**ENG 280: Third Place**

# Adventure Education

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Exercise is a very difficult task to perform continuously if you don't enjoy what you're doing or don't feel like it's challenging you in new ways. If kids aren't enjoying exercise and getting the recommended amount, it's unlikely that they'll continue to try to do it their entire lives. A new approach is getting implemented into multiple school programs called "Adventure Education." It allows students to experience a different learning style by being in a new environment and using different skills. "Adventure Education occurs outdoors, incorporating extreme conditions, and online through expedition activities. It combines experiential learning with decision making, team building, and the application of real-world situations to the learning environment" (Graziano). Adventure Education challenges all students in new ways beyond just exercise. It builds character and leadership, trust in relationships, self-esteem, and confidence while releasing inhibitions, and it is a powerful newly recognizable form of education for problem-solving and teamwork. If that isn't enough, Adventure Education is even a great escape for disabled students.

This is a new approach that is shaping America and helping students find their passions in doing tasks with perceived risk that they haven't done during the past ten years of their education. The subject is meant to train your mind in new ways. Some of the activities students participate in may stretch their comfort level. By no means do they have to participate in an activity that is beyond their comfort level. Doing this means that teachers that are implementing Adventure Education programs should be looking for improvement. For example, if you can't get to the top of a rock wall that is fine, but as a teacher we want you to get one or two rocks

higher than you have done in the past, and your students will encourage you to excel in this manner by cheering you on (Zimmerman). Ultimately, Adventure Education is an approach to instructional design that actively engages students in authentic, mentally and physically challenging tasks. It follows a specific process through which teachers facilitate learning activities that gradually increase in risk level (Graziano). For students who may be afraid, the first way to build confidence is by building relationships with your peers to trust them in whatever risky activity you may be participating in.

Building trust and confidence in both your peers and yourself is crucial in the development of Adventure Education and leadership. There are multiple themes to move students toward achievement:  getting acquainted and cooperating, building trust, communicating and collaborating, team challenge, problem-solving, and low-level initiatives (Tannehill). Common activities to help students get acquainted are ice breakers and problem-solving activities. This means the students must work as a team to get the task done, making sure to include everybody. If there is a problem-solving activity that the team can't seem to solve, sometimes the shy and quiet people have the best ideas and advice. From there, there is no reason that the team cannot try their peer's advice because it may resolve the problem-solving task, and if it doesn't, it cannot make it worse (Gabbei).

After problem-solving activities and icebreakers, the students will start to find similar interests and ideas and start to build trust. The next common steps are low-level initiatives and team challenges like trust falls. Teams start with trust falls on the ground and build up to higher objectives like tables. It's crucial that the students go with a partner they're not best friends with or as familiar with. A familiar example of low-level obstacle courses is walking the students' entire team across a log without touching the ground. The ground is lava, and if a student touches

it and falls off the log on accident, the entire team has to start over and keep trying until they succeed. Finally, the teams proceed to high ropes courses and pursue rock climbing training while belaying their partners because they trust them enough to do so and have been building their relationships for weeks (Gabbei). Besides ensuring students' safety and creating activities that foster cooperation and communication, instructors must provide emotional support to help students' fears and self-doubt. "You constantly have students saying, 'I can't do it,'" says Daniel Brundage, a prestigious New Jersey professor. "You can't be standing on the sidelines, you have to be nurturing, comforting and encouraging students, while continually assessing whether a situation constitutes a genuine emergency or is just an emotional crisis that can be overcome." None of this could be accomplished without communication from peers.

Communication and constant encouragement from your peers are essential components to achieving your goals and bettering your performance. The goal is to provide a challenge with a choice if a student feels they are incapable of performing a task. The student starts at their comfort zone where they feel safe. They transition into their groan zone where the perceived challenge may be viewed as a threat on some level, and finally they proceed into the growth zone where they can achieve success because of encouragement from their peers and integrate new knowledge and skills with what they already know how to do. The goal is that the growth zone will eventually become the comfort zone (Tannehill).

Another important source of communication is creating a full value contract with your students. The full value contract is an agreement developed by and agreed to among members of a group to create an effective learning environment for all students in Adventure Education. The class designs a contract to cover all their needs and concerns including specific criteria of how they will function as a group and as individuals. They are then asked to agree to their behavior

guidelines as a way of ensuring that everyone fully understands what is expected and appropriate. The contract includes aspects like, what we are doing, when are we doing it, why are we doing it, and how we are doing it; this is the pre-discussion. Next, the activity takes place, and following the activity is the post-discussion. This is many times the most important part because students reflect on what they have learned, if they have questions, and what they want to improve on for next time. Processing or debriefing the adventure can give the activities greater meaning rather than using adventure activities purely for recreation. It can be summed up as experiencing, reflecting, generalizing, and applying (Tannehill). Before moving onto a new Adventure Education topic, the class must remain committed to being here, being safe, setting goals, letting go and moving on, and being honest and present (Gudelhofer). Ultimately, the full value contract will help the students feel a sense of ownership of the adventure and have a physically, emotionally, and cognitively safe environment.

The goal of the communication stage is for participants to understand that communication is complex and can be accomplished in a variety of ways including verbal, nonverbal, writing, and listening. Students learn to take turns verbalizing their ideas and listening to others' ideas (Gudelhofer). Finally, the communication stage is important for developing social skills. For example, the game *blind forms* requires students to make a shape while all participants hold a circular rope and wear blindfolds. The participants need to work together to move as a group to make the directed shape. Students practice giving and receiving directions from a peer. After the participants are content with the shape, the instructor has them take their blindfolds off and look at the shape they formed. The instructor will lead the participants in a discussion, asking them how they think they did. What was helpful and what could they have done better? (Zimmerman). Another impressive leadership skill that students show through communication is working

directly with disabled students in Adventure Education to make them feel as if they are like anybody else; because that's how they should be treated in the first place.

Adventure Education can empower children with special needs whose attitudes towards learning and school are often negative due to an experienced failure. In the last twenty years, Adventure Education programs have had a series of positive effects on personal and social development, academic performances and leadership abilities for a wide variety of participants and age groups (Stoica). Since disabled students can perform activities individually, this commonly produces eustress which is beneficial to the development of their self-concept. It's such a positive source for students because Adventure Education is typically non-competitive and performed in a semi-predictable environment which allows for disabled students to feel safe.

Though promoted, when Adventure Education is performed outside there are a lot of general concerns (Florina). Children with special needs are often overprotected by parents, guardians, and teachers, therefore it is crucial to give those children a chance to distinguish themselves and give them opportunities to show their abilities and competences. For example, many parents are afraid to let their disabled children be outdoors. However, in multiple Adventure Education classes, nature and being outdoors has been called a "co-facilitator of change." Some even go as far as to say that nature has spiritual powers (Grenier). In addition to an outdoor aspect, disabled students need to develop the same concepts as every other student in the classroom in regards to trust and team-building. Their peers serve as the mediators by modifying activities and bridging instructional gaps that may exist when students with disabilities are included in general Physical Education.

After enough groundwork had been accomplished with trust, communication, and safety, students were ready to participate in the adventure activities. Steven, a student with down

syndrome, had attempted the challenge. After tying him into his harness, seven students and the Physical Education teacher lifted his 300-pound frame 25 feet into the air. Steve smiled gleefully as they slowly lowered him to the ground. Over the next several weeks of classes, with the support and encouragement of his fellow students, he completed the challenge six more times. This is only a beginning in showing how Adventure Education can promote high levels of participation and enthusiasm (Florina). The most important value students can get out of an Adventure Education program is to transfer these skills into their daily lives.

Adventure education supplies innumerable benefits, including physical and mental acuity and emotional and social skills that serve students in college, the workforce, and family life. “Students learn how to trust themselves and their classmates. I watch self-confidence building and friendships forming as students conquer their fear of heights and learn they can accomplish anything they set out to.” Students know their success is based on helping and caring for each other (Brundage). Ultimately, in Adventure Education students are placed in situations where they must focus on their strengths and need to overcome increasingly difficult challenges by working as a part of a team. This creates opportunities for the development of traits such as emotional stability, assertiveness, and social competence. Adventure Education helps students mature themselves through experiences which promote physical, cognitive and emotional development. It’s crucial to help the development of students in their academic career to try something new and enjoy what they’re doing. Then, it’s their choice if they choose to continue it the rest of their lives or even promote it to help inspire others.

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