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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the principles of Reality Therapy and Choice Theory, which provide a practical foundation for understanding and influencing human behavior, and relate them to experiential learning. Choice Theory is an explanation of human behavior developed by Dr. William Glasser (1965, 1985); Reality Therapy is the application of Choice Theory within the context of helping relationships. All behavior is an attempt to meet one or more of four basic psychological needs; love and belonging, power and recognition, fun, and freedom. The facilitator's role is to establish a need-satisfying environment where all participants feel safe to embrace risk and challenge in their quest to achieve their purpose. Though human beings have the same basic needs, they have different perceptions of how to meet those needs. Individuals meet their needs and express perceptions through total behavior, which has four components; thinking, feeling, doing, and physiology. Helping participants utilize their thoughts and behavior to overcome negative feelings and physiology are some of the most powerful opportunities in the adventure experience. Also important in designing and facilitating activities are individual learning styles: active experimentation, concrete experiential, reflective observation, and abstract conceptualization. Appealing to all learning styles contributes dramatically to learning and transference, and is easily done through careful planning. Reality Therapy is a self-evaluation process involving a series of questions that allow participants to make their own value judgments. Experiential education offers infinite opportunities for applying and internalizing these principals for enhancing personal and professional growth. (TD)

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The Reality of Experience

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ABSTRACT

The principles of Reality Therapy and Choice Theory provide a practical foundation for understanding and influencing human behavior. Experiential education offers infinite opportunities for applying and internalizing these principles for enhancing personal and professional growth. Explore a visual, interactive model for examining the many facets of learning acquired through the reality of experience.

> Tell me, I will forget. Show me...I may remember.
> Involve me and I take the experience as my own!

This ancient Chinese proverb has been a pillar of learning theory for centuries. Because we learn best from our own experiences, the most effective learning opportunities are experiential in nature. Experiential education encompasses a huge continuum of activities, ranging from simple ice breakers and role plays, to problem-solving initiatives, outdoor adventure, ropes courses, and beyond! While we know all of these approaches provide valuable learning opportunities, how the experience is perceived is a key factor regarding its impact and transference.

The principles of Choice Theory and Reality Therapy provide a compass for navigating the intricacies of human perception, assimilation, and application of new knowledge and experience. Understanding the most basic principles governing human behavior opens new doors to maximizing the enjoyment and application of adventure- based learning experiences. Choice Theory is an explanation of human behavior developed by Dr. William Glasser (1965, 1985). Reality Ther-

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apy is the application of Choice Theory within the context of helping relationships. The theory and process combined provide a valuable model for conceptualizing the many opportunities for processing learning experiences.

Basic Needs

Glasser has identified four basic psychological needs which our brain seeks out through total behavior. These include the need for LOVE and BELONGING, the need for POWER and RECOGNITION, the need for FUN, and the need for FREEDOM. According to Dr. Glasser, all behavior is an attempt to meet one or more than one of these needs. Identifying the goal or need met by a particular behavior provides valuable information regarding appropriate interaction.

The role of the facilitator is to establish a need-satisfying environment where all participants feel safe to embrace risk and challenge in their quest to achieve their purpose. Identifying this individual and collective vision is an important foundation for building anything, including relationships and learning experiences. Having participants state their expectations for the experience is an integral aspect of setting the stage for success.

Levels of Perception

Though w e all have the same basic psychological needs, we all have very different perceptions of how best to meet those needs. The mind, like a camera, consistently takes and stores pictures for future reference. Pleasurable need-satisfying pictures remain "up front" and less desirable ones are often filed or discarded. Desirability of pictures is based on personal knowledge and

experience. Our perceptual system combines raw data, knowledge and experience and values, to create a personal lens through which we view the world.

Exploring the levels of perception is easily done by asking three very popular questions:

"What?" "So What?" and *"Now What?"*

What? refers to the information your senses are absorbing

So What? refers to your interpretation based on your knowledge and experience

Now What? explores the value of the experience for future application

Processing typically begins with sensory data and evolves toward deeper levels of personalization and application. The use of metaphors and analogies enhances assimilation and transference of new knowledge by connecting the experience to familiar situations and values. Metaphorical visualization can increase retention by as much as seventy percent because our brain has a greater capacity for remembering pictures than words alone. It is the personalization of interpretation which brings added meaning and diversity to each individual's experience.

Total Behavior

Individuals meet their needs and express perceptions through TOTAL BEHAVIOR. TOTAL BEHAVIOR refers to four interrelated components: what we THINK, how we FEEL, what we DO, and our PHYSIOLOGY. While behavior is typically labeled by its most obvious component, all components are present and active in any given situation. Thinking and behaving are within our direct control, while feelings and physiology are not. Feelings (both emotional and physical) are the body's signaling system, which sends messages regarding how

well we are meeting our needs in a given situation. Our thoughts assign meaning to these signals, and behavior follows.

When processing experiences, it is useful to explore all components of behavior, as well as the interaction among them. This information provides valuable insight regarding personal preferences and perceived locus of control. Helping participants utilize their thoughts and behavior to overcome negative feelings and physiology are some of the most powerful opportunities nestled within the adventure experience. This capacity is so powerful, it almost guarantees future generalization to other settings. Becoming consciously aware of the power within is a primary payoff of taking risk. The challenge of the facilitator is to help participants become aware of the interaction between thoughts, feelings, and behavior patterns and to transfer this new learning into their home, school, and work settings.

Learning Styles

It is also important to consider individual LEARNING STYLES in design of activities and approach to facilitation. Appreciation for how individuals absorb and interpret information is instrumental to establishing a healthy learning environment. Though not always the case, the larger the group, the greater the diversity of learning styles you are likely to encounter. Learning styles are often recognizable by vocabulary and approach to problem-solving situations. Being sensitive to the preferences of others enhances your options and influence.

Active experimentation is an easy learning style to identify because this type participant is typically extroverted and actively involved in the problem-solving process. The concrete experiential learner also prefers hands-on opportunities and often makes feelings-based judgments. The reflective observer tends

to be introverted, observant, and typically very insightful. These participants willingly share their insights if asked directly, but rarely volunteer them. Abstract conceptualizers relate best to symbols and concepts. Analogies and metaphors are especially meaningful to this style learner. Appealing to all learning styles contributes dramatically to learning and transference, and is easily done through careful planning.

Reality Therapy

REALITY THERAPY is a self-evaluation process involving exploration of three questions: *What do you want? What are you doing? Is it working?*

What do you want? is identified early through clarifying expectations and establishing ground rules.

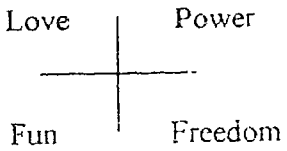
What are you doing? involves exploration of the total behavior system, including thoughts, feelings, and physiology.

Is it working? explores the value of specific choices as they relate to reaching identified goals.

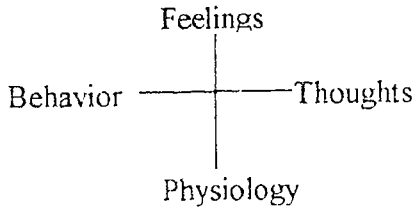
If the behavior is not working, the next step is to think of a better approach. Notice that Reality Therapy is a series of questions which allow participants to make their own value judgments.

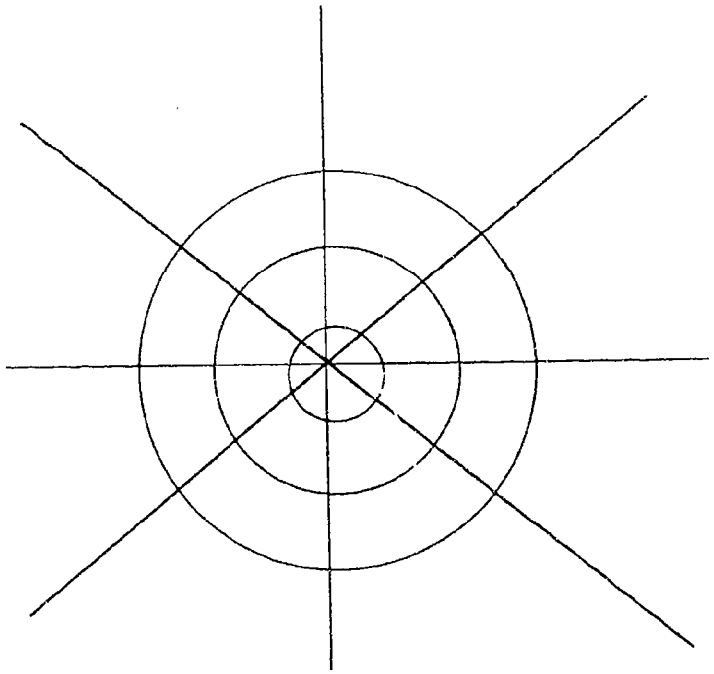
Balancing wants and needs, feelings and beha s, and perceptions and learning styles is an ongoing challenge for everyone. Combining and overlapping these principles of learning and behavior creates infinite windows of opportunity for exploring the value and application of personal and collective experiences. Guiding the process of reflection, introspection, and transference requires a delicate balance of awareness and skill. Whether parenting, counseling, teaching, or playing, we are all facilitators at some point, raising the consciousness of others and challenging them to assimilate new knowledge into their lives. We all learn best through the reality of our own experience.

BASIC NEEDS

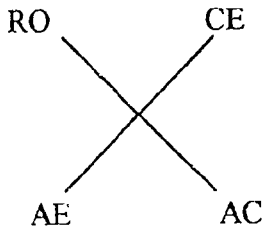


TOTAL BEHAVIOR

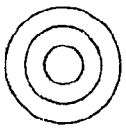




LEARNING STYLES



LEVELS OF PERCEPTION



Sensory
Knowledge/Experience
Values

The REALITY of Experience

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