

Simpson, S., Miller, D., & Bocher, B. (2006). *The processing pinnacle: An educator's guide to better processing*. Oklahoma City, OK: Wood 'N' Barnes Publishing.
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Jennifer L. Hinton
Associate Professor, School of Health Sciences
Western Carolina University

Sometimes processing feels like a secondary component to the main attraction. It is the broccoli of experiential education—vital to a well-balanced program, but except to those who are very process-oriented,—not as interesting as the main course. To carry the broccoli metaphor over just a little further, processing is an acquired taste. In fact, the overriding purpose of this book is to make processing more palatable to those who are tempted to push it under the plate (p. 23).

The Processing Pinnacle opens with a campfire conversation between McKinley and Yangtze, two seasoned experiential educators. This conversation lasts for several pages, weaving the reader through questions of formal and informal, participant-centered and facilitator-controlled processing structures. This first chapter ends with the question “So who’s right?” leaving the reader wanting to better understand how they too, may answer the question. The following two chapters in Section One explain basic definitions of processing and why processing is seen as such a difficult task.

Section Two contains a Processing Quiz and a section on interpreting the quiz results. As the authors state, the quiz helps the reader to “...clarify their processing techniques” (p. 33). The quiz is not an undertaking for the short-sighted; it took me over 20 minutes to complete (the authors recommend 30). However, the process of taking the quiz, along with the scoring and interpretation chapter proved to be quite fruitful. It improves the reader’s ability to understand where he or she feels comfortable (for example, whether they are more controlling or tend to allow the group to take control) and what techniques she or he is apt to use.

I consider myself a “seasoned facilitator,” and this chapter proved to invoke the type of reflection in me that I feel the authors intended. Why do I use method X so much more often than method Y? Is it because of the group I most often serve (college students)? Would I be using a different method more frequently if my clientele were more varied or of a completely different constitution? Am I well versed enough to be flexible and use the other areas that are not as often a part of my repertoire? These are some of the self-questions that arose to challenge me. Conversely, I believe that facilitators with little experience may also find an appropriate level of discovery; just understanding the principles may be enough for a beginner.

Section Three, the largest and final section, introduces the reader to *The Processing Pinnacle*, the model for which the book is named. The model is also closely linked to the Processing Matrix, which is the product of the quiz findings

in Section Two. The Pinnacle uses the metaphor of a mountain, wherein the peak—or ultimate goal—is the point at which your clientele is capable of independent reflection.

The authors admit they have experienced some resistance to the model—especially from therapeutic recreation specialists—because the pinnacle is not achievable by all individuals. This may be especially true for individuals with cognitive disabilities. The authors go on to state however, that even if some individuals do not reach the summit, it “...pokes out of the clouds as the ideal” (p. 75). Although I certainly understand the resistance of my therapeutic recreation colleagues, I also feel it is the job of the therapeutic recreation specialist to help each client to find his or her own personal pinnacle. There are many “ideals” in society that are not achievable by many. It is up to us, not only as therapists with clients but also as individuals within our own lives, to choose our own ideals and decide how far up a mountain we wish to—or can—climb.

The following chapters after the initial explanation of the model examine each of the levels of the model in greater detail, guiding the reader through techniques on Facilitator Frontloading, Traditional Question and Answer, Participant-Directed Processing, and Independent Reflection. Throughout these chapters, the reader returns to conversations between McKinley and Yangtze as ways to punctuate points. There are also many snippets of vignettes and practical applications that make this book more three-dimensional, and seemingly applicable, than a standard text. The appendices highlight this trend by including “A Few Processing Activities” and “A Facilitator’s Field Guide.”

This book has been in print for over a year now, and this may lead to some questions as to why this serves as a timely review. I believe that processing is a skill from which many types of educators and practitioners can benefit. Many of our students will take jobs upon graduation wherein they will be asked to help their clientele find the “why” beyond the activity at hand—especially in the current climate of providing outcomes for all actions. Unfortunately, outside of the outdoor and experiential education fields, I find little at conferences or in conversations with colleagues about this skill. Processing has many applications across the scope of recreation, education, and therapy provision. This text contains a unique approach to understanding processing from a theoretical model, but also using a writing style accessible to a wide variety of audiences. I could easily envision applications for both undergraduate and graduate level recreation courses.

I became fully engaged with this book as a reader. Admittedly, I am one of the “broccoli lovers”: I enjoy the processing as much or more than the action. One of the main benefits of this book is that the authors not only make clear why reflection and action need each other, but also how a person may make sense out of the complex reflection process, which is often riddled with many variables of intuition and experience. The book guided the reader through information, action, and reflection activities and provided a sufficient blend of theory and practice, making it a worthy addition to both my library and classroom.