

Chapter 14

The Semantics of Adventure Programming

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Outdoor Education

The broad field known as outdoor education encompasses everything from scaling a major Himalayan peak without oxygen, through taking school children outside the classroom for their learning, to bird watching from the bedroom window. Outdoor education has been described as a place (natural environment), a subject (ecological processes), and a reason (resource stewardship) for learning. It has been called a method (experiential), a process (sensory), and a topic (relationships) of learning. However, these explanations have failed to address the facts that outdoor education may take place indoors (trip preparation) and may be concerned with more than ecology (human interactions).

One definition includes all these valid points: outdoor education is an experiential method of learning with the use of all senses. It takes place primarily, but not exclusively, through exposure to the natural environment. In outdoor education the emphasis for the subject of learning is placed on relationships concerning people and natural resources.

This definition implies that outdoor education is more than just learning about nature. Historically, two branches of outdoor education have been identified: environmental education and adventure education. Truly functional outdoor education incorporates aspects of both approaches. Here are explanations of the two approaches in relation to the key point of relationships.

Environmental Education

Environmental education is concerned with two relationships: ecosystemic and ekistic. Ecosystemic relationships refer to the interdependence of living organisms in an ecological microclimate; in other words, basic biological concepts like the web of life, the food chain, and the energy pyramid. Ekistic relationships refer to the key interactions between human society and the natural resources of an environment; in other words, how people influence the quality of the environment (water pollution or strip mining) and how in turn, the environment influences the quality of their lives (clean drinking water or the spiritual beauty of nature).

Adventure Education

Adventure education is also concerned with two relationships, but different ones: interpersonal and intrapersonal. Interpersonal relationships refer to how people get along in a group (two or more people). These include communication, cooperation, trust, conflict resolution, problem solving, and leadership influence. Intrapersonal relationships refer to how an individual gets along with self. These include self-concept, spirituality, confidence, and self-efficacy.

The premise of adventure education is that change may take place in groups and individuals from direct and purposeful exposure to: challenge, high adventure, and new

growth experiences. This is not to say that adventure education causes change; just that it highlights a need to change and supports any personal decisions to make changes.

The purpose of adventure education is to bring about an awareness for these positive changes. A subpurpose is to enhance the self-concept and improve social interaction. For these reasons, adventure education has become a powerful tool for modifying the behaviors of many client groups from functionally disabled persons, through individuals who feel socially and personally inadequate, to incarcerated people who are disruptive or destructive to society.

The process of adventure education involves the use of adventurous activities such as recreational pursuits in the outdoors or the so-called artificial adventure environs (ropes courses and group initiatives). These activities are used to provide a group or an individual with tasks to accomplish. These tasks often involve problem solving and challenge. The problem solving requires decision making, judgment, cooperation, communication, and trust. The challenge may take the form of testing one's competence against mental, social or physical risks. To maximize safety, the risk is structured in a manner where it is perceived as being enormously high, while in reality, it is controlled at acceptable low levels.

The product of adventure education is personal growth and development. By responding to seemingly insurmountable tasks, groups and individuals learn to overcome almost any self-imposed perceptions of their capability to succeed. They are able to turn limitations into abilities; and, as a result, they learn a great deal about themselves and how they relate to others.

Outdoor Recreation

Very simply put, outdoor recreation is any activity done outdoors. This broad definition spans the spectrum from gardening, through camping out, to racing cars.

Outdoor Pursuits

Outdoor pursuits are a subset of outdoor recreation. They represent the self-propelled activities performed in an outdoor setting. Some common examples include walking, backpacking, rock climbing, mountaineering, skiing, snowshoeing, orienteering, bicycling, spelunking, sailing, kayaking, rafting, and canoeing. They *do not* include other outdoor recreational activities that are motorized (such as snowmobiling, motorcycling, car racing, and power boating) *nor* animal powered (such as horse riding and dogsledding). While the latter are definitely outdoor recreation, they lack the low-impact environmental philosophy which is expected to go hand-in-hand with outdoor pursuits.

Leisure

Recreational activities take place during an experience known as leisure. In leisure, the process of the experience is the most important part; as opposed to work, where the product is all important. For example, playing music to earn money is work; while playing for the sheer enjoyment is leisure. For an experience to qualify as leisure, it must meet two criteria. First, it must be entered into voluntarily and of free choice; and second, it must be intrinsically motivating in and of its own merit.

Adventure

Adventure is a subset of the leisure experience. For something to qualify as an adventure experience it must meet the two criteria mentioned for leisure, and must meet a third criterion: the outcome must be uncertain. Consider two individuals who go for a walk in the woods. The first is walking because she enjoys getting exercise and likes the outdoors (she is at leisure: free choice and intrinsic motivation). The second is walking because he is placating her, doesn't want to be there, and hopes to get back to the TV as quickly as possible (he is not at leisure: obligatory attendance and extrinsically motivated). If some uncertainty arises, only she is capable of experiencing an adventure. He may become excited and may even enjoy the event, but by definition, the experience cannot qualify as adventurous since he is not at leisure.

Uncertainty

The outcome of an adventure is uncertain when information (critical to the completion of a task or the solution of a problem) is missing, vague, or unknown. For example, on an outdoor journey the outcome is uncertain when the necessary skill or confidence may be lacking; when the leadership influence, task definition, or group morale may appear unclear; and when the weather might be somewhat unpredictable. These conditions all lead to uncertainty through risk.

Risk

Risk is the potential to lose something of value. The loss may lead to physical (broken bones), mental (psychological fear), social (peer embarrassment), or financial (lost or damaged equipment) harm. From moment to moment, no one can be fully sure that a loss will actually occur, hence the uncertainty creating adventure in a leisure experience. Risk is created from the presence of dangers.

Danger

Danger gives rise to risk. They are not the same. Dangers are present in both people and their surroundings. Dangers may be classified as either perils or hazards.

Peril

Perils are the sources of the loss. A lightning bolt is one example. It is the source that leads to the risk of electrocution.

Hazard

Hazards are the conditions which influence the probability or likelihood of a loss actually occurring. An intense thunderstorm is one example. It is the hazard which accentuates the number of lightning bolts.

Human Dangers

Dangers (perils and hazards) may originate from the people in a group. Peer pressure, lack of attention, horseplay, and incompetence are all examples of human dangers. These are said to be subjective or under the control of the group and their leader.

Environmental Dangers

Dangers (perils and hazards) may also come from the natural surroundings. Avalanches, whitewater rapids, poisonous plants or animals, and temperature extremes are all examples of environmental dangers. These are said to be objective or not controllable by the group and their leader.

Accidents

The accident is an unexpected occurrence which results in a loss (illness, injury, or fatality). An accident only becomes an emergency if the group and its leader are not prepared to respond correctly. The potential for an accident occurs if the human and environmental dangers are permitted to occur simultaneously. Kept separate, whitewater rapids and horseplay are just fine; but allowed to combine at the same time leads to the possibility of an accident. This does not mean an accident will always be probable. Accidents can be prevented by effective leadership. However, the concern is not a matter of *will* there be an accident, but *when* will it happen. Be prepared!

Incidents

Incidents or close calls are the unforeseen happenings which do not develop into emergencies. Through effective leadership, the accident is prevented or the conse-

quences are reduced. Incidents can be thought of as minor accidents where the losses are acceptable (e.g., cuts, scrapes, and bruises). Acceptability is a personal matter. Acceptable losses to one person, may not be acceptable to another. Death is acceptable to some Himalayan climbers, while a bump on the head may not be to a child's mother.

Risk

Once again, risk is the potential to lose something of value. The risks may be physical, mental, social, or financial. Risk may have two possible values: real and perceived.

Real Risk

Real risk is the true potential for loss: that which actually occurs in an adventure. If no loss occurs, then the real risk was zero. If the person died, then the real risk was extreme. No one can tell with absolute certainty where the real risk lies at any time. However, it can be estimated. Effective leaders with sound judgment and plenty of experience can usually perceive the risk accurately, but not always.

Perceived Risk

The best estimation of real risk is known as perceived risk. For a novice, the perception of risk may be flawed. Fearful people tend to overperceive the risk, while fearless people tend to underperceive it. Only through intensive and extensive experience can a person gain an astute perception of risk.

Competence

An adventurer uses competence (a combination of skill, attitude, knowledge, behavior, confidence and experience) in an attempt to solve the problem or achieve the task. Like risk, it may have two possible values: real and perceived.

Real Competence

Real competence is the true ability of the individual: that which is actually mustered in an adventure. If no loss occurs, then the real competence was sufficient. If the person died, then the real competence was insufficient. No one, not even the adventurers, can tell with absolute certainty where their real competence lies at any time. However, like real risk, real competence can be estimated. Effective leaders with sound judgment and plenty of experience can usually perceive an individual's competence accurately, but not always.

Perceived Competence

The best estimation of real competence is known as perceived competence. For a novice, the perception of competence may be grossly inaccurate. Timid people tend to underperceive their competence, while arrogant people tend to overperceive theirs. Only through intensive and extensive experience can a person gain an astute perception of competence. Perceived competence is closely allied with self-efficacy: a measure of effectiveness and efficiency to perform a competency; in other words, the personal belief that a task can be accomplished or a problem solved.

Facilitated Adventure

The facilitated adventure is used to create astute adventurers. By manipulating perceived values of risk and competence, while keeping real values at acceptable levels, a reasonably well-controlled adventure experience is possible. Depending upon the objectives and precise structuring of such an experience, the misperceiving individuals will slowly come to better recognize real risk and real competence.