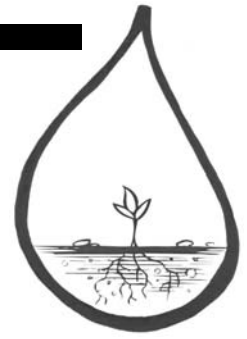


Building Environmental Youth Leadership

A High-School Service-learning Curriculum



TOPIC:

Team-building,
Mission-building

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will get acquainted with their co-participants.
- Through risks, students will begin to trust each other.
- Students will work as a team to solve various group challenges.

LENGTH:

3 to 5 hours

ENVIRONMENT:

Outdoors and off-site. Students should be prepared for adverse weather conditions.

MATERIALS:

- Access to a safe ropes course facility.
- Van or other transportation off-site travel.
- Permission forms for each student participating on the trip.
- A trained and certified facilitator.

Ropes Course Trip

Background:

In many ways, ropes courses mark the epitome of team-building challenge activities. Depending on the structure of the course, students may engage and overcome initiatives like trust falls, high climbs, swinging bridges and tightropes. Trained facilitators ensure safety throughout the process, support group encouragement, and process life-lessons learned. For many, a well-planned trip to a ropes course is a life-changing experience.

Activity Outline:

Choosing a Course:

Depending on popularity of facilities in your area, efforts should be made to secure a ropes course 2+ months in advance of the trip date. Because of the risks inherent to a ropes course trip, however, safe facilitation requires specialized training and experience. Due to these concerns, a ropes course should not be chosen lightly. Use the following guidelines when sub-contracting a group to facilitate the trip:

- Take a tour of the course. Ask staff to describe how the various course initiatives operate.
- Ask about their safe operating procedures. Ask to see risk management policies, emergency response plans, forms, etc.
- Ask about their staff qualification standards. How are they hired and trained? Can they effectively deal with an emergency?
- Discuss their experience in dealing with groups similar to yours. What special considerations do they identify? How will they handle these?
- Make sure that they are willing to hear and respond to safety concerns of their groups.
- Ask about their expectations of the participating group. How many chaperones are required? Etc.

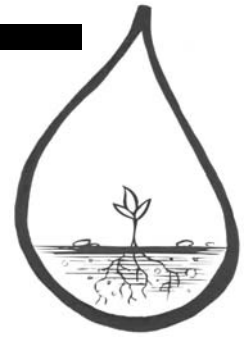
It may be helpful to contact local recreation departments, camp facilities, and other area youth service organizations to locate a safe and effective ropes course facility.

Permission and Preparation:

Follow facility guidelines and timelines for securing transportation to the ropes course site. Before departing on the trip, make sure that all participants also have a permission slip signed by a legal guardian. This form should conform to any safety needs expressed by course sub-contractors. It should 1) clearly communicate all risks associated with the activity, and 2) solicit any health conditions that might bar a participant from safely participating.

Building Environmental Youth Leadership

A High-School Service-learning Curriculum



Students need to dress for the weather forecasted on the trip date. Course sub-contractors should be contacted 1-week prior to the arrival date to confirm procedures, times, concerns, etc.

Meeting the Challenge

Upon arrival at the ropes course, lead adults consult facilitators concerning procedures and expectations. These will vary according to the specific program. Some facilitators may request that adults refrain from participation in activities. Others may ask for their help. In either case, trust them to take charge of group movement and activities. Ask before stepping in to “help” with an emotional or misbehaving student unless the safety of a participant is obviously in jeopardy. It may be an expected part of the initiative process. Whether adults are involved or not, student participants lead all team initiatives and tackle process questions. However, all group participants should actively encourage each other, laugh, and savor the challenge.

If possible, take detailed notes describing participants’ emotional reactions to initiatives, group processes, and answers to process questions.

Solidifying the Metaphor

In theory, ropes course experiences are effective because of their rich metaphorical representation of life challenges. Perceived risks and fears associated with the initiatives melt participants’ established values and attitudes, allowing them to shift and reform. However, it is incredibly hard for a single and relatively short experience to significantly impact a lifetime of experience. Therefore, continual reminders of the experience are imperative to increased effectiveness. Afterward, refer often to notes of the experience, asking students to recall emotions and answers to questions. Students should often explicitly apply the metaphor to the team service-learning effort.

References:

- Rohnke, K. (1989). *Cowstails and Cobras II: A Guide to Games, Initiatives, Ropes Courses, & Adventure Curriculum*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.
- Wade, I. (2001). *Subcontracting for Adventure Programs*. Downloaded 7.12.06 from www.adventuresafety.org.