

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

To study skills programs, advances and innovations in outdoor education courses at High Ropes Schools and other institutions aimed at the education of the "self" through adventure oriented experiences, particularly those which deal with "at risk" youth – USA, Bermuda, Canada.

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1. INTRODUCTION

I am a member of the South Australian Police Department and current Manager of the Errappa Blue Light Camp in rural South Australia.

Blue Light is a crime reduction initiative by the South Australian Police Department that began in 1982. The main objective at that time was to address the growing problem of youth crime by providing wholesome and well supervised recreational activities for young people.

Blue Light's broad range of activities reflects the diverse needs of young people in our communities. Activities include camps, discos, sailing activities, drop-in centres and schools programs. Police and volunteers run Blue Light activities, a successful partnership that reflects support from both police and members of the community.

The long term objective of youth programs is to reduce crime by equipping young people with the life skills to be a responsible law abiding community member and to have a positive attitude towards police.

Blue Light Camp programs strive to equip participants with life skills and are educated about life decisions and consequences, while interacting with police at a social level, effectively breaking down the barriers and forming positive relationships. This is done in some part by providing adventure based experiential learning activities. These activities include high ropes activities, problem solving and team building initiatives.

Outdoor educators using adventure based activities have explored the therapeutic uses of camping, expeditions, and challenge courses since the 1940's.

Around that time, Kurt Hahn, the international developer of the Outward Bound program, believed that it was essential to develop both the bodies and minds of students. He was also strongly committed to the notion of community and service. These early ideas helped shape Outward Bound as one of the most influential experiential programs operating to this day.

From the decade of the 1970's to the present day, there has been growing interest in experiential learning and outdoor programs. The Project Adventure program, bringing experiential methods and techniques into the public school, was founded in 1971. On an international level, the Association for Experiential Education was officially founded in 1977, as was the Wilderness Education.

Since the 1970's, there has been a dramatic increase in the number and types of outdoor programs geared specifically toward troubled youth, especially in the USA.

A number of good studies have been done, which have provided evidence of the effectiveness of these programs, research studies using experiential education techniques with troubled youth found them effective in the moderate range.

(Cason, D., & Gillis, H. L. (1994)

These studies suggest generally positive results for outdoor programs for at risk youth.

My fellowship took me to the USA, Canada and Bermuda to see how experiential learning, in particular with outdoor recreation is being used with youth and at risk youth in these countries.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Having visited many institutions and sites in the United States, Canada and Bermuda, I find that programs here in Australia are remarkably similar to those I visited. Campsites were bigger, staff more numerous, but the enthusiasm was the same. I was drawn to the people I met in every location that are still filled with the same passion to give children the tools for life in an exciting and meaningful way, that in some small part may even change their life for the better.

In the USA this is reflected in the way that orders of government, such as the Juvenile Justice Commission in Trenton New Jersey I spoke to, supported the use of experiential education and challenge ropes course for “adjudicated” or incarcerated youth. Also at many levels before detention, the justice system was implementing courses to assist youth in living and maintaining a productive life by having programs that challenge the mind and the body in the way a challenge course does.

Many public and private schools include challenge ropes courses as part of the school curriculum to increase self esteem and promote teambuilding within the class, the school and the community.

Police Services too were involved in running programs for local and troubled youth, the most notable being the Syracuse Police Department in New York, and the Bermuda Police in Bermuda running a program in conjunction with Outward Bound. It is these kind of activities, run similar to the one I am involved with in Australia, that see police tackling the same issues with youth that we in Australia encounter and using the same tools of outdoor experiential education to improve citizenship and help foster self worth, team building and a positive outlook on life and their own community.

The delivery of these programs in North America is to an extremely high standard and professional in its approach. Industry standards in training, safety and facilitation are excellent. The industry has shown that although “perceived risk” is part of a challenge course, with professionally run programs, the chances of injury are much less than a lot of recognised sports.

As a national Police organisation, running 2 adventure based learning campsites in South Australia, Blue Light is the ideal vehicle to disseminate the information gained through this project.

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3. PROGRAM

Association for Challenge Course Technology Conference, South Carolina, USA

The Adventure Network, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Police Athletic League, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Thomas Middle School, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Templeton University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Edison Prep Program, Trenton, New Jersey, USA

Project USE, Trenton, New Jersey, USA

Juvenile Justice Commission, New Jersey, USA

Challenge Discovery, Ashland, Virginia, USA

Ashland Police Department, Ashland Virginia USA

Syracuse Police Department, Syracuse, New York, USA

Northside Community Police Centre, Syracuse, New York, USA

Clark Sports Centre, Cooperstown, New York, USA

Police Athletics League, New York, New York, USA

Bermuda Police Outward Bound School, Paget Island, Bermuda

National Challenge Course Practitioner's Symposium, Boulder, Colorado USA

Salvation Army Croc Centre, San Diego, California USA

Humbolt Adventures, San Diego, California USA

Camp Stevens, San Diego, California USA

Adventure Works, Hamilton, Canada

4. OUTDOOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Outdoor activities and the natural environment are a well recognised medium for developing teamwork, communication and personal skills. Many organisations use activities ranging from one-day enrichment programmes for schools to long term life skills courses for at risk youth. The programmes all use a mixture of indoor and outdoor activities as a vehicle for learning.

Experiential methods help students build positive traits and protective factors such as an increased sense of purpose, pro-social leadership skills, increased interpersonal skills and development of a positive classroom climate. Adventure-based problem-solving activities empower students to develop creativity and insight and then apply these skills to real-life situations and future learning.

4.1 Action Events

The activities used most commonly in experiential and/or adventure programming can be categorized as follows:

Socialization games - "ice breakers" designed to de-inhibit people and familiarize them with one another.

Group initiatives - group problem solving tasks that individually isolate a single teamwork tool (such as trust, communication, or collaboration) or collectively test those elements in combination. Whether it be initiating a new work group or enhancing the skills of an existing team, programs leave a lasting impact on peoples' abilities to communicate, cooperate and solve problems together. Adventure techniques combined with traditional training tools result in high levels of involvement, insight and finally the opportunity for change and improvement. Trained instructors conduct team challenges, use the high ropes course and create a safe and trusting environment to empower participants to step through their own boundaries and achieve what they never imagined possible.

Ropes or challenge courses - people negotiate challenges built high or low above ground level among trees or utility poles, where safety is provided by spotting (low) or belaying (high). A ropes course is a series of physical adventure challenges requiring a combination of teamwork skills and individual commitment. The elements of our high ropes course focus on the individual achievements of participants as they challenge themselves. Climbing up to the high elements and completing the challenge is adrenaline producing, high energy, and exhilarating fun. Even participants who are at first scared of heights accomplish what initially seemed impossible with the support and encouragement from team members. Physical safety is ensured through the use of a belay system with ropes, carabineers, harnesses and specialized hardware. With the

reassurance of trained facilitators every event is about perceived versus actual risk.

Outdoor pursuits - self-propelled outdoor or wilderness activities (rock climbing, canoeing, etc.) usually applied to complex interactions of individual and group issues (leadership, risk, etc.).

4.2 Experience Based Learning

All learning is experience-based. Whether we hear a lecture, watch a video, or read a book, our learning is "based" on those experiences. Unfortunately, we remember 20% of what we hear, 50% of what we see, but 80% of what we do.

*As Confucius said: I hear and I forget,
I see and I remember, I do and I understand.*

Experiential learning is founded more on the active “doing” rather than the passive “being done to”. In this way, people practice the very skills they are learning and are more likely to maintain their change back at work. Experience-based learning (action alone) becomes "experiential" when elements of reflection, transfer and support are added to the base experience:

- **Reflection** - purposefully examining the process of an experience enhances the awareness of learning and leads to changes in feeling, thinking or behaving that derive from that experience;
- **Transfer** - when change obtained in an experiential program shows up in the real life workplace: this transfer of experiential learning can be enhanced by the use of metaphors and isomorphs; and
- **Support** - providing time, resources, and team or project opportunities that permit people to continue changing (or maintaining new learning) and allows them to lessen their resistance.

4.3 Adventure

Adventure is a specific subset of experiential programming where the outcome of the experience is uncertain and may contain risks (physical, emotional, social, financial, etc.). Direct participation in action events requires us to use our competence to face our fears of the risks and to resolve the uncertainties of the outcomes. In dealing with these challenges, and by turning perceived limitations into abilities, we learn a great deal about our relationships with others and ourselves.

4.4 Programming

The deliberate use of action events and facilitated reflection to bring about lasting change and learning. There are four types of programs are defined by their purpose of change and learning:

- **Recreational** - designed to change the way people (to entertain, re-energize, relax, re-create, socialize, teach and learn new skills, etc.).
- **Educational** - intended to change the way people feel and think (to gain awareness of needs, to add knowledge of new concepts, to understand new ways to look at old or familiar concepts, etc.).
- **Developmental** - designed to change the way people feel, think, and behave (by increasing positive functional behaviour, by improving interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, etc.).
- **Redirect ional** - intended to change the way people feel, think, behave and resist (by decreasing negative dysfunctional behaviour, by reducing opposition and denial, etc.).

4.5. Facilitation

Facilitation is considered one of the most important factors in successfully running an adventure based learning program. Since reflection is the key to deeper learning that leads to more lasting change, anything that a "facilitator" does to enhance reflection before, during, or after an experience is called "facilitation

Six generations of facilitation techniques have evolved in experiential programming (Priest & Gass, 1997). These can be categorized, in order of historical occurrence and sophistication, as follows:

- Letting the experience speak for itself (1940's)
- Speaking for the experience (1950's)
- Debriefing or funnelling the experience (1960's)
- Directly frontloading the experience (1970's)
- Framing the experience (1980's)
- Indirectly frontloading the experience (1990's)

4.5.1 Letting the experience speak for itself

This is a method found in numerous programs where clients are left to sort out their own personal insights. This approach is fine, provided that identified or prescriptive intrapersonal and interpersonal goals are not sought (such as in recreational programs). Clients may well have a good time and possibly become proficient at new skills, but they are less likely to have learned anything about themselves, how they relate with others, or how to resolve confronting issues in their lives.

4.5.2 Speaking for the experience

This is when a facilitator would provide the group with feedback about their general behaviours after the activity was completed: what they did well, what they need to work on, and what they learned from the exercise. In debriefing, facilitators ask clients for their opinions and refrain from making statements to clients. In this way, clients learn to think for themselves and begin to take ownership over confronting issues (educational programs). If they "own" their issues, they are more likely to commit to changing the situation and to following through on their commitments. In a debrief discussion, clients are asked (under the guidance of a questioning facilitator) to reflect on their experiences and to discuss points of learning that they believe took place. The discussion can take a free form and shift from topic to topic as the group needs or can be prescribed or "funnelled" in a direction that the facilitator determines is best. This latter type of debriefing is called funnelling, where questions are carefully sequenced toward an outcome.

4.5.3 Debriefing the experience

In this, a facilitator would foster a group discussion concerning the details, analysis, and evaluation of the group's behaviour following activity completion. Sample questions of this facilitation style might include: "what happened?, what was the impact of this?, how did that make you feel?, what did you learn from this?, what aspects for this activity were metaphors of your life?, and what will you do differently next time?" In its simplest form, frontloading refers to asking questions before the experience rather than afterwards in a debrief discussion. The term literally means to load learning in front of an experience by emphasizing key points that provide an opportunity for clients to change during the experience rather than afterwards (as is the case with usual debriefing). When questions are asked of the clients, the frontloading is said to be "direct" (compare with indirect frontloading later in this section).

4.5.4 Frontloading the experience

Using this, a facilitator would introduce say, a Spider's Web with the same logistical briefing as usual (Group members should be passed through the opening in the web, from this side to that one, without touching the strands. Contact with a strand wakes the spider, which bites

you and causes you to start over. A repeat contact sends your whole group back to the beginning). In addition to this, the leader would add a series of questions to focus the learning prior to the activity (what do you think this exercise might teach you?, why is learning this important?, how might your learning help you in the future?, do you recall from past exercises what each of you wanted to work on in situations like this?). Since this frontloaded pre-briefing has already covered many of the topics usually held in debrief, the concluding discussion can concentrate on changes made during the experience.

4.5.5 Framing

This refers to how a facilitator introduces an experience. Three types of frames are common: fantasy, reality and isomorphic. In a fantasy framework, the facilitator weaves a tale of intriguing "fairytales" and uses imaginary scenarios like giant spiders, nuclear bombs, poison yogurt, and rivers of acid. In a reality framework, the props in an activity are called by their real names: grass, wooden planks, ropes, and out-of-bounds areas. In an isomorphic framework, the introduction is presented as if it is actually the reality of the client's workplace. Not only are the names changed to fit the culture and context of the client, but the consequences and rewards associated with the experience are also changed to suit the situation and desired outcome. Isomorphs are the parallel structures added to the adventure experience by the facilitator so clients are encouraged to make certain metaphoric linkages that enhance transfer because the two learning environments (experience and work) become mirror images of one another (making this technique particularly useful in developmental programs).

Isomorphic framing

Using this, a facilitator would address the briefing in terms of the similar structures between the adventure and corresponding present life experiences of the client. For example, the Spider's Web (see rules in description above) becomes a distribution network (the web) through which goods and services (team members) are passed from the warehouse (one side) to the customer's many outlets (other side). Passage takes place along unique routings (openings) and contact with the network (brushing up against a strand) damages the goods and services which means they need to be returned to the warehouse. If damaged goods and services are purposely passed on to the customer, then all shipments will be refused by the customer and returned to the warehouse to be fixed and shipped again! If this form of introduction is a strong metaphor of the workplace for this company, then the debrief need only focus on reinforcing learning changes made in the experience.

4.5.6 Indirect frontloading

This is used only as a last resort: when all other approaches have failed, only in the clients' best interests, and specifically for addressing

continuing problematic issues (as in redirection programs). For example, the harder a client tries to eliminate an unwanted issue, the more it occurs; or the more a client tries to attain a desired result, the more elusive it becomes.

Section 4.5 Priest, S. (1996–2004) <http://www.tarrak.com/EXP/exp.htm>

4.6 Risk Taking

Five conditions of challenge exist and depend upon the blend of risk and competence.

- exploration and experimentation (minimal risk and maximal competence),
- adventure (more competence than risk),
- peak adventure (equal or matching levels),
- misadventure (more risk than competence),
- devastation and disaster (maximal risk and minimal competence)

People can use personal competence to influence the probabilities of success or failure in an adventure, provided their perceptions are correct. In short, they will be motivated to select risks which suit their level of perceived competence in the belief that they can positively influence the uncertainty of the adventure to a final outcome in their favour.

4.7 At Risk Youth

The term “at risk” when discussing youth can give a myriad of answers, all adolescents are arguably at risk on one level or another. We consider youth at risk as those who experience personal, family, economic, or community situations which may increase the possibility of negative behaviours. Examples of negative behaviours include getting in trouble in school, dropping out of school, joining a gang, becoming sexually active, and using alcohol and drugs. These behaviours can lead to criminal activity, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Estimates suggest that as many as half of today's youth run a moderate to high risk of experiencing school failures or participating in early sexual activity, alcohol and drug use, and criminal behaviours.

When visiting the USA, I discovered many of the people I spoke with considered incarcerated youth or youth in detention “at risk”. It took some time for me to realise the difference in our perceptions of the term, and found we were talking apples and oranges, not just apples. When I realised their view, I stated that I considered youth to be at risk before detention, not after, I was informed they were considered “at risk” of going into detention as an adult.

5. TRAINING QUALIFICATION and CERTIFICATION STANDARDS

In an increasingly litigious environment, training, qualification and certification to run the activities of an adventure based training camp are becoming essential.

It is interesting to note that a “Project Adventure” 20 year study of 57 million participant hours showed an injury rate of 4.3 injuries per million hours. This rate is significantly lower than many well accepted sports and other physical activities.
(Project Adventure: 2004 <http://members.pa.org/CircleUp>)

5.1 Training and Qualification

I believe it is important as a Police Officer in South Australian Police Force to have the appropriate level of qualifications, skills and expertise to manage all the activities attempted with young people. Recently I have been asked to supply my qualifications to run a challenge ropes course and the risk management details of the course to potential participant organisations.

Training in not only how to physically run the challenge course, but in the facilitation process is essential to the success of a course, these would include:

Technical & Safety Skills include information on:

- Medical screening for the layman
- The safety system
- Basic safety training and spotting techniques
- High element belay school and applied physics
- Self-belay systems and high element set up
- Belay system equipment care and inspection
- Senior First Aid Qualification
- Inspection skills for the facilitator
- Low element safety & spotting techniques
- High element belay and self-belay
- High element systems and setup
- Information on how programming and course design creates emergencies
- Developing judgment
- High element rescue
- Programming to avoid rescues
- Program documentation and record keeping

Facilitation Skills include:

- Tools for team process and group decision making
- Developing the voices of team members
- A problem solving model that creates innovative solutions
- A model that opens communication between team members
- A powerful model for goal setting and developing confidence
- Program sequence and flow for learning
- Creating emotionally safe environments

5.2 Certification and Standards

Ensuring challenges and equipment are certified by reputable companies that service the industry to meet whatever government requirements are in place is vital.

As in Australia, each state in the USA seems to have differing standards and requirements to meet for a challenge course to operate. Many sites choose to use the Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT) standards as the basis for constructing and using sites in the USA. Other sites use professional organisations such as Project Adventure to assess their site on a regular basis. It appears that most vendors I spoke to chose to voluntarily adhere to an industry standard, rather than forced to comply through legislation.

In South Australia, changes to the Occupational, Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations has meant that most, if not all courses must be inspected and certified under the Amusement Structures/Devices legislation. The Errappa Blue Light Camp chooses to be certified by an engineer under the legislation, structures are certified that they are safe to use, or operate in accordance with the instructions, operating, maintenance and supervising procedures applicable to this device. The camp is also inspected and maintained by a qualified challenge course professional to ensure the best quality of care for all participants on the course and risk management.

Risk management as it applies to these activities means anticipating problems in advance and eliminating any procedures that may allow something to go wrong, conducting periodic reviews of operations, having a constant eye towards safety.

6. POLICE INVOLVEMENT

Throughout my tour I endeavoured to meet a variety of police who were involved in activities with youth, there are a wide range of activities organised by the various police departments throughout the USA, I did manage to find some who ran similar programs to those I am involved with in South Australia.

Syracuse

In Syracuse New York, Police and other agencies were looking for a way to encourage better citizenship from middle school children from the lower socio-economic schools in Syracuse.

With grant funding the Police Department was able to purchase and implement a school based program called "Character Champs". The program was purchased at a cost of \$10,000. The program has Police Officers visit schools for about 2 hours per week, at the end of a 10 week program, the participants attend a 2 day camp at an outdoor experiential education location run by Syracuse Police Officer, Kevin Corcoran. I attended a number of sessions with Kevin who extolled the system and gave me insight into the reasons they believe in this type of program.

Participants can use the results of appositive adventure based group experience as an example when they bring the lessons back to new audiences in their home community. Their experience will provide the tools necessary to create a change process for their community or cultural system. Adventure learning experiences can build the skills to be successful in contributing to a community's development by incorporating the social competencies in an effective prevention program – self management, decision making, problem solving, communication and resistance to negative and potentially harmful social influences. Adventure learning lays a foundation for growth and asset development that leads to increased resiliency for community members and youth. (High 5 Adventure Learning Center 2002)

Bermuda

In Bermuda, the Police, as a result of an investigation of the 1968 civil riots by a Commission chaired by the Rt. Hon. Sir Hugh Wooding, formed links with Outward Bound. The commission found that police needed to interact more with youth in a positive manner.

A program initiated by the police organised youth to attend Outward Bound camps and activities in the United Kingdom from 1970 and continue to present day. As a result of the success of the scheme, the Bermuda Police established an outdoor education facility on Paget Island in Bermuda to give more youth the opportunity to attend outdoor experiential education activities with police. This facility is run by Bermudian Police in a similar fashion to the police camps run in South Australia at Errappa Blue Light Camp.

“The Force has always been conscious of the need to foster good relations between itself and the Island’s youth. Back in 1970 with this thought in mind the Police launched what would become their most successful community program to date, the Outward Bound program. Originally co-ordinated solely by Police officers, the programme has provided the opportunity for thousands of Bermuda youngsters to sample the Outward Bound experience, both here and overseas. For many of the participants it was their first positive contact with Police officers.”
(Historical Review of Bermuda Police Service 1879-1999)

Trenton New Jersey

Whilst not run by the police, the Edison Prep is an interesting operation run in partnership with the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission.

Edison Prep is a fifty-five bed residential facility that is operated by Project U.S.E, an outdoor experiential learning organisation, under contract with the Juvenile Justice Commission. The residents are male between the ages of 15 and 17.

Project U.S.E. provides school, covering all academic areas, individual and group counseling, recreation, athletics, community service projects, and adventure education experiences. Within the New Jersey Juvenile Justice System, the Edison Prep program is considered a model program.

Philadelphia

In speaking with Arnold Dort, a former “1997 Teacher of the Year” at the Eastern District Middle School in Philadelphia, he told me of his challenge to bring outdoor experiential education to lower socio-economic urban schools. Arnold decided to build all the outdoor structures “inside”. He went about using the second story gym at the school and built a home made ropes course to be proud of.

Now, to the Police involvement in this case. Police became involved in Arnold’s project when he decided to teach abseiling or rappelling out the second story window of the school to the ground below. Police attended at the school stating they had received calls of children “escaping” from the second story building of the school by climbing down a rope. A few weeks later police attended again when they received reports of children “breaking into” the school by climbing a rope to the second story. Yes, Arnold was teaching prussiking, the outdoor skill of using smaller ropes to climb larger ropes.

It is these types of people that epitomise those who work in the industry and try to give all youth a chance to experience a different way of learning, gain confidence, look at themselves and perhaps become better in doing so.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Remarkably, most challenge courses I visited in my tour had a similar program and activities of those I have seen in Australia. As I previously stated, It was the people I met I was drawn to, in every location, that are still filled with the same passion to give children the tools for life in an exciting and meaningful way, that in some small part may even change their life for the better.

The use of adventure based activities for youth and at risk youth has proven itself to be a valuable tool for growth and change. In responding to the experiences participants learn to overcome self imposed judgements of their abilities, to turn limitations into capabilities, and to learn a good deal about themselves and their relationship with others. Good facilitation is one of the keys to success in this area.

Police agencies around the world use adventure based activities and challenge ropes courses to assist youth in making the right life choices and resist negative and potentially harmful social influences which lead to improved citizenship and stronger communities. The positive interaction between police and youth can only be seen as an added bonus to policing.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the South Australian Police Department continue with the excellent work being done through Blue Light in running the two campsites using adventure based experiential learning to assist youth and at risk youth to improve citizenship, reduce crime and reduce youth contact with the juvenile justice system.

That the focus of the camps continue to be strongly led through facilitation to strive to equip participants with life skills and are educated about life decisions and consequences, while interacting with police at a social level, effectively breaking down the barriers and forming positive relationships.

That the two South Australian Police run campsites share knowledge and develop a common approach to servicing youth and at risk youth in the community.

That a presentation be made at the State and/or National level of Blue Light to expound and encourage programs to be further developed in adventure based activities for youth in all communities.

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