Developing Outdoor Leaders: Paul Petzoldt’s Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Paul Petzoldt, an early pioneer in outdoor education, saw the need for trained outdoor leaders. This paper presents material from unpublished papers retrieved after his death that clarify and expand on his philosophy of leadership development. Key ideas such as: judgment, 20-20 vision, and use of wilderness expeditions, are expanded upon and discussed. Much of Petzoldt's self-developed methods align with the experiential learning cycle. Students learned by doing a skill, thinking critically, and applying their judgment to decision making. The reflection and analysis process included the "whys" behind a decision and the 20-20 vision metaphor for hindsight. Application occurred throughout an expedition, as more activities were experienced over time through the use of judgment. In this way, students continuously increased their abilities and were clear about limitations of leading others in the wild outdoors. As Petzoldt aged, his ideas, and how to teach them, seemed to become clearer to him. He experimented with younger students, while continuing to focus on college students and professors, who were so ingrained with formal educational methods that they presented a special challenge. Many of his ideas, quotes, and methods are still utilized in leadership training courses. Above all, he wanted self-aware, safe, resourceful, selfless, and environmentally responsible leaders in the field. They, in his mind, would save lives and make traveling in the backcountry a fun and enjoyable experience. (TD)

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