

Outdoor Education Learning Model

Introduction

The following short paper seeks to layout the learning model used by staff at the YMCA Outdoor Education Centre at Greenhill. It refers to creating a learning environment, developing learning processes and expected learning outcomes. The model is based on research carried out by several professional colleagues but is informed primarily by the feedback from practitioners working at the Centre.

Creating a Learning Environment

The pre-requisites for any learning being created in Greenhill are contained in developing a culture within the Centre which establishes five pillars before activities start:

- **A Safe Space** - Safe space does not just refer to the management of activities but an atmosphere where a child feels their interests are paramount, their fears are recognised and their voice is heard. Every member of the Greenhill team must work to create an environment where the users feel respected, and the centre of all our efforts. Often the participants evaluations refer to Greenhill being a place where they feel at home - this is the experience we want to expand and develop alongside safe procedures & confident leadership.
- **Invitational leadership** - also refers to the atmosphere and culture of Greenhill - includes: reduction of negative messages, sense of belonging and the responsibility of every staff member to make every child valued. This includes 'inviting' critical feedback and encouragement of honesty within discussions and shared planning.
- **Supportive feedback** - This a crucial aspect of activity management, including during and after activity - building support for experimentation and cooperation.
- **Effective communication modelled** - this aspect of the environment is key to the instructor role with clear and well thought communication of information inviting feedback and comment. Every opportunity must be used to convey information, values and support.
- **Context awareness** - Every group that attends is coming from a particular experience, social religious cultural context. Significant factors that may influence readiness for learning may also include: age, gender, class and race. Sensitivity to the context and these factors is crucial to creating an effective learning experience.

Creating Learning Processes

When in session with a group the staff must endeavour to engage in a manner which exploits the opportunity for creative development. This can include

- Relationship building - The 3 principles of Rogers¹ should be evident in the relationship the tutors develop with the young person
 - Congruence or authenticity - the ability of the staff member to speak truthfully to the young person giving both negative and positive feedback
 - Unconditional positive regard - treating all young people without prejudice but with a positive regard which empowers through the respect being afforded to them and the confidence expressed in them.
 - Empathetic awareness - the ability of the staff member to see the world from the young person's perspective and comprehend the barriers or restrains they are experiencing.

- Conversation & Dialogue - the use of effective questioning and careful feedback can create new levels of self awareness which assist with self efficacy and personal ownership of the experience. This is a useful tool to assist thinking skills development and reflection in the learning process.

- Participation - Although this process is often associated with perspectives of rights or empowerment, at Greenhill the focus should be centred on participatory learning. In such situations the instructor role is to invite the young people to be a co creator of the activity, conversation or exercise, promoting them from follower/receiver of teaching to tutor and facilitator.

- Experiential learning - Outdoor education is an experience which includes excitement, wonder and team working which reach places beyond the experience in the classroom, youth centre or local community. It includes taking risks, sharing new experiences of intensity and emotional commitment. The instructor's role in facilitating this process is to encourage reflection, dialogue and sharing. The experiences can then become personal and social in their impact.

¹ Carl Rogers 1902-1987