the field, it also seems unavoidable that a range of synonyms - each with its own connotations - facilitates a more differentiated understanding of the experiencing process. Yet, in our literature, I find little reference to language and the assumptions that are embedded in it go largely unquestioned. This is not only the case for language in the traditional sense of the word - English, Dutch... - but also for academic language or for the varying jargon among adventure educators.

The Dutch word 'meemaken' can serve to illustrate how language may affect our understanding of experiential education. A synonym for 'experiencing', 'mee-maken' literally means 'co-constructing'. With regard to reification, it seems significant that this word does not have a corresponding noun: there is no such *thing* as a 'meemaking' and, in this sense, experiencing can only be referred to as in-process. The verb implies that experiences cannot be programmed. Facilitators may program activities, but the experience will necessarily be co-constructed by all involved in the activity, and the facilitation of this process requires a focus on what participants bring to this activity rather than on the activity itself (Hovelynck, 1999, pg. 20). Last but not least, to the extent that experiencing is 'meemaken', it is self-evident that experiential education cannot be fully understood without viewing it as a social construction (see e.g. Allison & Pomeroy, 2000; Hovelynck, 2001).

- ◊ A third issue that I want to briefly draw attention to with regard to the reification of experiencing is the market dynamics that increasingly affect our understanding of experiential learning and education. I will suffice to point at the increasing presence of business language in the field of adventure education, as

²² The term 'reification' has its origins in the Latin words 'res' and 'facere', which can respectively be translated as 'thing' and 'making'. 'Reification' and 'reifying' thus refer to the process of turning complex processes into 'things'.

in education at large (Loynes, 1998, pg. 35). In the context of an adventure industry, treating 'experience' and 'activity' as synonyms gives processes of experiencing and learning, the outcomes of which cannot be guaranteed, a 'thingness' that is easier to package and market. This has come to a point where the idea that providers can actually 'deliver experiences' to their customers has gained considerable acceptance among adventure educators.

- ◇ A last issue is research. I have argued elsewhere (Hovelynck, 2001) that academics tend to expect that the educational practice which they study adapts to their research methods rather than vice versa. When Richard Wagner (1995, pg. 132), for example, attributes his observation that "extensive and exhaustive research yielded almost no quality evaluations" to the fact that "the goals of training programs did not include specific, measurable results but focused on team behaviors and interactions", he *de facto* urges the field to take a more didactic stance in order to allow scientists to study its programs according to their own standards. The dynamic is recognizable in much of the research in experiential education, in adventure programs as well as in others (see e.g. Campbell & Dunnette, 1968, 103-104), and suggests that it does not make sense for "experiential educators (who) have fought bitterly against traditional educational principles in the past (..) to accept similar standards as basic research principles" (Warner, 1986, pg. 249).

In sum, adventure education is adopting "a narrow concept of learning as the acquisition of predefined sets of knowledge, strongly shaped by the practice of the schools" (Gilsdorf, 1998b, 86) which it originally questioned and offered an alternative or at least a supplement for. This development is mirrored in reified notions of experience, which are reinforced by adventure educators' preoccupation with activities, the undifferentiated use of language, the "omnipresence of the adventure industry"³ (Gilsdorf, 1998b, 86) and the predominance of research that ignores the epistemology of experiential learning. These four aspects are clearly interrelated and the field will hence need to address them simultaneously if it is to move beyond didactics.

4. Where do we take adventure education?

The cases of the physics class, the first aid course and the technical ropes training not only document that educational practices vary with regard to the place they reserve for experience in learning, but

³ Gilsdorf uses the word 'Erlebnisindustrie', which is hard to translate in English and refers to an 'experience industry'

also raise questions about the future of so-called experiential education. What space for experience does it take to consider education 'experiential'? More specific questions, based on the practices that I described, include:

- ◇ If adventure educators set out to ignore a range of significant participant experiences, does it make sense to call their programs 'experiential'?
- ◇ If educators assert that certain learner experiences are not valid, does it make sense to say that they facilitate 'experiential' learning?
- ◇ If the lessons from experience can be listed before the program takes place, does it make sense to consider the learning during this program to be 'experiential'?

Several authors and practitioners in the field of adventure education claim that all three these questions can, and should, be answered positively. With regard to the first question, for example, current guidelines on managing psychological depth in adventure programming recommend that experiences which reach deeper than the purpose that was agreed upon before the program, are not addressed in the group (see e.g. Priest, Gass & Gillis, 2000, pp. 58-59). Underlying this guideline is a valid concern for emotional safety (Ringer, 1997, 199). All too often, however, the static interpretation of 'the agreed upon purpose' implies that facilitators adopt the approach of the first aid teacher who is confronted with a mourning process and proceeds to teach CPR procedures: they focus on the materials to be taught rather than on the participants' experiencing.

With regard to the second question, the recent proposal of "a new paradigm of change (for) experiential debriefing" (Porter, 1999, pg. 85) not only illustrates that some forms of adventure education assume that the facilitators' experience is more valid than the learners', but also recommends such a practice in "experiential debriefing". Illustrating her paradigm with a concrete program event, the author describes how she "often needs to spend considerable time" convincing her program participants that their experience of a certain learning activity is inappropriate. In line with the metaphoric blueprint that she – the facilitator – brings to the activity, she refers to this intervention as "detoxifying their response" (pg. 88). In ways very similar to the hard skill instructor's clarification of desirable and undesirable rope techniques, she thus defines for her participants which interpretations of the event are acceptable and which are not.

With regard to the third question, lastly, I want to draw attention once more to the common idea that specific activities contain certain lessons to be learned and that the facilitator's role is to design a program that will make these lessons emerge. In this

respect, the facilitators' task has even been compared to setting a trap: "(...) while resisting the temptation to make the points for students, the teacher must understand the point of the activities (..) in order to set a good trap and must intentionally teach toward that climactic moment" (Chapman, 1995, pp. 237-238). In the broader context discussed in this paper, one may – and should? – wonder whether the metaphor of facilitation as setting a trap generates approaches that fundamentally differ from "forcing people into opinions".

Overall, these examples illustrate a tendency in adventure education to adopt notions of experience and learning that stem from the very paradigm that it challenged and, with the words of Alan Warner (1986, pg. 249), that it "fought bitterly". If this is indeed the direction in which the field develops, I suggest that we stop identifying it with the epithet 'experiential' and acknowledge that the activities in adventure programs serve the mere purpose of demonstrating the providers' knowledge, simulating the providers' blueprint of reality and how to tackle it, or experimenting with issues to which the provider will ultimately give the expert answer. At least it will be clear in this case that adventure education is a form of active teaching, which adds visual, tactile, kinesthetic and socio-emotional qualities to the conceptual ones that prevail in conventional classroom teaching, but that it is *not* primarily concerned with students' experiencing.

An alternative option is that the field renews its attention to the experiencing process and the ways in which this process generates learning. With Bill Proudman's words: "If a teacher truly believes in the experiential process, the teacher will create safe working boundaries for students and then get right out of the way" (1995a, pg. 243). In terms of this paper, such a teacher leaves his or her didactic stance behind and is *therefore* able to see the process of experiencing and learning unfold, and hence facilitate it. While the nature of this process can be understood as experimentation (Peeters, 1997; Gilsdorf, 1998), it differs from the learning in the rope techniques training in two fundamental ways. First, it assumes a learning space that is open to any significant experience, confined mainly by the groups' current readiness to generatively explore it (Hovelynck, 1999, pp. 17-21; 2000, pp. 250-253). Secondly, in what I would consider a fully experiential approach the learners "are viewed as the experts on their experience" and "this experience is the ultimate reference point" (Greenberg, Rice and Elliot, 1993, pg. 21).

5. Epilogue

While I am well aware that the term 'experiential' has been used for a variety of educational practices, and do not suggest that there is a single legitimate interpretation of it (see e.g. Weil & McGill, 1989, pp. 3-18), it is clear that the role which these practices allocate to experience varies greatly. As definitions of experiential education typically refer to the participants' "direct" or "first hand experience" (Proudman, 1995b, pg. 1; Weil & McGill, 1989, pg. 19) as the source of learning, I have questioned to what extent practices that supplant this 'im-mediate' experience by elaborately 'mediated' experiences meet this defining characteristic. Frank Oomkes rightfully pointed out that "there is a contradiction in the fact that trainers carefully design learning situations within which the trainees then, by 'discovering themselves', learn exactly that for which the sessions were set up" (Oomkes, 1992). The experiential nature of such an approach is at best ambivalent.

A critical look at the position of adventure education with regard to these issues suggests that this field develops in the direction of didactic teaching methods. As I indicated elsewhere (1999, pp. 21-22), much of the practice that has been associated with the 'state of the art' in adventure programming is considered "non-experiential" in experiential therapy (Greenberg, Rice & Elliot, 1993, pg. 131). In my eyes, such observations should raise questions, if not concerns: does adventure education facilitate participants' experiencing and learning from it, rather than convey yet another teacher's blueprint of reality and how to handle it? The cases that I documented suggest that adventure educators' preoccupation with learning activities and predefined learning outcomes – both convenient reifications of experiencing – may be at the expense of their focus on the experiential process. While the dichotomized presentation of experiential education and active teaching in this article may lack some nuance, I believe that the field would benefit from questioning its practice – including its so-called 'best practices' – in this perspective.

As the issue of active teaching in so-called experiential education is recognizable in the Chinese proverb that has often been presented as an adage for adventure education, this proverb – in Frame 3 – seems an appropriate anchor for the questions that I raised in this paper.

Frame 2: Chinese proverb often presented as a guiding principle for experiential education

Tell me, and I will forget.
Show me, and I may remember.
Involve me, and I will understand.

To me, the sequence of these three lines suggests that something is left unsaid in this proverb and that the more explicit version would read as follows: "Tell me what you expect me to know, and I may forget. Show me what you expect me to know, and I may remember. Involve me in what you expect me to know, and I will understand." Some of the practices that I described above seem to confirm that this is indeed what inspired many adventure educators: in the context of this paper, the omission seems hardly a coincidence. "But", as Proudman (1995a, pg. 243) pointed out, "this approach raises several critical questions: whose experience is it? (..) What is the goal of the activity for the student? How interested is the teacher in guaranteeing a certain student outcome?" Or, connecting these questions to the *raison d'être* of adventure education: how much space is there for the learners' experience in so-called experiential education?

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About the author

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Frame 3: Experiential and didactic approaches to learning

"Experiential learning"		"Blueprint models for learning and teaching"
"Experiential training"		"Didactic teaching methods"
"Discovery-learning"		"Teaching"
"Process orientation"		"Product orientation"
"Non-directive"		"Directive"
"Experiences"		"Opinions"
...		...

(Wildemeersch et al., 1998, 252; Hobbs, 1992, xiv; Oomkes, 1992, 91)
