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Outdoor education is a means of experiential learning, which is a process of teaching that is different from traditional methods. Traditional methods normally are based in classroom with teachers lecturing students. Experiential learning differs because it allows students to develop skills, knowledge, and principles through the participation of direct experiences and the reflection that follows the hands-on learning. This paper will examine the four theories that have been developed to support and further explain this claim.

The first theory that helps clarify outdoor education as a means of experiential learning is John Dewey's theory of progressive education. According to his theory, developed in the late nineteenth century, education must be taught as a democracy with meaningful activity and participation. Progressive education emphasizes motivating students to want to learn by making the curriculum relevant to their social lives. Dewey also believed that these programs must have qualities such as learning by doing, emphasis on problem solving and critical thinking, group work, emphasis on social skills, etc.

Dewey also claimed that progressive education, specifically, the use of student experience in learning, is more "democratic and humane" than

traditional education. Traditional education relied solely on teachers preaching lessons in the basic core classes while students listened and recited what they were told. Teachers had high authority and full control. However, these mechanical methods of teaching failed to engage students in ways that manifested motivation to learn. This problem then unearthed the question: With the traditional method, are students really digesting what they are learning or are they just rehearsing and repeating what they are told?

Progressive education creates an environment with teacher-student relationships and reinforces individual empowerment that allows students to follow their own narrative and growth. This is a common problem in modern day classrooms – the lecture and exam structure that is generally implemented in education leads to student burnouts and the failure to retain information and material. Progressive education addresses and structures a means to begin to correct these issues. For these reasons, progressive education is characteristically seen as more democratic and humane. Outdoor education, an example of progressive education, poses all of these qualities that embody John Dewey's theory. Utilizing outdoor education in Wales exposed me as a student to a new and insightful style of learning.

I can attest to my own personal experience in Wales; for example, the exploration of cave mines. Throughout the mines we were able to learn about

the culture and history and the significance of the mines in Wales while satisfying our own personal interests. In the first mine, a coal mine, we had the opportunity to talk to an actual miner. I learned about his own personal experiences and he explained to me that although coal mining was shut down by the government, many of the miners wish that they could still mine regardless of health concerns as it was their whole means of supporting themselves and their families and it was all they had ever done for work. I never would have had the opportunity to learn these things and gain these perspectives in a classroom.

Another theory that supports outdoor education as a means of experiential learning is Kolb's 4-stage cycle. Kolb's theory revolves around the idea that teachers and students must learn together. The four stages of the cycle are concrete experience (doing), reflective observation (observing), abstract conceptualizing (thinking), and active experimenting (planning). Kolb's theory claims that the cycle can be continuously repeated, but once in the cycle one cannot move backwards through it. Also when an individual repeats the cycle, they will make changes of teaching style and learning to better suit both the teacher and student.

An example of student and teacher working together to make a decision that is best fit for everyone was before we hiked up Mt. Snowdon. Normally in past years, this hike was meant to be for sunrise. However, this year due to the

chance of rain the students and teachers together decided on a new plan that would mean hiking for sunset. It was the first time the teachers had ever brought a group up the mountain for sunset instead. When working through the four stages of Kolb's theory throughout this adventure the teachers observed and reflected changing this part of the curriculum to a sunset hike for future programs may even be a better alternative.

The third theory was conceptualized by Colin Mortlock and further developed by Simon Priest. The two believed that there is a subjective nature of adventure experience according to one's ability and risk. The first stage of this cycle is play, in which competence and risk are both low, for example, someone taking a walk on a trail. The second stage is adventure, which is when both competence and risk become slightly more substantial. An example of this would be someone going for a short hike. The third stage is frontier adventure which is when the adventurer reaches peak adventure experience. In this stage there is a good balance between competence and risk. The adventurer goes on a long hike that involves some climbing and they complete it successfully. The fourth stage of this theory is misadventure. In this stage, risk is too high for the adventurer. For example, it would be if someone with little climbing experience attempts to free solo up a rock face. In this stage there is high risk of fear and may even result in injury or death.

One good example to explain Mortlock and Priest's theory would be when we went scrambling. We did not scramble in the best conditions. It was a very rainy, wet day, and scrambling up rocks when they are wet could very easily become a misadventure. While scrambling our teachers helped pick appropriate routes to ensure that we would stay in the peak adventure stage. The climbing was challenging, but not to the point where if we slipped it would risk our lives.

The last theory, developed by Karl Rhonke, portrays challenge as a choice. Rhonke claims that there must be voluntary participation, individual choice, respect, and a level of challenge in order to have a successful adventure. Ultimately, challenge is subjective to the individual. What is challenge to one person may be play or even misadventure for another. Therefore, choices will be different person to person in order to have successful adventure. However, Rhonke put an emphasis on trying something rather than doing nothing at all. He believed that avoiding challenge altogether meant never having the opportunity to gain enough experience to comfortably achieve successful adventure. There should also be a trial and error approach to new activities: if you fail once, try again with a new execution. Lastly to make people more comfortable with challenges, one should incorporate play, which mitigates fear and pushes people in a healthy way.

A perfect example of challenge by choice that we experienced on the trip was when we went mountain biking. No student in the group had ever mountain bike before and some people even claimed they could not ride a bike. We began in the parking lot practicing turns and breaks to get comfortable with our bikes and then hit the practice trails to get used to the types of obstacles we would be seeing on the trail. Before even reaching the actual trail, we had a bit of a misadventure with a Buddy who took a bank turn too hard and smashed her face on a rock. Although not an incident that ultimately led to death, she had a good amount of injuries. Some students decided to take the opportunity that challenge by choice offers and backed out from doing the trail. This was the best decision for them as they felt it would avoid a misadventure.

I remember talking to Graham a few days later about challenge by choice and he gave us a remarkable perspective on the theory. He told a story of a woman who had lived a life of domestic abuse, but was currently out of the relationship and was trying to live a healthy lifestyle. When on an adventure, she decided to opt out of repelling off of a cliff. She said that she wasn't viewing this decision as a negative thing. She wasn't upset that she would be missing out. Instead she felt empowered that she finally had the option to say no, which was something that she never had throughout her abusive relationship.

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