OUTDOOR ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES AS EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Campus Recreation
The Next Hour

I. Introduction
II. Positive Outcomes of Outdoor Adventure
III. Self-Determination Theory
IV. Results of Study
V. Group Discussion: Implications for Campus Programming
VI. Conclusion
VII. Evaluation
Learning Objectives

• Recognize the need for healthy psycho-social developmental opportunities for college students
• Identify positive outcomes of participation in outdoor adventure activities
• Identify ways to engage students in outdoor adventures activities and the types of experiences they have while engaging in them
A Little About Me
“a variety of self-initiated activities utilizing an interaction with the natural environment, that contain real or apparent danger, in which the outcome while uncertain, can be influenced by the participant and circumstance” (Ewert, 1989, p. 6)
The Drive

- Strengthen the understanding of the outdoors
  - Education
  - Psychology
- American Great Outdoors Initiative
  - Listening Session
    August 2010
  - Report February 2011

America's Great Outdoors: A Promise to Future Generations
February 2011
Executive Summary
Americans today have become increasingly disconnected from our great outdoors. We find ourselves cut off from the natural and cultural inheritance that has shaped our lives and history. Our natural resources remain central to our economic vitality, yet they are under intense pressure from development and fragmentation, unsustainable use, pollution, and impacts from a changing climate.” (AGO, pg. 1)
Positive Outcomes of Adventure

- Studies show that access to the outdoors can help reverse the obesity epidemic that has tripled among our children [who spend an average of seven hours a day using electronic devices] in the last generation.

- They show that time spent in nature can reduce stress and anxiety, promote learning and personal growth, and foster mental and physical health (AGO, pg. 4).
National Programs

“Adventure programs appear to be the most effective at providing participants with a sense of self-regulation” (Hattie et al., 1997, p. 70)

Increases in self-awareness, and self-confidence with importance of the role of group and value of instructors (Martin & Leberman, 2005)
But do we know *how*?

- “It may seem odd to suggest that adventure education programs fosters growth and at the same time asserting that there is little understanding of how this change occurs” (Baldwin, Persing, Magnuson, 2004, p. 168)

- Suggestions of how outcomes occur
  - Expectations
    “thinking, feeling, and behaving as if there is something to be gained by participating” (Walsh & Golins, 1976, p. 3)
  - Challenge by Choice
    self-selected and regulated involvement
Sample Program Theory

Sample program theory for an adventure-based college student orientation.
Research Questions

1. What are students’ expectations regarding their participation in a collegiate outdoor adventure trip?

2. Do students’ experiences and reflections during and following the collegiate outdoor adventure trip align with the expectations listed in Question 1?

3. Can these expectations, experiences, and reflections be understood using self-determination as a framework that specifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as basic human needs?
Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

- Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are three fundamental motivational needs in human nature and are essential for facilitating optimal growth, social development, and personal wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

- Widely used and empirically supported (Schunk et al., 2008)
SDT Continued

- Autonomy
  i.e. students are given power to make decisions
- Competence
  i.e. students feel they have learned relevant skills
- Relatedness
  i.e. students feel that they have built trusting and supportive relationships with their peers and leaders
Setting and Participants

- 6-day outdoor adventure trip in Midwestern US
- Rock climbing, backpacking, and camping
- Group size: 10 with 7 participants in the study
  - 6 males: 1 female
  - 19-30 years old
Methods

- Qualitative Research Design
- Interviews
  - Before, During, and After the Trip (Seidman, 2006)
- Campfire Focus Groups
- Program Evaluations
- Participant Observations (Spradley, 1980)
- Self-Determination Theory
Data Analyses

Thematic Coding
- A Priori SDT Categories
  - Autonomy
  - Competence
  - Relatedness
- Ad Hoc Other Categories
  - Environmental Ethics
  - General Enjoyment
  - Relaxation and Retreat

Profiles
- Competence
- Relatedness
Results

- Not all themes were present during each phase
- Competence and relatedness were the most salient and consistent
Participant Expectations

Pre-Trip Interview

- “being outdoors there is a lot of things that are out of your control, and you have to try and prepare for those things”
- “all of it at once is going to be one big learning experience”
- “looking forward to people I can relate to”
- “letting things go, it is just easier to do that outside”
- “I have this urge craving to get away from the smoggy gray cinder block…I want to see green, and brown, and blue. I want to hear the sounds of the birds singing and rustling of leaves in the wind”
Participant Experiences

During Trip Interviews, Participant Observations and Campfire Focus Groups

- “it’s nice because [the itinerary] is flexible”
- “it reminds me how much this is like community”
- “people can actually sit back and appreciate what is around them”
Participant Reflections

Post-Trip Interview and Program Evaluations

• “we had to depend on each other for shelter, food, and so on”
• “the leader told us the plan for the day but we chose when it happened”
• “I got to accomplish some tough climbs, and it felt really good”
• “it allowed me to trust and depend on others in order to accomplish tasks together”
Utility of SDT Framework

- The voluntary context may have satisfied the need for autonomy
- Informal learning environment was conducive for self-directed learning
- Participants felt supported and respected by each other
Autonomy

- Had a lot of choice and control
- Structure could create more free time
- Risk management issues

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Note: an X indicates that this theme was mentioned by the participant in the interview.
Competence

- Looked forward to learning
- Goal setting
- Pride in the accomplishments

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Relatedness

- Having a great time with great people who shared energy and enthusiasm
- Supportive of individuals needs and abilities

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Richard Louv
- *Last Child in the Woods*
  - Nature Deficient Disorder

- *The Nature Principle*
  - “reconnecting with nature is one key to growing a larger environmental movement...focus on the intrinsic importance of the natural world to our health, our ability to learn, our happiness, our spirit”
Implications for Campus Programs

Break-Out Discussion
With a partner or in a small group discuss ways to link what you have learned for future training or programs in your areas

1. Discuss populations that you influence/reach

1. What positive outcomes do you feel are most important to your group?

2. Could you apply Self-determination theory to enhance your program/group, how?

Afterwards, come back together and share
Conclusion

- Future Research Together
  - Availability
  - Impact
  - Importance

- Outdoor adventure fosters self-determination… therefore outdoor adventure becomes a means of positive development

“They should just try it out, I think that there is so much of these trips that people would enjoy…you just got to get out there and try it out and experience it. Then you’ll know.”
“This is what connects us, this is what connects humanity, this is what we have in common. It’s not the Internet, it’s the oceans” (Robert F. Kennedy Jr.)