Learning through adventure

Structuring adventures to facilitate learning

We use outdoor adventures as a tool to help young people develop skills for life. When using adventures for this purpose, we achieve better outcomes if we structure the experience to encourage learning. This doesn't mean dictating what should happen every minute of the day, but it does involve the following key principles:

- Start with the outcomes
- Add a simple structure to your adventure
- Structure your planning
- Facilitate learning through adventure
- Include a simple structure for reviewing and reflecting on learning

Start with the outcomes

To get the most from any experience, begin by considering what would be a successful outcome. Working backwards from your desired outcomes when designing your plan will help you to achieve those outcomes at the end of your adventure. Otherwise, it is easy to end up with activities which you think your young people would like to do, but won't teach them new skills.

These outcomes could be 'hard' (practical things we can do) or 'soft' (inter and intra personal skills which we can apply to other situations).

Example of 'hard' outcomes	Examples of 'soft' outcomes
- Cooking a meal	- Time management
- Pitching a tent	- Initiative
- Using tools	- Planning
- Reading a map	- Self-motivation
- Packing a bag	- Collaboration
- Lighting a fire	- Leadership
- Tying a knot	- Communication

Start by identifying the specific outcomes you would like to achieve, instead of a general statement of intent. For instance, instead of saying 'We want to go on a canoeing camp', start by saying 'We want to plan a canoe journey, improve our paddling skills and camp overnight'. This way you can break the adventure down into chunks of skills to be taught and learnt. In doing so, we make use of valuable opportunities for learning because we're prepared and we don't end up doing things for young people that they can do for themselves, given the chance. This also allows us to facilitate learning so that we build in opportunities for the Scouting method to be applied, for example; by working in small teams; learning by doing; taking responsibility and developing leadership skills.

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Add a simple structure to your adventure

There are many different learning models and methods to structure a learning experience. Teachers and coaches often use quite advanced models but even a simple structure like 'Plan-Do-Review' can be effective. Let's explore how this simple model can be used:

The cycle

You can think of adventurous experiences as onion-like layers of plan-do-review – there may well be plan-do-reviews within an overall plan-do-review, and this is outlined in the table below. It applies to specific tasks or problems to be solved within the experience (cooking dinner, for example), as well as the bigger picture of the whole adventure (like going on an overnight expedition).

Plan

Planning involves considering all the relevant information you have and deciding what you're going to do. We can use open questions to help us form a working plan.

Do

This is a case of following the plan and adapting it dynamically where needed. You can see the plan-do-review cycle within the adventure itself too – especially if an adventure is made up of lots of smaller challenges and decisions to be made.

Review

Reviewing is the process of actively reflecting or considering what has happened – literally 're-viewing' the experience. You should consider what worked and what didn't work, what changes you had to make during the adventure, and why all of that is the case. Then think about how you will apply that information next time.

Plan	Do	Review
	Problem to be solved – hitting the target	

Plan the session	Plan	Do	Review	Reflect on the adventure
■ Who? ■ What? ■ When? ■ Where? ■ Why? ■ How?	■ Choosing where to stand ■ Deciding how hard to throw ■ Deciding where to aim for on the target	Throwing the tomahawk at the target	■ Reflect on what happened and what to change ■ Change the distance ■ Grip the tomahawk differently	■ What worked? ■ How would you change the plan next time?

←———————— **During the adventure** ————————→

←———————— **Before, during and after the adventure** ————————→

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Structure your planning

To help to create an effective plan, think about all of the questions you need to know the answer to before you begin the adventure. Using open questions is a good method to ensure you hit all of the important points in your plan:

'Who?' - The people 'What?' - The activity 'Where?' - The location	'When?' - The timings 'Why?' - The outcomes And then, 'How?' - The process

The same questions can be used whether you're an instructor teaching a specific skill, a group planning an adventure, or dynamically during the experience to help tackle challenges that come up along the way.

	Example of an instructed archery session	Example of an Explorer-led expedition
Who?	■ Who are the group members? ■ Who has any medical issues?	■ Who are the team members? ■ Who has skills relevant to activity?
What?	■ What will we be doing? ■ What have they done before?	■ What outcomes do we want? ■ What equipment do we need?
Where?	■ Where will we be based in this activity? ■ Where are the boundaries?	■ Where will we go? ■ What route shall we take?
When?	■ When will it be their turn to have a go? ■ When does the activity finish?	■ When should we go? ■ How long will we go for?
When?	■ Why are we doing this activity? ■ What will young people get out of it?	■ Why do we want to do this now? ■ What are our objectives?
How?	■ How exactly do we do this activity? ■ How do we prepare for it?	■ How exactly do we do this activity? ■ How do we prepare for it?

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Facilitate learning through adventure

Exactly how you facilitate the adventure will very much depend on what the adventure is, what you're trying to achieve and who you are working with. Some of our other resources provide more detailed information on general topics such as 'Managing a group outdoors' and 'Teaching practical skills', as well as on specific outdoor skills, like planning a hike, lighting fires, orienteering, and more. Ultimately, remember that as a leader you should try to ensure that the Scouting method is always applied. This includes:

- Making learning practical whenever possible
- Letting young people take responsibility, make choices and manage risks
- Encouraging and developing team work
- Allowing and supporting young people to take the lead
- Encouraging young people to take on new challenges

Simple structure for reviewing and reflecting on learning

Any activity that makes you reflect on a task will help you learn from the experience. A simple way to make this more effective is to add a structure that takes you on a logical journey, from what actually happened, to how you will apply learning the next time around.

A common structure is; 'What?'; 'So what?'; Now what?'. This takes us through that logical progression. We can couple this with the open questions we used in the planning stage to dig into and learn from an adventure.

Stage	What's happening	Question types	Example
What?	Talk about what happened	Who, what, where and when questions	We couldn't light the fire
So what?	Consider why it's important	Why questions	Because we ran out of kindling too soon
Now what?	Decide how we can apply that in the future	How questions	We'll get twice as much kindling next time

Good reviews are based around the original objectives of the challenge – they help you with the overall 'why' question and allow you to transfer learning to new situations. You can wrap all of this up into reviewing games that work well for groups. Here are a few examples:

Mighty machine

Outline	Consider a machine (for example, an aeroplane) as a metaphor for our adventure. Which part of that machine did you represent and why?
Example	'The jet engine, because I got us all moving and kept us going.'
Development	You can use this in different ways to explore peoples roles – assigning parts to other people, considering which parts you were missing, which parts you didn't need, etc.

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Remote control

Outline	Ask participants to imagine they are watching a movie of the experience. They have a remote control and can press pause at any point. Ask them to find a specific point that you specify, such as when a problem occurred, and ask them to mentally pause the video, describing what point they chose and why they chose it.
Example	'Press pause at the point when you think the original plan stopped working. Why did you choose this point?'
Development	You can discuss why people pressed pause at different points for the same question. Think about what an alternative ending might have looked like, or go back and identify if there were any signs leading up to this point in the plot.

Me, you, us

Outline	This activity gives young people the time to reflect on a question, then after a minute or so, to discuss their opinions with a peer. You can then have a whole group discussion, drawing out answers from each pair.
Example	'What do you think is the most important thing we could change next time?'
Development	This review is less intimidating than picking on people to answer, and it gives everyone a chance to speak – not just the confident members. Experiment with asking different questions to different pairs, or variations of the same question to see if you get different perspectives.

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