

...TRANSFER LEARNING

INTEGRATION

Experiential learning transforms the lessons of feeling, thinking, behavior, and resisting change. When these lessons show up as new change in daily life, learning is said to have transferred.

Transfer can be **specific**: same lessons in similar settings (learn knots in rock climbing, use these same knots while sailing). Transfer can be **non-specific** (or general): similar lessons in different settings (learn to trust others with physical and emotional safety on a challenge course, learn to trust others with sharing secrets at home).

Specific involves the **products** of learning, while non-specific emphasizes the complex **processes** of learning. Non-specific transfer is much more difficult to achieve than specific transfer since processes are more intricate than products and because the two settings are so far apart.

Metaphors can be used to bring widely divided settings closer together by matching pieces of the two with parallel linkages. For example, the multi-day expedition is analogous with any task that can be broken down into individual pieces.

To purposefully utilize **metaphoric** transfer to enhance learning and change, programs can ask clients for their metaphors during the reflective debrief by asking questions like “how was this like life?” In advanced programs, activities can be deliberately **framed** or introduced with a powerful metaphor. Two types of metaphoric frames include contextual and isomorphic.

Contextual frames are general introductions that use universally common life experiences to describe group/client stories. Stories are easily understood and willingly accepted by almost all populations. For example, goals or destinations can represent university students’ graduations.

Isomorphic frames are precisely crafted to suit only that group/client and successful resolution of the activity mirrors the exact change need in daily life. For example, to get out of a no exit maze, recovering alcoholics must ask for help.

The key to framing lies in the strength of the many metaphors that connect the two settings. **Stronger metaphors make better connections** and transfer of learning is likely to be increased.

CONTINUATION

Far too often, EE programs stand alone or are “one-off” interventions. As a result most gains obtained through the program are quickly eroded on return to daily life. Here are a few common follow-up routines for afterward.

Hold a **graduation ceremony**, with recognition and schedule a reunion social or brief checkup.

Ease transition for clients returning to daily life with a period of visitation by program staff.

Assign homework. Allocate tasks for individual clients to complete on return. Provide intact groups/teams something to work on together.

Maintain a **long term connection** with clients and, if needed, encourage their return for a booster program to refine learning and change.

AUGMENTATION

In addition to follow-up, a number of strategies can be embedded within the program delivery. For example, EE programs for children “at-risk” ought to structure discipline for clients and engage caregivers in parallel parenting training. Embed anonymous feedback into the program, where clients randomly select names from a bowl for observation during and sharing after.

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FURTHER RESOURCES

READING

Gass, M. A. (1985). Programming the Transfer of Learning in Adventure Education. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 8(3), 18–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105382598500800305>

Gass, M. A. (1991). Enhancing Metaphoric Transfer in Adventure Therapy Programmes. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 14(2), 6–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105382599101400202>

Gass, M. & Priest, S. (1993). Using Metaphors and Isomorphs to Transfer learning in Adventure Education. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership*, 10(4), 18–23.

Leberman, S.I. & Martin, A.J. (2004) Enhancing transfer of learning through post-course reflection, *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 4:2, 173-184.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14729670485200521>

Sibthorp, J., Furman, N., Paisley, K., Gookin, J., & Schumann, S. (2011). Mechanisms of Learning Transfer in Adventure Education: Qualitative Results from the NOLS Transfer Survey. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 34(2), 109–126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105382591103400202>