**Future Bound: A Life-Career Expedition Workshop**

Future Bound was designed to address the situations that youth face in living in a rural setting. Themes were identified by one rural community in BC and used to distinguish common interest and concerns addressed in Future Bound. For example, youth noted that they experienced difficulty in integrating current career information in ways meaningful to their life situations. They suggested that resources and information needed to be relevant for youth living in many small communities with limited access to services.

This paper gives an overview of the Future Bound Workshop, with one activity in each of the loops in the model being described in detail. The package for the workshop includes a facilitator’s guide that provides the background and philosophy of the workshop, information on group building, formation of group norms, discussion topics, as well as a selection of black line masters.

Future Bound was developed (a) to help youth create a sense of what is possible for their future, by providing a hands-on strategies for mapping their past, present, and hoped-for-future; and (b) to provide support to youth in identifying their personal strengths, community resources, and resources outside their communities. This will enhance one’s personal and contextual knowledge on how to make decisions for one’s future.

Future Bound is intended to assist youth in approaching the future with a sense of positive uncertainty to “help [participants] deal with change and ambiguity, accept uncertainty and inconsistency, and utilize the non-rational and intuitive side of thinking and choosing” (Gelatt, 1989, 36:252). Increasing their knowledge about themselves, the possibilities in their communities, as well as possibilities outside of their communities, enhances a sense of living with positive uncertainty.

Although youth acknowledged that there was information available to them, they were unsure on how to integrate the resources or information in a way that fit for them. Gaining access to literature on occupations and the labour force was low because they believed the information was not meaningful to them. Many youth were not able to recognize their personal strengths and the ways in which these strengths could be translated into transferable skills. Difficulty in connecting one’s interests, values and experiences, as well identifying the barriers they faced, into a cohesive life picture was mentioned as major concern by the youth.
Youth identified positively and expressed close ties to their rural community. Sense of place, proximity to nature, and relationships within the community were strong themes that surfaced in the interviews. Sense of place, then became a strong determinant in life-career decision-making. Integrating lifestyle and career information in personally relevant ways was achieved in the Future Bound workshops through the process of circling back, revisiting, and building upon activities and work done in previous years. Youth were empowered to extend their networks within and beyond their own community.

The research and activities for this workshop are grounded in a social constructivist approach that focuses on life narratives and constructions of identity. Constructing narratives of the future is an attempt to weave together the person’s most fundamental motives, outstanding strengths, and salient interests and values (Amundson, 2002; Cochran, 1997). Youths examine their past life experiences and present realities, and map in authentic and manageable ways how their hopes for the future may be manifested. The workshop is developed around a hiking metaphor, as this is an activity that is familiar and meaningful in the participants’ lives. Participants move through four loops on the journey, continually building on and integrating the experiences of the previous loops.

Figure 1: Model of Future Bound: A Life-Career Expedition Workshop
Each loop of the journey passes through the centre, which includes integrative exercises whereby youth are encouraged to become more aware of the role of hope and serendipity in their life paths, and the importance of approaching the future with a sense of positive uncertainty. In addition, many of the activities begun in Loop 1 are revisited in each of the proceeding loops, helping participants to continually integrate new knowledge.

**Loop 1: Gearing Up**

“You need to claim the events of your life to make yourself yours” (Anne Wilson Schaef)

Loop 1 of the journey is concerned with setting the tone and obtaining a picture of one’s current situation and a sense of what the journey ahead might look like. “Registering for the Hike” is a discussion point at the beginning of the workshop where youth come to understand the purposes of the life path exploration journey, and to uncover perceptions and preconceptions of the journey. This early discussion also provides opportunity for team building, so that group members can develop a sense of respect and safety that will facilitate sharing in the activities during the workshop. Participants also explore their hopes for the journey with the Possible Selves Mapping Exercise (Shepard and Marshall, 1997). This activity is revisited in proceeding loops, where hoped-for selves provide the basis for making plans to achieve goals. “Exploring Life Paths” is one activity in this loop.

**Exploring Life Paths**

In this loop, participants map their life paths from childhood up to the present time, plotting self-defining memories, identifying themes and patterns, and reflecting on turning points along the path. The path that participants trace illustrates the emotional ups and down of the journey in the form of peaks and valleys. They have the opportunity to think about and discuss how events have impacted them along their life paths—what they have learned and how these events have shaped their path. Each person was encouraged to consider the values, skills and qualities that are represented in the events they have illustrated on the life path. After completing the Life Path participants debrief the experience as a group.
How to Create a Life Path Map

The Life Path mapping activity provides participants with (a) a concrete and visual representation of the events of their life, connecting these events and time periods with the emotions experienced, and illuminating themes and patterns and (b) an opportunity to develop understanding of the impact that both positive and negative life events have played in shaping their present realities and personal values.

For this activity participants are invited to draw a horizontal and vertical axis on a piece of paper. They then label the horizontal axis “age” and the vertical axis “feelings” (Barlow, C.A., Blythe, J.A., and Edmonds, M., 1999). Secondly, they are encouraged to map the events of their life up to this point, labelling the events along the age line. Finally, participants examine the impact of each event by asking: What was learned? Why was this event significant? How did this event change your path? How do you feel about this event now? Do you notice any patterns along the Life Path?

The Life Path is revisited in each subsequent loop. In particular, early memories are examined to uncover themes and explored on how these themes have influenced one’s sense of direction, hopes, and fears for the future. The Life Path map is also used to look into the future by considering how one’s paths might unfold—the possibilities and directions that might exist for them.

Loop II: Checking Your Backpack

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters, compared to what lies within us” (Ralph Waldo Emmerson).

In this loop participants examine the internal and external resources that they have with them for the journey. In addition to examining their fears for the future with the Possible Selves Mapping exercise (Shepard and Marshall, 1997), they are asked to delve deeper into their life paths through examining early memories. Discussion regarding lifestyle and positive lifestyle alternatives is included. External resources are researched in the community and supports identified as “Companions on the Journey.” The concept of internal resources is discussed, and participants work towards identifying their own resources. The activity “Finding Your Footing,” helps participants in this process.
Finding Your Footing: Naming Personal Strengths

Personal strengths are internal assets that participants feel good about and are differentiated from the concept of transferable skills. These strengths are seen as more intrinsic, and are qualities that the individual values and have been developed over the course of their life path. For example, a reliable strength might be patience, or attention to detail, rather than a transferable skill such as cashier experience.

During this activity each participant has the opportunity to tell a story of an experience they were proud of. Their partner for the activity facilitates the story-telling process, while recording the positive strengths that they hear. One shared experience that was shared was one’s experience as a stage manager for a community theatre production. The personal strengths or tools uncovered in the storying of this experience included leadership and flexibility. After strengths were listed, each participants has the opportunity to “wear” their strengths (slips of paper with the strengths on them are attached to the participant’s clothing), and they reflect on how they feel about those strengths through a reflection process.

Naming Personal Strengths:

The Naming Personal Strengths exercise can be used (a) to develop a participant’s understanding and appreciation of personal strengths and how they relate to possible future careers and other roles and (b) to identify those qualities that are most important and rewarding to them.

As a first step, the participants divide into triads, with one storyteller and two listeners. The narrator relates a story about a time they were proud of, focussing on personal strengths and accomplishments, not just things they are good at because a job or task demanded it. One listener takes notes on the story, while the other writes down one-word strengths or qualities on strips of paper. At the conclusion of the story, the strengths discovered are read back to the narrator. The narrator is encouraged to wear their strengths on their clothing, and to reflect on how it feels to be covered in these qualities.

Questions which can be asked of the participants include: Are there any surprises or new learning? Which strength would be the hardest to give up? What would life be like if you did not have that strength?
**Loop III: Venturing Out**

“I am no longer afraid of storms, for I am learning to sail my own ship” (Louisa May Alcott).

In this loop, participants begin to “turn up/down the volume” (Ungar, 2003) on the voices and messages they have identified in the activities of the first two loops. They choose who to “rope up” with on the journey; decide on resources they are going to employ; identify mentors in their community or elsewhere; and project their life paths into the future in order to create a map towards these goals. “Setting Your Compass” is one of the central activities in this loop.

**Setting Your Compass**

In this activity participants consolidate self-knowledge they have developed during the activities of the proceeding loops, and chart some long-term goals for their future. Participants use the symbol of the compass to organize personal and community information into four quadrants. The first quadrant draws on the hopes generated in the Possible Selves Mapping exercises; the second includes information on resources in the community and beyond; the third quadrant is concerned with personal resources, values and strengths; while the fourth quadrant lists barriers that participants observe in themselves and within their community and society in general.
Developing the Compass

The Setting Your Compass exercise is used (a) to enable participants to gather together the information they have mapped, on their hopes and fears for the future, and their dependable strengths; (b) to create awareness among participants of common goals, barriers and resources; and (c) to help them articulate long range plans for their future.

At the beginning of the activity, participants work with the Setting Your Compass black line master. First, participants need the information they have gathered through other workshop activities and through their own research into community and life-career resources. Secondly, participants are encouraged to integrate the knowledge and information they have gathered onto the compass, thinking about the long range plans they are creating for themselves. As a final step, participants discuss the resources and barriers in their community and beyond, to these are include in the second and fourth quadrants of the compass.

Loop IV: Future Bound

“Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you’ve imagined” (Henry David Thoreau).

The last loop of the journey is intended to set youth up for success, by building on and extending the relationships that exist to provide youths with the support and resources to succeed on their continuing journey.

This part of the journey enables participants to continue on their life-career journey effectively after the workshop is ended. Activities of this loop facilitate “Building a Hiking Culture,” through creating and extending community links, establishing mentorship, and accessing community speakers. The youth participating in the workshop are asked to identify mentors among older youths who have left the community for education and/or training, or individuals in the community who can provide entrepreneurship support. Information on workers’ rights, job search and job maintenance are also covered. Participants work in smaller groups at this point according to shared interests or plans. The compass is revisited, and participants are encouraged to set manageable short term plans as they strive to obtain larger goals. For example, youths that are planning on attending college or university might work together on short-term goals such as completing applications or obtaining housing.
Conclusion

In order for the Future Bound workshop to achieve the goals of empowering youth to seek success on their life-career journey, the approach must be relevant and meaningful to the particular youth and their community. It is also essential that the group process be facilitated throughout. The design of the workshop—continually integrating and looping back, allowing youth to build on their experience and learning—must be preserved. The process and the journey takes time, thus it is important that there is support within the community to assist with these steps. It is vital that community links are maintained to assist youth in moving forward with a sense of positive uncertainty. Finally, participants should be left with a definite and specific sense of what the next steps on the journey are. With a clear sense of who they are and what they want, and a detailed plan as to how to get there, youth will be better able to negotiate the sometimes rocky and unpredictable terrain of the life-career journey.
Bibliography


