

Negley, S. (1997). *Crossing the bridge: A journey in self esteem, relationships and life balance*. Beachwood, OH: Wellness Reproductions & Publishing.

Reviewed by

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Biographical Information

Charles C. Bullock, Ph.D., is Professor and Chair of the Health Ecology Department at the University of Nevada, Reno. He has been both a practitioner and an educator in therapeutic recreation for over 25 years. He was formerly Professor and Chair of the Curriculum in Leisure Studies and Recreation Administration at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where he also directed the Center for Recreation and Disability Services. His book with Dr. Mike Mahon entitled Introduction to Recreation Services for Persons with Disabilities: A Person Centered Approach, 2nd Edition (1999) is used widely by recreation and therapeutic students in the United States and Canada.

Although not intended as a primary textbook, *Crossing the Bridge* is an excellent supplemental resource for a number of therapeutic recreation courses. Therapeutic recreation practitioners routinely find themselves in situations where their clients are dealing (or more often need to deal) with issues of self-esteem, relationships, and life balance. As such, therapeutic recreation students need to learn ways to help their clients deal with these issues. Using a book such as *Crossing the Bridge: A Journey in Self Esteem, Relationships and Life Balance*, can assist students in gaining skills that will help them as they practice in the field.

What makes this book so real and so helpful for therapeutic recreation students are the personal experiences that are evident throughout the book.

It was a dream that made me realize I had fallen into this confused cycle. Night after night as I would lay down exhausted, I'd slip into a frightening dream... For what seemed most of my sleeping hours I would scratch and claw, digging to climb out of the hole... Where was I going? What did I want in life? I had worked so hard for what I had and now I wanted none of it. (Negley, p. 1)

As a compilation of her personal journey and her professional experience, the importance of self-esteem, relationships, and life balance come alive. The author insists that the book is to be "experienced whether it is read and explored in the privacy of your own space or with a group." (Negley, p. 1).

Crossing the Bridge is useful for anyone who wants to improve the quality of his/her personal life by building self-esteem and exploring relationships and balance in life.

Yet it is also written for professionals who want a tool to use with individuals or groups. The author states, "as a professional it is always important to be in touch with what is going on in your life, so as not to project what you need onto the client..." (Negley, p. 62). She clearly encourages therapeutic recreation educators to use the book for themselves and to guide their students through self exploration as a way to teach them to help their future clients in the self exploration process.

The author says that the book is to be used as an interactive experience and indeed it lends itself to such use. There are eleven sections/lessons in the book. The book builds upon each lesson, moving from internal exploration to external influences. It holds together very well, with logical movement from one section/lesson to the next. Further, it appears that a given section can also be used as a stand-alone component if needed or desired. The layout is clean, crisp, and clear. The artistic format lends itself to openness and creativity by the user. The facilitator's guide in the back section of the book suggests uses of the book by educators, practitioners, and facilitators for group and/or individual work. The book includes 19 reproducible activity handouts and 11 reproducible journal pages (one for each chapter) for use by the participants. Nine corresponding laminated presentation posters are available from the publisher. The book is unique in that many personal disclosures are made that offer the reader a personal identification with the author. Experiences of others with whom the author has worked are also included as examples.

Chapter 1 delves into self-definition. Who are you and what is your purpose are questions to be answered. Ms. Negley structures thoughts by offering vignettes about school, church, social experiences, and home. Chapter 2 encourages introspection of past and present influences. Pertinent questions are offered in the activity sheets that pose deliberation of messages sent by gender, educators, and family members. One is also provoked to think about the impact of these messages in terms of creativity, emotions, relationships, leisure, sexuality, and other content areas. Various examples are provided to help participants understand these concepts.

Chapter 3 builds on Chapter 2 as it explains "self-talk" in terms of past and present influences. Hints are given to change self-talk as needed, and the activity sheet promotes building awareness of self-talk. The journal sheet instructs people to carefully analyze self-talk in terms of self-esteem. Chapter 4 is about exploring, identifying, and understanding one's feelings. It builds on Chapter 3 by promoting analysis of the self-talk and the feelings that are provoked. Feelings are dealt with in both emotional and physical contexts. An activity sheet builds on this by helping one identify when such feelings evolve and what a person may do to act on such feelings, express the feelings, or begin to change the feelings.

Guidance is provided in Chapter 5 to assist people in identifying their belief systems, making adjustments in them as needed, and modifying their behavior to be consistent with coherent, personally developed belief systems. It explains how to see and

develop beliefs that are congruent and encouraging. Reframing is the content area of Chapter 6. Here Ms. Negley relates beliefs, self-talk, and self-judgments with the art of seeing things in a different light. The exercises offered in the activity sheets help one to reframe self-descriptors in a manner that is supportive and enhances personal growth. Similarly, in Chapter 7 she offers examples and activity sheets that help people dismiss former beliefs and self-talk that were deemed harmful or resistant to personal growth, or that were identified in earlier exercises as inconsistent with one's personal being. Again, "past messages" are addressed in terms of expectations one has of oneself that are likely induced by another influence, rather than what one wants for himself or herself.

In Chapter 8 the process of change is explored. In the preface the author notes the power of being involved in the process of learning by doing. Here she gives instruction for the change process. The activities become more involved and complex. Chapter 9 explores relationships and their impact on one's self-concept. The reader is encouraged to examine the quality of various relationships in terms of their being supportive or devaluing, including casual, personal, and work relationships.

Chapter 10 addresses becoming cognizant of one's self in terms of the balance of work and leisure. The final chapter (Chapter 11) offers the entire book as a beginning, rather than an ending. The significance of the sum of the previous exercises is briefly explored. Finally, a glossary is included for those not familiar with the jargon in the book.

This book is written by a person who has been a recreation therapist for many years. She has facilitated groups, worked one-on-one with clients, supervised her own staff as well as student interns, and has taught university students. It makes sense that she would include a final section of the book as a facilitator's guide. In the facilitator's guide, she anticipates many of the questions that instructors and/or therapists might have and provides "helpful hints."

This book is easy to use, bound in a spiral notebook. It would make an excellent resource for those who are teaching students to become practitioners. Concurrently, it offers useful exercises for those who wish to become therapeutic practitioners. It is much easier to use than many self-help books one would find in a bookstore, and it is written from the perspective of a therapeutic recreation specialist. It would be appropriate for use with almost any group of clients or other people, whether or not they have disabilities. The book is not intended explicitly as a tool to use when working with people with severe and persistent mental illness. Ms. Negley cautions that those without therapeutic training should not use the book to facilitate groups.