



PARALLEL PAPERS IV
SATURDAY 8th JULY 1345-1500
ROOM I - 7.0.01

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*Learning from active engagement with
the self in outdoor and natural spaces
and places*

The early work of Bion, Rickman and Bridger at Northfield was based in part on the notion that 'men' learn both from interaction and conducting a practical task. That is, activity can be a legitimate part of learning about oneself. This element of Bion and his colleagues' work has barely survived in the thinking of his followers although it does re-surface from time to time (Perini In print).

Other approaches that integrate activity into the process of personal learning and growth include those of Kurt Hahn (Hahn 1960), John Dewey (Dewey 1938 (1963)) and more recently, David Kolb (Kolb 1984) and have been grouped under the banner of 'experiential learning' which now includes many disciplines such as activity as an essential element of the learning process. One strong branch of experiential learning is outdoor adventure-based learning and this has further

diversified to spawn a relatively recent discipline of 'adventure therapy'.

Adventure therapy programs often include multi-day journeys where participants and adventure therapists walk together in remote outdoor settings such as mountains and live together for the whole time. Everything is carried in back packs and accommodation is often in two-person light weight tents. The 24 hour/day communal nature of the therapeutic encounter provides some challenges to conventional thinking about the application of psychoanalysis in group settings (Norton, Carpenter et al. 2015). These challenges will be explored in the presentation.

Spaces, places and settings are a vital part of adventure therapy in that there natural places become containers for the experience and provide places to dream into and connect with in quite a different way to what is possible with the built environment. The psyche resonates with natural spaces and the physical journey offers a metaphor for the inner journey of personal discovery and growth (Hoyer 2012).

Current practices of adventure therapy draw from a wide range of psychotherapeutic

theories in addition to the foundation of experiential learning, as well as theories related to the way in which place – and in particular natural places – influence personal learning, healing and growth. Examples include positive psychology, systemic family therapy, Rogerian counseling, social psychology, Gestalt and psychoanalysis. For further information see

<https://internationaladventuretherapy.org/what-is-iat/>

This paper focuses on the connections between systems-psychoanalytic theory and that of adventure therapy as well as the challenges posed by mobilizing physical group activity with therapeutic intent.

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