

The adventure course – education, challenge, fun

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Outdoor education has been defined in a variety of ways throughout its history. Those who influenced the field early on defined outdoor education with the needs of camping education in mind. For example, L. B. Sharp (1943) [1], one of the earliest advocates of camping education, offered the following rationale for outdoor education: "That which can best be taught inside the schoolrooms should there be taught, and that which can best be learned through experience dealing directly with native materials and life situations outside the school should there be learned". As the field of outdoor education matured, organizations emerged that worked to gain support from school personnel. For example, Julian W. Smith began the National Outdoor Education Project in 1955. Smith elucidated the connection between outdoor education and the school curriculum in his definition: "Outdoor education means learning "in" and "for" the outdoors. It is a means of curriculum extension and enrichment through outdoor experiences" [2].

Our faculty's regular and master students, as well as those from the West University's Chemistry, Biology, Geography Faculties participate in such an activity. Everything began as a personal experience of a few teachers of our faculty that participated in a program of education through adventure called "Viața" ("Life").

It is organized under the form of an educational camp that takes place in the Vîlcan Massif, in the mountain resort Straja since 1999. up to the present, more than 5000 young people have benefited from it; the program takes use of various methods specific to education through adventure (high rope courses, climbing, orientation, hiking etc.).

The purpose of the "Viața" program is to develop abilities such as teamwork, communication, conflict resolution, creative thought etc., but most of all to offer the possibility to the young to exercise certain attitudes and values such as: courage, perseverance, compassion, confidence etc. The general purposes of the program, as they are stated on the website of those who initiated it in Romania ("Noi Orizonturi" Foundation – "New Horizons") [3]:

- *Development of outdoor physical aptitudes* (through the assimilation of basic notions referring to alpinism and elementary knowledge regarding camp life);
- *Personality development* (defeating pessimism; growth of the will to take risks; development of reflexive thinking; setting realistic objectives);
- *Development of interpersonal relationships* (conflict resolution techniques; communication techniques; development of the capacitate to formulate and receive constructive criticism);
- *Responsibility regarding environment protection* (development of respect towards the Earth and

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nature; learning methods of environment conservation and growing awareness of their importance);

- *Moral development* (respect and assuming responsibility; compassion; involvement in community development; adaptability to an ever-changing life; learning general principles of democratic citizenship; structured activities that have a palpable effect over family and community life; capacity of undergoing equal teamwork).

Although the words stress, challenge and risk are often used when describing adventure education, it is important to remember that in reality we must strive to provide “perceived” physical risk activities. Through instruction in and supervision of spotting procedures will instructors help insure that physical risks are eliminated or at least minimized. The instructors’ judgment is a key factor. If an instructor feels that the group is not taking safety considerations as seriously as he/she would like them to. They can stop the activity and come back to in later, change the pace of the activity, change the focus of the activity or make other modifications as necessary. Initiatives are short-term, tangible, problem solving activities that may involve the whole or part of a group. In most instances, whole group activities are preferred. Typically, the purpose of initiatives is to raise an individual's or group's awareness of the processes involved in making decisions and completing tasks. Initiatives should be designed with specific learning outcomes in mind. Challenge by choice - During the briefing, when the leader says, “It’s important to be able to say at the end of our activities today that you challenged yourself in at least one way”, he/she is utilizing one of the most effective tools he/she has. Challenge means going beyond the old, pushing into new territory or a new ways of doing things. It may mean dealing with fear and accepting help and support. Challenge also is looking at that part of ourselves that isn’t sure of our abilities. Challenge has the

potential of stripping us bare, of getting down to the essentials, the nub of things.

And, as all these values are getting rare and “outdated” in this modern age of computers, buttons and of the virtual world, the implementation of such possibilities of professional training in the ranks of the P.E. and Geography teachers (that, it is known, are the promoters of outdoor excursions in any group of teachers, pupils or students). The place existed, qualified personnel existed, the possibility of introducing it in the curriculum of the university degree, the masters degree in Fitness and motric performance, as well as in the curriculum of the masters degree in Development and touristic planning of the Geography Faculty existed; so we went to work. The pages of this journal are too few to describe the wonderful location of the Vîlcan Massif’s mountains where the course takes place; there are no words to describe one’s feelings as a participant or as a simple onlooker, progressively going from the childish smile provoked by the games taking place on the first day of the course to the throbs caused by the „catwalk”, „platforms”, „pass x”, „centripede”, „High Mohawk Walk” „flying squirrel”, “Jacob’s ladder” etc. that bring out powers, ambitions and, why not, fears that the participants didn’t know they had in them. After successfully completing one of these challenges, one could see in their eyes that force that makes you feel almighty, even if only for a few moments... In the end, this course is referring to this feeling that we should all try, at least once in a while.

References

1. Sharp L.B. (1943) *Outside the classroom. The Educational Forum*, 7(4), 361-368;
2. Hammerman W.M. (1980) *Fifty years of resident outdoor education, 1930-1980: Its impact on American education*. Martinsville, IN: American Camping Association;
3. <http://noi-orienturi>, accessed in 10 may 2010.