

An investigation into the environmental, activity and people components of *sail training*.

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Context

Participating in a sail training voyage, as a type of outdoor adventure education, has been shown to support personal and social development by enhancing self-constructs and inter- and intra-personal skills (Schijf, Allison & Von Wald, 2017). It is an experience that is more than mere adventure (McCulloch et al., 2010). Introduced in the 1940s by Kurt Hahn, sail training was used to ‘train young seamen in small boat handling, and improve their physical and mental capabilities’ (Veevers and Allison, 2011, p. 55) to improve the survivability of the early generations of mechanised seafarers, who were at an increased risk of being shipwrecked during World War II.

Modern day sail training has evolved from the male-dominated traditions and culture from the *age of sail* (Fletcher, 2017), and now manifests as a diverse cultural community embracing participants and practitioners from all sections of society. The extant research literature has principally sought to isolate, identify and measure voyage outcomes, however, there is little known about the processes by which these outcomes are achieved. The study presented here investigated these processes, in particular the subjective (non-statistical) significance of voyage-based activities experienced by twelve 14-year old crew members during a five-day sail training voyage (see Fletcher & Prince, 2017).

Method

This study considered the environmental, activity and people components of the sail training voyage. Using a five-point Likert scale (0 to 4) participants were invited to indicate significant activities, from an inventory of 58 voyage-based activities categorised under *Arrival, Initial Briefings, Safety, Seamanship, Sail Handling, Living Aboard, and Training Workshops* headings. Participants were invited to apply their own every day meaning of significance and significant.

This survey was completed at the end of their voyage (T^1) and then again six-months later ($T^2 = T^1 + 6$ months). This allowed the inventory of activities to be ranked in order of significance, and enabled the comparison of T^1 and T^2 rankings (see Table 1).

Activity	T^1 Ranking	T^2 Ranking
Helming – steering the [vessel]	=1 st	1 st
Initial familiarisation of [the vessel]	=1 st	=4 th
Man Over Board (MOB)	=1 st	10 th
Introductions for crew and sea staff	=2 nd	=4 th
Meals – eating together around the table	=2 nd	=2 nd
Night sailing – sailing during the hours of darkness	=3 rd	=2 nd

Table 1: Comparing selected T^1 and T^2 significant activities.

Findings and Discussion

In their responses at T^1 , crew participants indicated activities as significant that were part of the welcoming ritual at the beginning of most sailing training voyages. These activities meet the lower

order needs of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs (1970). The only significant sailing-specific T¹ activity was Helming – steering the [vessel]. The T² responses ranked activities that were more related to the voyage experience, with lower order Maslow-activities (from T¹) relegated in their subjective significance. The only activity that maintained its subjective *significance* was Helming.

In considering why Helming was such a significant activity for this crew, it is proposed as an activity that is:

- Authentic: it is situated in the vessel-based setting as a non-contrived, valued activity of the voyage experience;
- Mediated: engaging practitioners and participants in an expert-novice dialogue; as the practitioner bridges the known and the unknown, and provides support as the participant 'takes the helm';
- Complex: engaging physical and psychological sensations in an *optimal* experience: 'It is what the sailor holding a tight course feels when the wind whips through her hair, when the boat lunges through the waves like a colt – sails, hull, wind, and sea humming a harmony that vibrates in the sailor's veins.' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008: 3)
- Power: senior sea-staff, as power-holders, complete close-quarter manoeuvring, however, once sails are set and the vessel has sufficient sea room to manoeuvre safely the participants 'take the helm' in a distinct but implied transfer of 'power';
- Agency: the person on the helm is in control of the vessel, albeit with the supervision and support from a more experienced member of the sea-staff.

The findings from this small-scale study suggest that it is important for sail training practitioners, and significant for the participants, to meet the lower order Maslow 'needs' removing barriers and enabling participation in the voyage experience. However, post-voyage, with time to reflect on their experience, it is the memories of the voyage, such as eating meals together and night sailing, that remain significant for the crew participant. Recognising that Helming is a *significant* activity for participants, both on- and post-voyage, then all crew participants should be encouraged to 'take the helm'.

References

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