Experiential Dynamics, Inc.

Adventure-Based Experiential Education

What is Adventure-Based Experiential Education?

Most researches trace the origins of modern Adventure-Based Education to Kurt Hahn. In 1941, Hahn devised the first Outward Bound Program for the Blue Funnel Shipping Lines to reduce deaths in the North Atlantic due to shipping disasters at sea. The month long course was designed to develop decision making, initiative, physical fitness, resourcefulness and the ability to work with others. Due to the success of this course, Hahn set up many such schools across Europe and a program was born.

Adventure-Based Education is based in Experiential Education where participants are expected to “discover” answers on their own, not through lecture. We use cooperative games, trust activities, group initiatives, challenge courses (low & high) and wilderness experiences to teach concepts that need to be “discovered” and addressed by individuals and groups.

Our Adventure-Based programs are characterized by an atmosphere that is fun, supportive and challenging. Activities will provide participants with physical, emotional and mental challenges. The main goal is always “safe fun”, with the emphasis on “safe”, including both physical and emotional safety. This atmosphere encourages individuals as well as groups to reach beyond their perceived limits, set and reach higher goals, improve confidence, increase self-esteem and develop strategies that enhance problem solving and decision making skills. Groups will discover the power of cooperation, acceptance of individuals strengths and weaknesses, while learning to respect personal differences within the group.

Two main concepts establish the foundations on which we build: The Full Value Contract & Challenge by Choice. These two concepts give individuals and groups the self-empowerment and safety to take risks. These “perceived risks” enable individuals and groups to grow in the process of change and discovery. The philosophy of participation is not based on competition against others, but rather with oneself in a fun and supportive environment. Therefore, age and great athletic ability do not determine success since success is measured against oneself. Group success is determined by everyone succeeding, not a chosen few.

What types of Experiential Adventure-Based Programs are available?

Group Initiatives Experiences

Group initiative experiences can be conducted in almost any location and consist of cooperative games, trust activities, and problem solving games. Some of the issues addressed include: communication, listening skills, following directions, problem solving, leadership/followership, respecting individual differences within a group, and responsibility for one’s own actions.

Low Challenge Course Experiences

These low ropes experiences are based on the individual’s actions and how those actions affect others around them and group cohesion as a whole. Low elements are made from cables and ropes attached to trees or poles that range in height from one to five feet off the ground. Some of the issues addressed include: communication, listening skills, following directions, trust, power of group cooperation, physical & emotional support, decision making, problem solving, leadership/followership, respecting individual differences within a group and responsibility for one’s own actions. Many low challenge course experiences are combined with group initiative experiences.

High Challenge Course Experiences

High ropes experiences are characterized more by individuals challenging their own “perceived limits” within a supportive respectful group environment. High elements are made from cables and ropes attached to trees or poles that range in height from twenty-five to seventy feet off the ground. All climbers are attached to a top rope belay system consisting of a rope tied to the climber that runs
through a pulley hanging from a cable (tested to 17,000 lbs.) above their head and returning to a highly trained professional that will guide the participant through the physically, emotionally and intellectually challenging experiences. Some of the issues addressed are: goal setting, challenging one’s own fears and perceived limits, how a group can affect an individual’s success, dealing with problems one step at a time, and belief in one’s self.

**Wilderness Experiences**

Wilderness experiences are personal and group challenges in a beautiful natural setting. Modeled after the well-respected Outward Bound philosophy of inter-group dependence, the experience will promote “0” impact on the environment, natural consequences, progression of skills, safe fun and group dynamics. Activities may include: rock climbing, hiking, camping, canoeing, kayaking, white water rafting, mountain biking and back packing. Programs can draw from a wide range of geographic areas and range from one day to multi-day trips that are designed to fit each groups individual needs.

**FULL VALUE CONTRACT**

1. **Agree to be Safe.**
   Create a level of safety by being present mentally, physically and emotionally.

2. **Agree to value individuals and the group.**
   Be supportive physically and emotionally by listening and making everyone feel needed and important to success.

3. **Agree to give and receive honest feedback.**
   Everyone has the right to let others know their feelings and thoughts. We must be conscious of how we say things, so others can deal with what we say and not how we say it. Feedback should be specific, descriptive, and observable.

4. **Agree to “let go” of negative feelings, stale issues and move on.**
   We need to listen to each other, come to the best understanding possible, and then move on in the process of learning and growth. Carrying negative baggage from place to place will only disrupt our lives.

**CHALLENGE BY CHOICE**

1. **Agree to participate to the best of your ability.**
   A person must give their best try, physically, emotionally and mentally. That is all that can be expected from anyone.

2. **Be responsible for your own actions.**
   A person must be responsible for “all” actions they take.

3. **Choose your level of challenge.**
   Everyone must choose the level of participation they are comfortable with that reflects their best effort.
How can Experiential Adventure-based activities be used?

BUILDING A SAFE, RESPECTFUL, RESPONSIBLE CLASSROOM

One of the most critical issues in schools today is to create an environment for positive and ongoing education, beginning with the classroom. Classroom environment means more than lights, heating, and the style of desk that is most comfortable for learning. It would be difficult to learn with lighting that doesn’t allow students to see the board, a lack of heat that caused everyone to wear jackets, or desks that cause physical discomfort. An atmosphere stressing physical and emotional safety is essential if this positive environment is to be established. Before one can focus on academics, we first must establish the three R’s: Respect, Responsibility, and Relationships.

Respect for one’s self and others as well as other basic SKILLS FOR LIVING have been documented by research as lacking in our children today. Some basic skills for living include emotional and physical support, providing and listening to constructive feedback, “put-ups” rather than “put-downs”, group inclusion, valuing each other’s differences, compromise, letting go of “stale” or negative issues, problem solving / decision making skills and goal setting. These are many of the skills that our students must have if they are to be prepared for the future. These are concepts and actions that can be taught and fostered in our classrooms.

If a student, or any person for that matter, is expected to take risks or challenges, they must first of all feel safe physically and emotionally. Challenges and trying new things (risk taking) is the basis for growth in individuals and groups alike. Hopefully we are asking our students to accept challenges every day, whether it is diving for a trapeze at 30 feet, trying a new math problem, or giving an oral report in front of the entire class. A safe, supportive, valuing, and positive climate must be established as a basic premise first. For the above climate to be established, accepting each other’s differences and being conscious of making all feel included and necessary are a must. Honest constructive feedback, when given properly, can establish a basis for compromise: a skill we must all learn if we are to be with others. These actions can build healthy relationships in our classrooms as well as give our students the experiences for doing the same in their own lives.

For one to develop responsibility, the ability to make decisions is necessary. One must be taught the skills to do this, and they must be practiced if problem-solving potential is to be developed. The final skill necessary is goal setting. If one does not have a good idea or plan for what they want to accomplish, they will probably end up somewhere else.

BUILDING SKILLS NECESSARY FOR SUCCESS IN THE CLASSROOM

Too often, assumptions are made about the background, skills, needs and learning styles of the students that are in our classrooms. Without a strong foundation one cannot build a permanent structure. One of the reasons a pyramid stands so well is the strength of its base. The same base or foundation must also exist in a student if he or she is to stand up strong in their educational endeavors and pursuits. Basic skills such as concentration, memorization, listening, following directions, sequencing, gathering of facts, theorizing, planning, and problem solving are the base or foundation on which to build. We have all been born with different abilities. Our job as a teacher, no matter our subject area, is to assist in enhancing to the greatest level possible this foundation, while taking into account the abilities of each individual.

Games and activities, even play, can be adapted to assist in development of these basic skills. Experiential learning, to learn by doing, can not only make learning fun, but also have implicit concepts be made explicit experiences. As described in the following proverb:

To see is to recognize
To write is to recite
To hear is to remember (maybe?)
To do is to know
Concentration can mean many things and can be a conceptual way of approaching any situation. What we need to make “known” is what actions make up this thing we call concentration and what does each individual have to do to accomplish this to the best of their own ability. Many games and activities such as Group Juggle, Zip Zap Zoom, Speed Rabbit and Impulse games can assist in developing concentration. When gains are made or success is accomplished, stop the group and focus on “how did it feel”, “what specifically did you do”. That, from now on is what I want you to feel and do when I ask you to concentrate. Participants will get the feeling of concentration, not just the concept.

Memorization is very much dependent on concentration. Not all people have the same ability to concentrate or memorize any more then all people have the same ability to run a long distance. We all have our parameters, but with the correct practice and concentration, memorization as well as long distance running will improve. Memorization is used in games like Toss-a-name, Speed Rabbit, and Hidden path. Memorizing the rules of a new game, or for that matter, the new rules of a known activity promotes skill development. The basic ingredient is to make it fun! People learn better when they enjoy themselves.

Listening Skills are necessary for one to be able to follow directions; much of listening is dependent upon concentration. Many of these skills are interdependent. So, a basic progression of skills is necessary. Concentration > Listening > Following Directions. Almost any game or activity can be used to accomplish this if your main focus is put on “how the group plays” rather than “what the group is playing”.

Gathering of Facts is necessary in everything from reading to problem solving. Games such as Footsie, Help Me Rhonda, Mrs. O’Grady, Goonie Likes, and What Is It provide physical practice in this skill.

Sequencing is next in the line of progression. Any activity that can be broken into actions done in a specific order can teach sequencing.

Theorizing, Planning and Problem Solving is addressed by doing Group Initiatives. Group Initiatives are real or made up situations that present a problem. Real situations can be used like: “I want you to make as much room in our classroom as possible”, “You can’t touch my desk or block the door”, “No talking”, “Go”. Contrived circumstances used in numerous Group Initiatives can provide the same.

Goal Setting is developed through a Personal Action Plan, and can be used by an individual or group. The Personal Action Plan is not a static document, but rather a dynamic document, which means it should be revisited often to be evaluated and revised, not done once and put into a drawer.

For further information:

D. Craig Erb, President
484-883-2352
expdyn@msn.com

Jay Erb
610-970-2408
jayerb@yahoo.com