

Inner growth from sharing one's own perceptions

BY TOM RUE AND BOB MEHLMAN

If you weren't at the Personal Growth Lab on October 19th through the 21st, you missed something special. On that weekend a group of about 50 students had a lot of fun and learned a great deal about themselves and other people.

At the same time, they enjoyed the natural beauty of the northern Poconos. And the weekend was both exciting and relaxing for almost everyone.

So how did this happen? Since the mid 1960's the Personal Growth Lab has provided a unique chance for learning in groups. In a setting away from the campus participants, under the guidance of trained professionals (called facilitators), spend time together in groups of eight to 12 people. The focus in these groups is on sharing feelings and perceptions. The process is one of self-learning in a warm and supportive social environment.

Because of this opportunity to explore their own behavior (the reason why this is called a Personal Growth Lab), most participants learn how to listen more

effectively to other people, to respond to them with empathy and understanding, and to become more effective communicators. At this lab, too, students often develop deep and satisfying friendships which continue long after the weekend.

A major characteristic of the lab is the emphasis on personal choice. Although participants often share aspects of themselves that they did not believe others would understand, the supportive atmosphere, the high level of trust, and the sense of power gained from taking responsibility for the conduct of one's own life, make the risk possible.

The changes in the faces of participants tell the story of the weekend. At the beginning of the PGL, most participants are guarded and a little anxious and faces are tense and drawn. Conversation sounds like a cocktail party. By the last day there is more laughter, more spontaneity, more openness; people are relaxed and look at each other when they talk.

Nearly 90 percent of the participants said they found the weekend so



On the weekend Personal Growth Lab trips, people learn about themselves and each other by sharing their feelings and perceptions. At a recent PGL weekend trip, Rae Fulco, undergraduate Trenton State student, shows her affection for Bob Mehlman, English professor and PGL facilitator, as Nate Passen, another PGL facilitator, looks on.

photo by Tom Rue

rewarding that they plan to return for the spring lab next April. One student wanted to do it again "because the experience, the feeling, and the atmosphere were a refreshing and helpful change." Another person reported that he would like to return "because I believe in PGL; because I like the quality of my own personal experience, and because I like what I see happen here."

The PGL is entirely student run and is supported by the Student Finance

Board. An opportunity like this usually costs upwards of \$200. Trenton State College students can go for \$10. The committee meets Wednesdays in Ely House at 7:30 p.m. and would like to see even more Trenton State students and faculty attend in the spring on the weekend of April 11th to 14th. Plan for it now though, because those who have gone want to return. Who wouldn't want to go to a place where you can be appreciated for just being you?