**The Initiative Model[[1]](#footnote-1)**

The construct of initiative is closely related to capacity for agency or for autonomous action … It consists of the ability to be motivated from within to direct attention and effort toward a challenging goal. In addition to being an important quality in its own right, I believe that initiative is a core requirement for other components of positive development, such as creativity, leadership, altruism, and civic engagement…

… For this to happen, adolescents need a series of experiences and opportunities… that build their development of this capacity… I see three elements as crucial. To begin with, initiative involves *intrinsic motivation*, the experience of wanting to be doing an activity and being invested in it. Agency entails the experience that one's thoughts and actions originate voluntarily from the self…

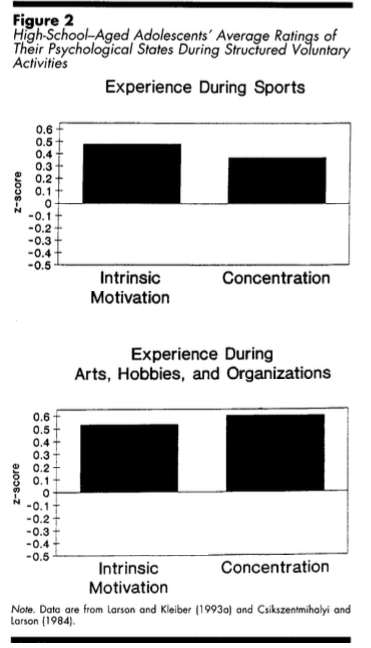
The second requirement is that this intrinsic motivation be experienced in association with *concerted engagement in the environment*, with exertion of constructive attention in a field of action involving the types of constraints, rules, challenge, and complexity that characterize external reality…

The third requirement is that this motivation and concerted engagement occur over time. Initiative involves a *temporal arc* of effort directed toward a goal, an arc that might include setbacks, re-evaluations, and adjustment of strategies. It is the capacity to carry out what Brian Little (1983, 1998) describes as a "serial" or "personal project." Despite its root in initiate, initiative is not just starting things but sticking with them… Initiative is the devotion of cumulative effort over time to achieve a goal.

For initiative to develop, I believe that all three of these elements need to come together. An individual needs to experience the three in consort and learn to regulate them.

The great majority of adolescents' time is spent in two opposite experiential situations. In school- work, they experience concentration and challenge without being intrinsically motivated. In most leisure, including watching TV and interacting with friends, they experience intrinsic motivation but not in a context of concentration and challenge. Neither provides the combination of both of these elements necessary for the experience and development of initiative. There is, however, one small segment of adolescents' time that combines intrinsic motivation and concerted attention…

**This one exception is a category we call structured voluntary activities, or youth activities for short. It includes activities that are organized by adults, such as extracurricular school activities and community youth activities, as well as structured activities that youth participate in on their own--such diverse things as hobbies, writing poetry, constructing a web site, or playing in a band with a group of friends. Our defining criteria for this category is activities that are voluntary (i.e., not required for school) and involve some structure, that is, where students' participation occurs within a system involving constraints, rules, and goals…**



As Figure 2 shows, the immediate experience associated with these activities includes both high intrinsic motivation and concentration. We see this for sports and for arts, hobbies, and organizations… This co-occurrence of motivation and attention, suggests what Dewey (1913) called "voluntary attention" and Gibson and Rader (1979) called "self- generated attention": attention that adolescents themselves direct. In an interview about experiences during this type of activity, one 9th grader described feeling "real strong and in control, like I could do anything." Adolescents' subjective involvement in these activities also resembles what Csikszentmihalyi calls flow; another 9th grader said, "You change, you forget everything around you."

As a whole, these findings begin to suggest that structured voluntary activities are a context that is particularly suited to the development of initiative. The presence of intrinsic motivation, concerted engagement, and, in many cases, a temporal arc, suggests that participants in these activities are having experiences of directing and regulating their actions in pursuit of a goal. Such experiences, I believe, are likely to stimulate the learning of initiative dispositions and skills…

The conditions that make structured youth activities a fertile context for the development of initiative, I believe, also make them a rich context for the development of an array of other positive qualities, from altruism to identity. Children and adolescents come alive in these activities, they become active agents in ways that rarely happen in other parts of their lives. This makes youth activities an invaluable laboratory for the study of processes of positive development, one that deserves much more scientific attention…”

**Learning that Counts:[[2]](#footnote-2)**

**“…No course or book on audio-visual teaching materials will help a teacher teach well if her fundamental ideas about teaching are wrong. She will merely learn to do more efficiently what she ought not to be doing at all. But if a teacher has a sound understanding of good teaching she will recognize and use all teaching materials as media as agencies which help transmit understandings. She will realize that audio-visual materials are usually means and not ends…**

**“These six examples, chosen from a great many other incidents of memorable learning experiences, are clear enough in themselves. They are concrete experiences and each one makes its point simply. You have already made a generalization about each incident – you have already drawn inferences as to why these learning experiences have been vividly remembered. Each of them was a rich and meaningful event in the life of the reporter. There was “something” about each of these six episodes that fixed them indelibly in the memory – that made them “permanent” learning. But before attempting to set down the key elements in a memorable experience, let us attack the problem from another angle: Why do we forget?” …**

**We said before that forgetting is accounted for by three factors. (1.) We forget when the motive for learning is absent, when the thing to be learned appears unimportant, when it seems to lack any relationship to our lives; in short when it has no significant for us. (2) We forget when we do not clearly see what we are supposed to learn or when we are not properly shown how to perform a new skill; in short when learning is befogged by confusion. (3.) We forget when we do not use what we have tried to learn; that is, when we fail to put it into practice. Putting all three factors together, we can say that “you learn what you live”.**

**… Sidney L. Pressey, in his book Psychology and the New Education, observes:**

**Material will be remembered in proportion as it is meaningful, and it is the meaningful element in any given unit of subject matter which is best remembered. Learning will last in proportion as it is made significant to the learner. That a great deal of subject-matter is so rapidly forgotten is thus a comment on its value to the pupil.”**

**Learning that is mechanically memorized stands little chance of being retained… If, however, we thoughtfully learn what the textbook passage means, we are likely to remember it… Motivation, therefore, explains why this crammed leaning is rapidly lost. It is bookish learning, as contrasted with real learning… Real learning… places the emphasis… on evaluating them – on relating them to what we already know and on using them as part of our daily life. This real learning is retained because we want to learn it, because what it says and implies is real and vital and necessary in our life… In other words, you can decide for yourself between mere memorizing an real learning.**

**What is ‘Real Learning’?**

**“… The world of the child, particularly in the elementary school, is a sensory-motor world; he is interested in things that he can see, hear, touch, taste, plan, make, do and try… Education must become the rich, active, personal and adventuresome thing it is when a father teaches his son how to fish... or a scout leader explains to youngsters how to find their way in the woods without a compass… For in all these situations learning has motivation, clarity and use to such a degree that permanence can almost be taken for granted. It has, in addition a train of other qualities – such as pleasurableness, emotional gratification, and a sense of personal accomplishment, – which strongly reinforce the learning.**

**“… The major elements that seem to be common to most rich experiences:**

**1. “Sense” experience is often strongly involved.**

**2. There will be a quality of newness about it, a feeling of discovery, of freshness… The sprit of adventure and experiment, then, is often present. The root of the word experience comes from expereri, meaning to “try out.” When we try our things, we must be active, not passive… the richest experiences are almost always personal adventured, in which the outcome has the appeal of the unpredictable.**

**3. A rich experience has a marked emotional tone… Note that the word motivation has the same root as emotion – it means to “move.” A rich experience is a moving experience, hence one that is remembered.**

**4. A rich experience is often the culmination or fulfillment of other experiences. The memorableness of an event depends on what you bring to it… What you get out of a new experience depends on what you bring to it, consciously and otherwise. In a sense, then, the richest of our experiences may be a synthesis or a combination of past experiences into new and meaningful combinations.**

**5. A rich experience often carries with it a sense of personal achievement. There is exciting satisfaction in having done well something that we are eager to do… Some experiences are rich chiefly because we discovered that we were capable of doing something remarkable that we had not known possible.**

**Experiences that Count**

**How are experiences made usable? This question can be answered in a simple sentence but one whose meanings require elaboration: We make experiences usable by giving them names, by crystalizing them into generalizations, rules, principles, concepts, habits, sayings, and the like. The process progresses from the simple name that a child attached to an object, all the way to an extremely abstract mathematical formula. It begins with direct experience and travels to the pinnacle of the ‘cone,’ if we wish to consider the whole in terms of a visual ‘aid.’ Such a device would begin with a broad base and steadily narrow as it rises to a point- the board base is “direct experience” and the pinnacle, that kind of experience as far removed as possible from direct contact with objects… If we bear in mind this progress, we shall understand something of the general manner in which human beings make experience useful…. Words are the names that we give to experiences. A word is not the thing itself but the name for the thing or the idea. It is a kind of verbal shorthand…**

**… Words, then, are the medium of exchange that we use when we express ourselves – when we talk or read or write – and if words are to mean anything, there must be something tangible behind them.**

**Helping pupils to attach the right names to the right the and ideas is one of the teachers big jobs… When we attach a name to an idea, a concept, an abstraction, the problem becomes complicated.**

**Thus while everybody agrees on the meaning of pencil, most of us may disagree on the meaning of freedom. The one is tangible, the other intangible… The experience out of which the word-name pencil is learned occurs at the base of our ‘cone.’ The experience out of which the word-name freedom derives is indirect. It occurs higher up on the ‘cone.’ It is a concept which is the end-product of a number of direct experiences. It is the result of our ability to make generalizations of increasing complexity…**

**For example… on the other hand, if we were to discuss a term like national sovereignty, we could not quickly draw on concrete experiences of sovereignty. It is not tangible; you cannot put your finger on it. You must go back into an entire series of baskets-within-baskets to find the concrete experiences that stand back of the word sovereignty. And you cannot eliminate this experiencing process…**

**We have seen that two elements are involved in building concepts: (1) we must have a certain about of concrete experience and (2) we must be able to combine and recombine these concrete experiences in many ways. Now, we do not become educated merely by adding one new concrete experience to another one. We must also classify and generalize upon the experiences we have had. We must, in other words, put them to work.**

**Learning is an interacting process. We move from the concrete to the abstract and back again to the concrete. It is a shuttling back and forth, in which generalizations help us understand new concrete experiences. The concrete experiences in turn help us to improve our generalizations or to build better ones. In short, we reconstruct our experience. If we understand this dynamic relationship between the concrete experience and the generalizations, we can get a fresh view if concept building…**

**In a civilization as complex as ours, you could not live successfully without abstractions of a high order – indeed, a complex civilization is defined by them. But we must never forget that some abstractions are heard to learn and that they must develop out of experience. Mere memorizing of abstraction or a definition means nothing so far as the power to use it is concerned. And if it cannot be used, has it really been learned? …**

**How can we make our experiences more usable? By building them into generalizations, concepts, principles, rules, or methods. The concrete thus becomes the abstract. But sound generalizations can grow only in the rich soil of concrete experience.**

**The cone of experience [is] a model which has at its bottom direct experiences and at its top the abstract, symbolic treatment of experience. Dale believed that learners benefit from abstract instructional activities once they have concrete experiences to give meaning to them**

**- Carlson Ann: The Other Dewey: John Dewey, His Philosophy and His Suggestions to Educators, In Library Education and Leadership: Essays in Honor of Jane Anne Hannigan**

**The Cone of Experience**

**… the “Cone of Experience” is a visual aid to explain the inter-relationships of various types of audio-visual materials, as well as their individual positions in the learning process… Even the hastiest glance at the cone shows that sensory materials can be readily classified as they move from the most direct to the most abstract kind of learning.**

**… Each division represents a stage between the two extremes – between direct experience and pure abstraction. As you travel up the cone from its base, you move in the order of decreasing directness. Thus, a ‘contrived experience’ is one stage more direct than ‘dramatic participation’; ‘dramatic participation is one stage more direct than ‘field trips’ and so on. Similarly, if you travel down the cone from its pinnacle, you move in the order of decreasing abstractness…**

**(Stage 1) Direct, purposeful experience**

**The base of the cone represents direct reality itself as we experience it at firsthand. It is the rich, full-bodied experience that is the bed-rock of all education. It is the purposeful experience that is seen, handled, tasted, felt, touched, smelled…**

**… It is learning by direct participation with responsibility for the outcome.**

**… But life cannot always be lived on this direct, concrete sensory level. Even our earliest experiences involve some degree of abstraction. As very young children we learn to talk about the doll or the dog… which is not physically present. Inevitably our direct, concrete experiencing soon becomes associated with abstractions.**

**(Stage 2) Contrived Experiences**

**… A contrived experience is ‘editing’ of reality, an editing which makes the reality easier to grasp… the imitation is better than the reality which it imitates… A mock-up, then, is a device which changes and simplifies the details of the real object in order to make it more teachable. It simplifies by eliminating unnecessary detail. It emphasizes the key points.**

**(Stage 3) Dramatic Participation**

**Dramatic participation can help us get as close as possible to certain realities that we cannot reach at first hand. We participate I a reconstructed experience, not the original one…**

**Though it is not the thing itself, though it stands for something else, a dramatization may have certain teaching advantages over the real-life situation. It can eliminate many elements that mean little and distract attention. It can sharpen and emphasize the important ideas. By reconstructing the experience, we can focus upon the things that “matter”; thus manipulating the subject-matter for teaching purposes.**

**There is a distinction between participating in a dramatization and watching it. Both experiences can be fruitful, but a pupil who plays a part in dramatic reconstruction gets closer t the direct experience than a pupil who merely looks on.**

**The three stages that we have discussed so far all involve doing: the direct experience, the securing of contrived experiences through the use of working models and mock-ups, and the experience of reconstructing reality by acting it out… in these three the individual is not a spectator but a participant.**

**In the next five stages on the cone, the individual is the observer. He no longer participants actively with responsibility for the outcome – he merely watches.**

**(Stage Four) Demonstration**

**A demonstration is another means whereby pupils can see how certain things are done… (they) may require nothing more than observation on the part of the pupil…**

**(Stage Five) Field Trips**

**When we make a school journey… we often see other people doing things. We watch them and note the meaning of their actions. As spectators, we are not responsible for what happens – we are on the sidelines, without authority or ability to alter the event. We merely watch it unfold…**

**If, however, they go one stage beyond observation… the field gains in directness. When Observation is combined with participation the field trip becomes more meaningful.**

**(Stage Six) Exhibits**

**… An exhibit is essentially something one sees as a spectator… Usually one is not involved in handling anything or working the materials, though some complicated exhibits include such added sensory experiences. When they do, of course, the learning can become that much more meaningful.**

**(Stage Seven) Motion Pictures**

**The motion picture experience, unlike the field trip, unfolds with a compression of time mans space. All the experience is not there. But this loss in directness and this compressed experience has compensating advantages…**

**Let us nor forget, however, that we are spectators before a motion picture. We are some distance from touching, tasting, handling, feeling, from directly experiencing. We are no longer participants in the event… we are merely watching…**

**(Stage Nine) Visual Symbols: Charts, Graphs, Maps etc.**

**When we enter the next stage on the cone, we no longer have the realistic picture of the thing itself but an abstract representation… we no longer deal with literal reality but with substitutes. We communicate by means of a new language - visual symbols.**

**(Stage ten) Verbal Symbols – the Pinnacle of the Cone**

**The next and final stage brings us to verbal symbols – designations that have no resemblance to the objects or ideas for which they stand. All appearances have been removed from the original. The word cat does not look like a cat or sound like a cat or feel like a cat.**

**The verbal symbol may be a word (like cat), an idea (like beauty), a concept (like credit), a scientific principal (like the law of gravity), a formula (like H2O), a philosophic aphorism (like Honesty is the best policy), and any other representation of experience that has been classified in some verbal symbolism. The range is limitless… (these words) once they are conveyed through verbal symbols… they have lost their last trace of direct reality.**

**What the Cone is and is not**

**Intellectual life is impossible without abstractions and symbolizations… But a word can stand for no more not less that its kernel of meaning. Hence, no abstractions can be worth much if the kernel is missing-it will literally be an empty word… verbal symbols, in order to be meaningful, must have underpinnings of concrete experiences.**

**… Abstractions must be combined (with experiences, ST), if we are to have rich, full, deep and broad experience and understanding. In brief, we ought to use all the ways of experiencing that we** can.



1. From Larson, Reed W. "Toward a Psychology of Positive Youth Development." American Psychologist 55.1 (2000): 170-83 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Dale, Edgar. Audio-Visual Methods in Teaching. NY: Dresden Press, 1946 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)