

# Facilitator, Teacher, or Leader? Managing Conflicting Roles in Outdoor Education

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*A facilitator is commonly defined as a substantively neutral person who manages the group process in order to help groups achieve identified goals or purposes. However, outdoor educators rarely experience the luxury of only managing the group process, because they are typically responsible for the provision of leadership, skill instruction, and safety management. Based on personal experience, the literature on facilitation, and my research on the theories and practices of facilitator educators providing facilitation training courses in Australia and New Zealand, I recommend strategies for managing the potentially conflicting facilitation roles that outdoor educators may be required to fulfill. The five facilitator roles identified by Schwarz (2002), which serve as a theoretical framework for this paper, are facilitator, facilitative leader, facilitative trainer, facilitative consultant, and facilitative coach. The similarities and differences between these roles are discussed, as are strategies that outdoor educators can apply to optimise their use of, and movement between, these roles.*

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The role of a group facilitator, according to Hunter (2007), is to guide the group process to help participants achieve their agreed purpose. Schwarz (2005) described a facilitator as a “substantively neutral third party, acceptable to all members of the group, who has no substantive decision-making authority” (p. 27). Although the idea of *neutral facilitation* has been contested in the literature (Brown, 2002, 2003; Estes, 2004; Kirk & Broussine, 2000), neutrality implies that the facilitator works with the group in a way that does not allow his/her opinions, ideas, or knowledge to influence the group’s decisions. This creates an obvious tension for outdoor educators who seek to fulfill the role of a facilitator with their groups. Typically, as well as facilitating the group process, outdoor educators are required to manage student safety and teach skills and knowledge relevant to the group’s identified learning outcomes. The purpose of this paper is twofold: (a) to explore the difficulties that outdoor educators experience as they attempt to manage the different roles they have to fulfill as part of their job description; and (b) to provide a conceptual framework to help outdoor educators better understand and manage their roles. To begin this inquiry I offer the following scenario from my personal experience to illustrate the challenges that outdoor educators can experience as they manage different roles.

The scenario described below occurred whilst leading a group of undergraduate outdoor education students at La Trobe University in Australia. The purpose of this unit was twofold: first, for students to learn how to safely lead whitewater river trips; and second, for students to learn how to help their future students explore the cultural and environmental histories of river places. It is challenging to achieve these purposes simultaneously, because the excitement of paddling and leading on whitewater can become an all-consuming focus (Thomas, 2005; Thomas & Thomas, 2000; Wattchow, 2007). However, I believe it is possible to work with the tension that exists when trying to use adventure activities to achieve other educational objectives, and I have described some strategies to do so elsewhere (see Thomas, 2005; Thomas & Thomas, 2000). That said, this tension between conflicting objectives in outdoor education experiences compounds some of the challenges associated with the facilitation roles that outdoor educators may be required to fulfill, as the following scenario explains.

It was the afternoon of the fourth day of a seven-day trip, and the group, two other leaders, and I had traveled to a Class III river in Victoria,

Australia, after spending three days journeying on a different river. On day five, in three smaller supervised groups, the students were scheduled to start a three-day, two-night river journey with a mixture of rafts, open canoes, and kayaks. I asked the students to form three groups, requesting that they ensure they had a balance of paddling experience and competence. Ten minutes later the students gave me the list of the students in each group, and upon reading the list it was apparent the students had formed three groups based on their friendship groups rather than the criteria I had provided. According to my perception of the students' paddling abilities, one of their groups had an overall high level of paddling competence, another was medium, and the other was medium to low. Consequently, I asked them to meet again, revise their proposed groupings, and inform me of the composition of the three new (and balanced) groups. Five minutes later a student representative informed me that they liked the groups as they were and did not want to change the composition of the groups.

I was reluctant to overrule the students and reconfigure the groups for them because the conditional favorability was not low enough to justify such an autocratic leadership style (Priest & Gass, 2005). Individual safety was not a concern, because each group was to be supervised by an experienced leader. Environmental conditions were good and the consequences of the decision were not serious or life threatening. I was hesitant to point out to the students which of the three groups I considered to be deficient in paddling expertise, because it seemed inappropriate to publicly identify those students who I perceived to be less competent. Normally, my preference in such situations would be to allow the students to experience the consequences of their choices, yet I was also aware that the uneven distribution of paddling competence in the groups would impact the less competent group's ability to engage with the place. As it turned out, I chose not to intervene and my concern was justified. The highly competent group was able to travel efficiently down the river, allowing more time for side-trips, exploration, and a fuller experience of place. The other two groups were less efficient in their journey down the river, were less relaxed, spent more time effecting rescues after capsizes, and were less able to engage with the environmental and cultural history of the river valley.

While the scenario may help to highlight a number of lessons about facilitation in outdoor education or experiential education programs, I will focus on the difficulty of managing the various facilitation roles that outdoor educators have to fulfill when working with groups. I have learnt much about facilitation since this experience, and some of my reflections on this scenario were prompted by my research on the theories and practices of facilitator educators (Thomas, 2007a).

## Review of Literature

### ***Common Facilitation Roles***

A number of authors within the broader facilitation literature have espoused the need for emerging facilitators to be clear and explicit about their role as facilitators with groups (Bens, 2005; Eller, 2004; Priest, Gass, & Gillis, 2000). Schwarz (2002, 2005), a facilitator-educator based in the United States identified five common facilitation roles: *facilitator*, *facilitative consultant*, *facilitative coach*, *facilitative trainer*, and *facilitative leader*. Schwarz is not the only facilitator-educator or facilitation author to conceptualise similar roles. Hunter (2007), a facilitator-educator based in New Zealand, also highlighted the difference between a facilitator and someone who is facilitative. She distinguished the role of facilitators from that of facilitative mediators, teachers, coaches, managers, group therapists, and leaders. Jenkins and Jenkins (2006) have written at length about facilitative leaders, and Hogan (2002) described some of the differences between a manager, a facilitator, and a facilitative manager.

The literature from within the outdoor education field and related fields of adventure education and experiential education has also provided some guidance on the different roles that facilitators may be required to play. Martin, Cashel, Wagstaff, and Breunig (2006) encourage outdoor leaders to clarify with their participants their respective roles and responsibilities. They indicate that whilst some decision making may be shared with the participants, “safety, instruction, observation, facilitation, raising issues in the group, and clarifying statements and issues are the responsibility of the leader” (p. 116). In a chapter specifically on challenge course leadership, Martin et al. make it clear that the facilitation competencies required of the challenge-course leader include the choice and sequencing of activities, monitoring the group’s state physically, socially, and mentally, teaching appropriate safety techniques, managing risks, processing experiences, and resolving conflicts within the group.

Priest and Gass (2005) argue that the participants and the objectives and context of a program dictate the facilitation roles that the outdoor leader must fulfill. They identify a list of 12 leadership competencies based on a meta-analysis of previous studies of outdoor leadership. Facilitation skills are listed as one of these 12 core competencies; they also dedicate a chapter of their text to the consideration of the facilitator’s roles in adventure programming. Gass and Stevens (2007) list the importance of role clarity when facilitating adventure programs as one of their 10 facilitation guides, and they suggest that being clear about what the facilitator and participants are there to do (and not do) optimises the facilitator’s effectiveness.

Whilst the outdoor/adventure education literature acknowledges that outdoor leaders must fulfill different roles, including facilitation,

there is little discussion on how these different roles can potentially cause tension or confusion for the facilitator and/or the group. To better understand such difficulties, the five facilitation roles identified by Schwarz (2002; 2005) will be discussed in more detail.

**The facilitator.** According to Schwarz (2005) a facilitator's purpose is to increase a group's effectiveness by helping it to improve its processes and structures. He argues that to do this effectively the facilitator needs to be a substantively neutral third party to minimise the likelihood of becoming involved in content or decision-making. Schwarz describes the facilitator as a process expert and advocate who knows the best way to help the group to improve its functioning. Similarly, Priest and Gass (2005) encourage outdoor leaders to maintain neutrality where possible by aligning themselves to a variety of belief systems, realities, or participant interpretations. They also acknowledge that in terms of acceptable group processes the outdoor leader cannot be neutral and should be clear on group processes that are acceptable and not acceptable. Outdoor educators will rarely be able to assume this facilitator role in its purest sense because they typically have some responsibility for the content of a program and the decisions that are made, particularly those concerning the safety of participants/students.

**The facilitative trainer.** Schwarz's (2005) conceptualisation of the facilitative trainer differs from a facilitator in that s/he has knowledge and expertise to share with the participants but s/he still bases her/his practice on the same core values and ground rules. For the sake of clarity, the term "trainer" is used throughout this paper when describing this facilitation role, with an understanding that the ideas are also relevant to teachers and educators. The goal of the facilitative trainer is to help her/his students to develop, test, and get feedback on new knowledge and skills. Schwarz argues that "calling a trainer a facilitator obscures the fact that the individual is expert in and has responsibility for teaching some particular topic" (p. 30), and for this reason he argues that the term facilitative trainer recognises both sets of responsibilities and skills. In her course text, Hunter (2007) agrees: "It is unfortunate that trainers are often called facilitators, as this muddies the waters for facilitators who work with group process only" (p. 33).

The facilitative-trainer role is one of the roles that teachers in an outdoor education setting often fulfill. Outdoor educators are charged with the responsibility of teaching students knowledge and skills as determined by program objectives. For example, skill sets they are required to teach could be those needed for safe participation in an outdoor pursuit or they could relate to some aspect of the environment. In some outdoor education programs in Australia (see Victorian Curriculum and Assessment

Authority, 2005), students are not only required to develop knowledge but also to assess their mastery of it.

***The facilitative leader.*** The facilitative leader is described by Schwarz (2005) as the hardest facilitator role “because this person needs to use his [sic] facilitative skills at the same time that he has views—sometimes strong views—about the issue being discussed” (p. 31). To make this role work, the facilitative leader must “openly state his [sic] views on a subject, explain the reasoning underlying those views, and then encourage others to identify any gaps or problems in his reasoning” (Schwarz, pp. 31–32).

The facilitative-leader role is common in outdoor education but the nature of the leadership provided varies according to the conditions of favourability (Priest & Gass, 2005). With mature groups, in conditions of high favourability, an outdoor educator can adopt an abdicatoric leadership style (Priest & Gass, 2005). If conditions are less favourable, however, outdoor educators cannot abdicate their responsibility for the safety of their participants, and they must carefully exercise good judgment and intervene when necessary. Clearly, the luxury of just managing the group’s process and being a neutral third party is not a role that many outdoor educators get to enjoy. A further complication that some outdoor educators may experience is the evaluative role they may have to fulfill regarding the development or behaviour of participants. Schwarz (2002) argues that this creates a potential role conflict for facilitators by increasing their power over the group and consequently jeopardising the students’ trust in them and decreasing the likelihood of members openly sharing information that could be used in the assessment of their competence or skills.

***The facilitative consultant.*** Facilitative consultants are used for their expertise in a particular content area and their role is to work with new groups for a shorter time to help them make informed decisions. This is congruent with the roles assumed by some specialist or freelance outdoor educators when they join a group specifically for their expertise in, for example, an outdoor pursuit or in a particular environment. This role still requires quality facilitation skills, because the facilitative consultant is often required to develop effective relationships and manage difficult conversations when participants have strong and differing views (Schwarz, 2005).

***The facilitative coach.*** A facilitative coach usually works with participants to help them improve their effectiveness by enabling them to reflect on their behaviour and thinking (Schwarz, 2005). Typically, this requires him/her to jointly design the learning process rather than assuming s/he knows the best way to help the participants learn. Ideally, the facilitative coach works with the participants to “explore the coaching

relationship itself as a source of learning for both the client and the coach” (Schwarz, 2005, p. 30).

### ***Facilitation Roles in Outdoor Education Practice***

According to Schwarz (2005), those acting in each of the five facilitation roles are experts on, or highly skilled in, the process of facilitation, but the aspect that varies most significantly is their involvement with content. Schwarz and Dick (1991) concur that it is very difficult to facilitate group processes when the facilitator is immersed in content. Bens (2005) suggests that engaging with content is a trap for novice facilitators because they can be distracted from their appointed role. Essential to clarifying the role that any particular facilitator will play with a group is the need to be *intentional* “in the sense that the facilitator is conscious of what she [sic] is doing and why” (Brockbank & McGill, 1998, p. 152).

Schwarz (2002) explains as a facilitator “you need not only a set of methods and techniques but also an understanding of how and why they work....You see the reasoning that underlies each technique and method....[And] you can improvise and design new methods and techniques consistent with the core values” (p. 9). All this would suggest that the first requirement for outdoor educators, when attempting to manage different facilitation roles, is to understand the theories and values that underpin their practice (Thomas, 2008b).

Outdoor educators regularly use experiential learning approaches in their programs to help their students because “throughout the experiential learning process, the learner is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning” (Association for Experiential Education, 2008, p. 1). The assumption inherent in experiential learning approaches is that the learning task is authentic and the results are more personal. This can create problems for outdoor educators who try to use experiential learning approaches to teach particular content or focus on particular issues, because it is not possible to guarantee the nature and extent of the learning that actually occurs (Association for Experiential Education, 2008) in experiential education. Estes (2004) notes that “teacher control of what is learned, no matter how well intentioned, conveys a message of control over students rather than student empowerment” (p. 146). Although Estes highlights the difficulty for experiential educators to teach content, she contends that a higher degree of student-centeredness can assist educators to achieve greater congruence between their espoused commitment to the principles of experiential education and their actual practice.

McKinney and Beane (2005) provide some poignant critique of facilitation practice that is incongruent with experiential education values

by highlighting the hypocrisy when facilitators massage participant responses to match predetermined outcomes, regardless of how well the participants' responses fit. This observation is consistent with the findings of Brown's (2002) ethnomethodological study of facilitation in an experiential education setting, which found that facilitators frequently assumed the role of "gatekeeper," controlling what were supposed to be student-centered discussions. McKinney and Beane argue that controlling or managing participants' learning in this manner creates many undesirable consequences: misunderstandings, defensiveness, reduced trust, reduced learning, and reduced facilitator effectiveness.

One strategy recommended by Schwarz (2006) and reinforced by McKinney and Beane (2005), to see if our actions are congruent with our intended purpose, is the *transparency test*. The transparency test encourages facilitators to imagine sharing their facilitation strategy out loud with their participants. In my scenario it would have sounded like this:

I would like you to reconfigure the three groups because I don't think you have distributed the paddling expertise and competence evenly according to my perceptions of your ability. However, to save embarrassing anyone, I don't want to publicly share my perceptions of your ability, but I do want you to create new balanced groups to fix the problem.

Unfortunately, the manner in which I actually approached the original scenario expected the students to play the "Guess what's in my head" game. Using the transparency approach to rephrase my request exposes the original request's inappropriateness and demonstrates how the transparency test can be a useful tool for outdoor educators to see when their facilitation strategies may not be consistent with the principles of experiential learning and good facilitation.

### ***Models Underpinning the Roles Facilitators Choose***

Within the facilitation literature, numerous models or frameworks conceptualise the process of facilitation with groups and, although most of them have not been specifically designed for experiential education contexts, they may still be useful to outdoor educators. Hunter's (2007) pyramid model of facilitation describes how the facilitator, the group, and individuals interact with the internal and external environment, and the group culture to work toward an identified group purpose. Hogan (2002) developed a "living frame of facilitation" (p. 78) that uses a mind-map to illustrate the complexities of facilitating groups. Hogan's model has the potential to contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of facilitation but is not a step-by-step model that can guide a facilitator's practice.

Schwarz (2002) conceptualised two models, based on the work of Argyris and Schon (1974), that have the potential to usefully guide facilitation practice. He calls these models the *Mutual Learning Model* and the *unilateral controlling model*. The Mutual Learning Model shown in Figure 1 (below) highlights several consequences, including understanding, trust, and group effectiveness that result from a focus on positive core values, assumptions, and strategies. This model underpins Schwarz’s Skilled Facilitator Approach and aims to help facilitators to enhance their effectiveness, particularly under difficult conditions. The core values that guide the Mutual Learning Model, shown in Figure 1, include the need to share all the information relevant to an issue in a manner that allows the participants to understand and the commitment to allow participants to make free and informed choices based on that information. This, in turn,

Core Values and Assumptions	Strategies	Consequences
Valid information Free and informed choice Internal commitment Compassion	I have some information; others have other information Each of us may see things the others do not Differences are opportunities for learning People are trying to act with integrity, given their situation Test assumptions and inferences Share all relevant information Use specific examples and agree on important words Explain reasoning and intent Focus on interests, not positions Combine advocacy and inquiry Jointly design the approach Discuss undiscussables Use a decision-making rule that generates the commitment needed	Increases understanding, reduced conflict and defensiveness increased trust Fewer self-fulfilling, self-sealing prophecies Increased Learning Increased effectiveness Increased quality of work life

**Figure 1. Schwarz’s (2002) Mutual Learning Model (used with permission).**

enhances the internal commitment of participants to their choices and encourages them to act with compassion.

The first core assumption within Schwarz's (2002) Mutual Learning Model acknowledges that the facilitator can never know everything there is to know and communication of this to her/his group is important. Second, other group members may know or notice some things that the facilitator does not. Third, the facilitator understands that s/he may actually be contributing to a problem without being aware of it. These three core assumptions combine with the core values described above to shape facilitation strategies that produce the desired group consequences. Such strategies include sharing all relevant information, testing assumptions, explaining reasoning and intent, and using specific examples. According to Schwarz, the effective use of these strategies, based on the aforementioned core values and assumptions, leads to productive group processes and outcomes.

Sadly, in the scenario I described earlier, the Mutual Learning Model was clearly not guiding my practice. Rather, as Schwarz (2002) explains, in times of stress, facilitators tend to revert to *theory-in-use* as summarised in the Unilateral Control Model shown in Figure 2. In such circumstances, because the facilitator feels threatened or out of her/his depth s/he operates from unproductive values and assumptions that lead to facilitation strategies that create undesirable consequences.

The core values and assumptions that unintentionally guide a facilitator's practice in a Unilateral Control Model tend to be defensive.

Core Values and Assumptions		Strategies	Consequences
Achieve my goal through unilateral control	I understand the situation; those who see it differently do not	Advocate my position	Misunderstanding, conflict, and defensiveness
Win, don't lose		Keep my reasoning private	Mistrust
Minimise expressing negative feelings	I am right; those who disagree are wrong	Don't ask others about their reasoning	Self-fulfilling, self-sealing processes
Act rationally	I have pure motives; those who disagree have questionable motives	Ease in	Limited learning
	My feelings are justified	Save face	Reduced effectiveness
			Reduced quality of work life

**Figure 2. Schwarz's (2002) Unilateral Control Model (used with permission).**

The facilitator places value on achieving his or her purpose, minimising the expression of negative feeling to avoid conflict or loss of control, whilst espousing the need for rationality and, particularly, the facilitator's version of rationality. The assumptions that tend to operate alongside these values are: I understand the situation and know what is going on; anyone who sees it otherwise is wrong; my motives are pure and other people's motivations are not; and my feelings are justified. Schwarz (2002) suggests that the strategies that logically follow from these values and assumptions create unfavourable consequences when working with groups. The facilitator typically advocates her/his position but keeps her/his reasoning for that position private. The facilitator will also fail to ask others about her/his position or her/his reasoning whilst saving face and using leading questions to *ease in*, or indirectly convey her/his point of view.

The consequences of the strategies associated with the Unilateral Control Model tend to be misunderstanding, conflict, mistrust, limited learning, reduced effectiveness and satisfaction. As Schwarz (2002) explains, most facilitators do not set out to practice using the Unilateral Control Model; rather, it is a mode that facilitators tend to slip into when they are stressed, feel threatened, or feel out of control. When the values, assumptions, strategies, and consequences are laid out plain for all to see, there is no logical reason for basing our practice on such a model.

### ***The Mutual Learning Model and Facilitation in Outdoor Education***

The Mutual Learning Model developed by Schwarz (2002) provides some challenges to outdoor educators who want to enhance the quality of their group facilitation regardless of which role they choose to fulfill. Schwarz argues strongly that using facilitation strategies that are consistent with the Mutual Learning Model requires more than changing what we say or how we say it. He argues that there also must be a genuine acceptance and engagement with the core values and assumptions; without these, he asserts, it is too easy for a facilitator to slip back into *theory-in-use* or a Unilateral Control Model. Careful examination and internalisation of the values and assumptions also highlights practices that are incongruent with the Mutual Learning Model. McKinney (McKinney & Beane, 2005) provide a specific example of such a realisation.

Reflecting on her use of experiential activities, McKinney (McKinney & Beane, 2005) describes her realisation that she could no longer facilitate activities that were designed to teach participants lessons by tricking them into certain behaviours with the "hope that they would have an 'aha' experience in learning" (p. 488). This brings into question problem-solving activities where the outdoor educator withholds relevant information from her/his students under the guise of creating more powerful experiential

learning. McKinney and Beane encourage facilitators wishing to use such activities to negotiate with their participants an agreement to participate even though the facilitator is planning to withhold information. Without such transparency, the participants may feel tricked or alternatively end up wasting a lot of energy trying to outsmart the facilitator. This negotiation could be as simple as what gets articulated in the following example:

In this next activity, there will be some opportunities to explore some ways of communicating effectively with each other. To make this a powerful learning experience there are a few tricks in store, and some of the solutions may not be immediately obvious. I have some thoughts on how the challenge can be solved, but there may well be some new solutions that I have never seen before. Are you happy to give it a go, even though there may be some tricks?

From my experience, such negotiations eliminate much of the ill feeling that sometimes can occur when students feel like they are being set up by the facilitator. Such negotiations also help to create a spirit of playfulness rather than the “us-versus-them” feeling that sometimes emerges when groups resent the fact that they are not being provided with complete information.

### ***Moving Between Different Roles***

Schwarz (2005) maintains that a single facilitator can move seamlessly between the five facilitative roles s/he conceptualises, as long as s/he does so transparently, which simply means discussing these role changes with the group. Schwarz also emphasizes, however, the need for consistency in all roles, because this allows the facilitator to act with integrity. Schwarz (2005) maintains that the five facilitator roles within his Skilled Facilitator Approach are all based on the same core values and principles and that the same person can move among the roles as necessary with integrity. To do so effectively, Schwarz recommends the facilitator “select the appropriate role given the situation, accurately and explicitly describe to the group the facilitative role you plan to use, seek agreement with the group, and then fill the role according to that agreement” (p. 32). The importance of being transparent about the facilitation role does, by default, reinforce the importance of the facilitator being intentional about her/his practice (Thomas, 2008b).

## **Recommendations and Conclusions**

Returning to the scenario provided at the start of the paper, I would like to discuss how I could have better managed the situation in light of the relevant facilitation literature just reviewed. Clearly, the decision by my students to not reconfigure the groups occurred within the context of

a longer trip and I have oversimplified what may have contributed to this situation. Before this particular scenario arose there had been some conflict within the group, and between group members and myself. At the time I lacked the self-awareness to manage myself well and deal with the situations that had occurred. Although a discussion of this background would be interesting, I have avoided doing so because it is extraneous to the discussion in this paper about facilitation roles. A big part of the problem with the particular scenario described at the outset of this paper was that I wanted to play the role of facilitator but also had the responsibility to be a facilitative trainer and leader. I delegated to my participants the impossible task of forming groups that conformed to my perceptions of the participants' abilities—without actually sharing that information with them. I also kept my reasoning for not initially accepting their selected groups private and did not ask the group about the reasoning behind their group selections—all of which indicates a unilateral controlling model (Schwarz 2002). In the years immediately following the scenario described, I took full responsibility for determining all group selections. I felt justified in taking this action, and it did reduce some of the problems I experienced in the scenario described in this paper. This strategy of forming groups did not, however, provide the students with experience or understanding of the challenging task that outdoor educators face when configuring student groupings. More recently I have found it educative and respectful to rotate the responsibility for the formation of groups to a small group of student volunteers. I provide some clear guidelines to the students and then discuss their draft groupings with them, modifying as we see fit, before releasing them to the whole group. With this strategy the students take turns getting some experience in configuring groups and I am able to manage any potential group configuration problems I foresee based on a full and frank discussion with all the valid information. Importantly, I comfortably share with the whole group the reasons behind using this approach, which is indicative of a Mutual Learning Model (Schwarz, 2002).

The scenario described was a powerful learning experience for me and reflecting on it has been a good reminder of my aspirations to practice with integrity and awareness using principles and values similar to those described in Schwarz's (2002) Mutual Learning Model. Naturally, I don't always succeed, at times slipping into a unilateral controlling model when I am under stress or when my self-awareness is low (see Thomas, 2008a). I offer the following recommendations to other outdoor educators based on my own experiential learning—both successes and blunders—and those that stem from the relevant facilitation literature:

- Be clear about the different roles you are expected to fulfill in your outdoor education practice. Reflect on these roles, and the expectations for them, with employers, colleagues, and students;
- Understand the theories and values that underpin your own practice, particularly in relation to experiential learning and experiential education. Without this intentionality facilitators are limited in their ability to manage the different roles they are required to fulfill;
- Be transparent with groups about the roles you are required to fulfill and explicitly discuss with participants instances when you may be required to move from one role to another;
- Be transparent about the difficulties you are experiencing with managing the different roles. I do not think I have ever lost credibility or the respect of my participants by discussing the struggles I am experiencing as a facilitator. Kashtan (2005) argues that “when practiced with awareness and care, transparency can contribute to trust, learning, efficiency, productivity, connection, empowerment, and community” (p. 573). Transparency with students allows outdoor educators to demonstrate an authenticity and self-awareness that is rare among educators today.

As an outdoor educator my goal is to be as facilitative as possible. In the years since the scenario described in this paper I have developed a much clearer understanding of the principles and values that underpin my practice as a facilitative leader and educator. I still reserve the right to intervene with my group if I have concerns for the safety of my students. I also have a responsibility to create opportunities for my students to develop skills, knowledge, and experience, although my preference is to do so using experiential strategies rather than direct instructional approaches (for an example, see Thomas, 2007b). I recognise that I have different roles to play when facilitating groups and I now accept that it is rarely possible for me to be a facilitator in the purest sense of the role as described by Schwarz (2002). In accordance with Schwarz’s (2002) Mutual Learning Model, I try to discuss with students the need for me to sometimes change my role when working with them and I try to share my reasoning for doing so. When a situation requiring me to do so presents itself, I try to explicitly discuss this with students and use the discussion about such changes to create more opportunities for my students to learn about being facilitative outdoor educators themselves.

In closing, the various roles that facilitators are required to fulfill in outdoor education programs can present challenges with the groups we seek to lead. Priest and Gass (2005) explain that when facilitators experience

resistance it can be our participants' way of telling us how to better help them. In the heat of the moment, this can be hard to remember—particularly if our levels of self-awareness are not high at the time. My contention is that the task of facilitation is made easier if we better understand the different roles outdoor educators are required to fulfill and base our practice on sound theoretical concepts and models of practice.

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