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Cognitive Behavioural Approaches in Outdoor Adventure Education

BMSH4105

Sharing Experiences

Reflect on your Micro-Adventure experience & journaling

FEELINGS

THOUGHTS

ACTIONS

CHOICES





before

the challenge

after

Introduction

Understanding the Cognitive Behavioural approach in Outdoor Education

Cognitive Behavioural theory emphasizes the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, making it essential for enhancing learning experiences in outdoor adventure education settings.

Usually referred to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), in this exploration we will refer to the **approach**, to clearly differentiate our role as facilitators, not therapists.



What does “Cognitive Behavioural” mean?

“In its simplest form, the cognitive model ‘hypothesises that people’s **emotions and behaviours** are influenced by their **perceptions** of events. It is not a situation in and of itself that determines what people feel but rather the way in which they construe a situation’ (Beck, 1964). In other words, how people feel is determined by the way in which they **interpret** situations rather than by the situations *per se.*”

(Fenn & Byrne, 2013, p.579-580)

Connecting Theory to Practice



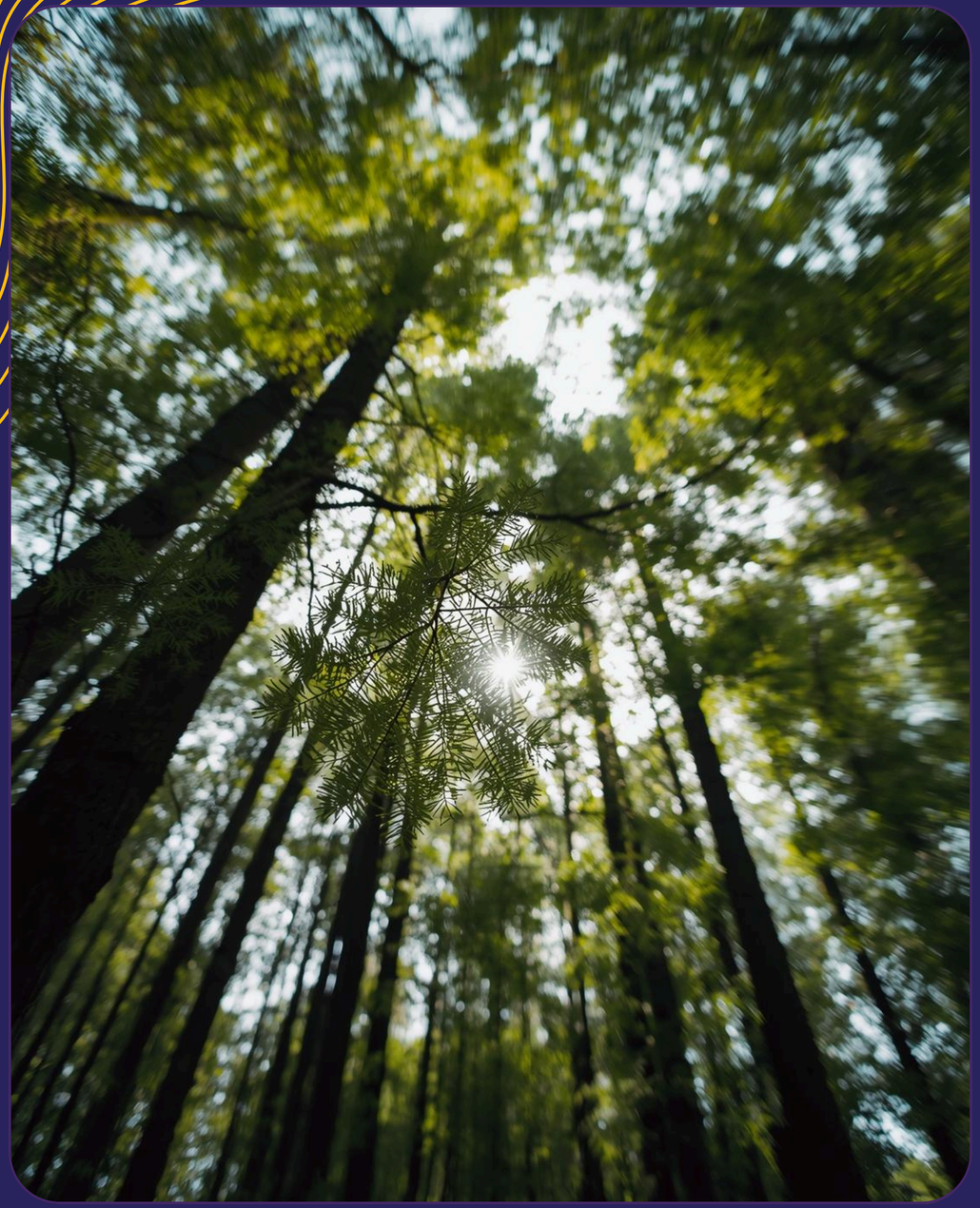
What can you initially relate from this information to your Micro-Adventure experience & journaling?

FEELINGS
THOUGHTS
ACTIONS
CHOICES



Key elements





Cognitive Behavioural terminology appears throughout the evolution of outdoor adventure education theories.

This psychological approach evolved from the behavioural foundations of Pavlov [Russia] (1927), Skinner [U.S.A.] (1945), and Watson [U.S.A.] (1924).

It became stronger in the 1960s and 1970s, with some elements in outdoor adventure practice related to promoting self-awareness and encouraging learners to challenge limiting beliefs, fostering resilience and confidence in outdoor settings.

Theoretical Background

Some theories from this approach related to the outdoor adventure practice

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy theory emphasizes the importance of believing in one's abilities and can significantly enhance performance during outdoor adventures, influencing participants' motivation and resilience.

(Bandura, 1977: 1997)

Social Learning

Social learning theory focuses on how individuals learn from observing others, which is vital in outdoor education as participants can adopt skills and attitudes modeled by peers and instructors.

(Bandura, 1977)

Adaptive Dissonance

Adaptive dissonance suggests that discrepancies between clients' perceptions and the reality of their adventure experiences can lead to transformational moments, increasing the likelihood of achieving peak experiences.

(Priest & Baillie, 1987)

Flow Theory

Flow Theory describes the psychological state where individuals experience complete immersion in activities, enhancing learning and performance.

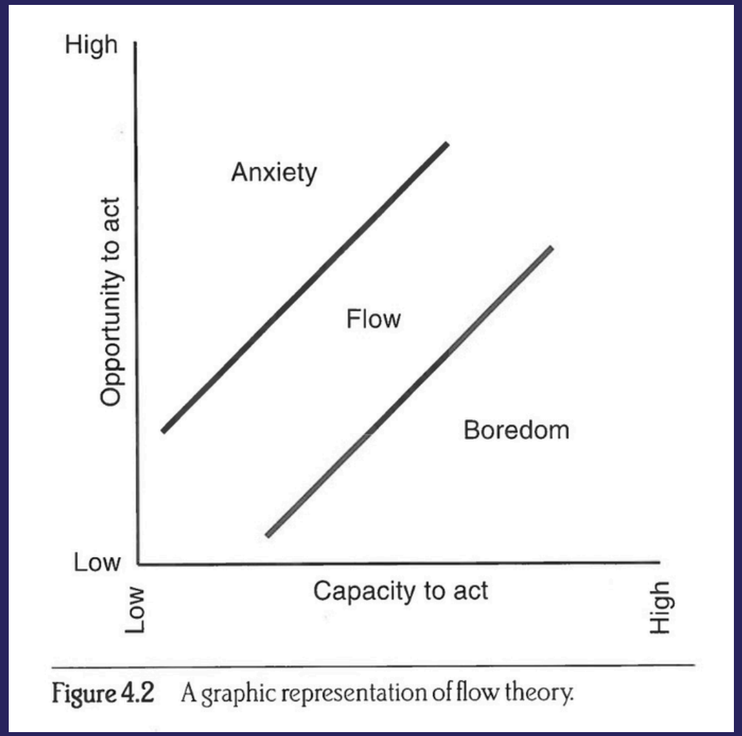
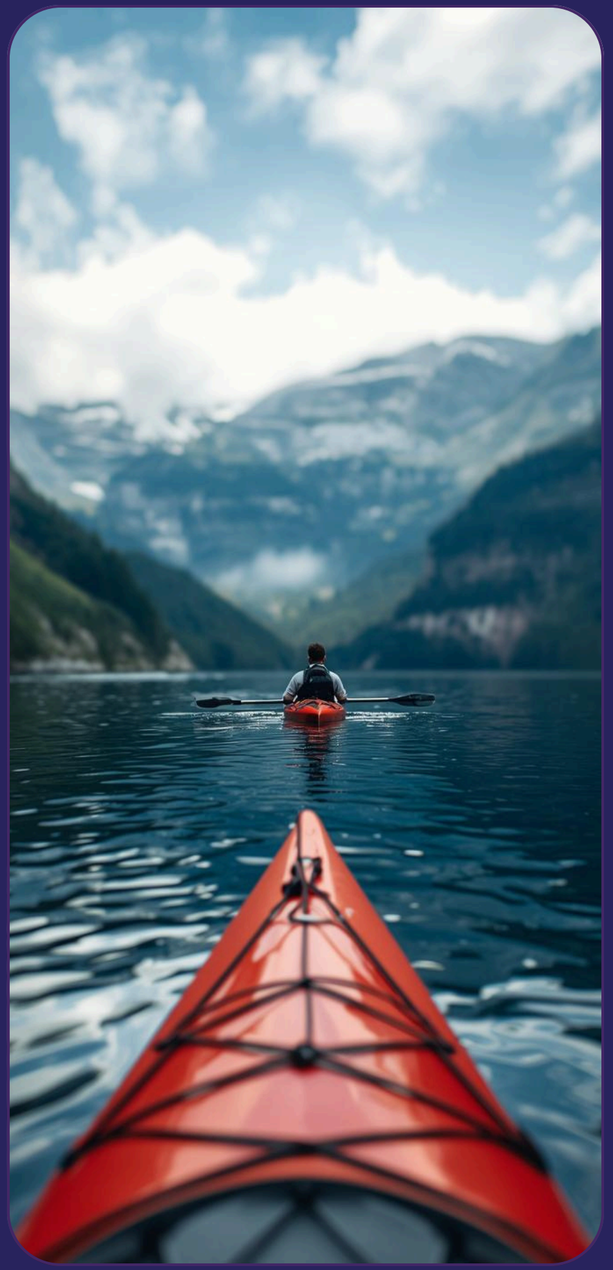


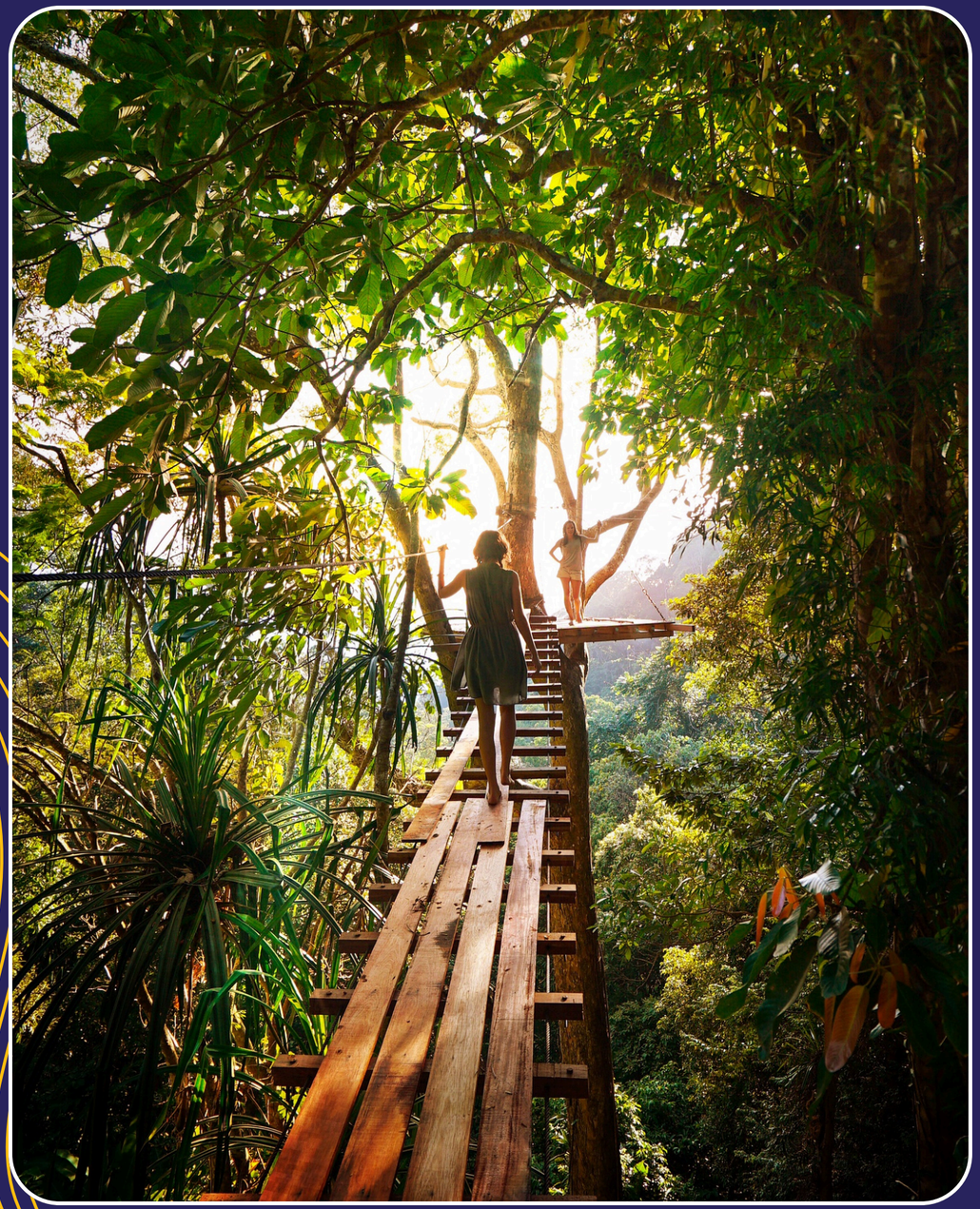
Figure 4.2 A graphic representation of flow theory.

(Priest & Gass, 1997, p.44)

Resilience

Resilience considered as a skill that “can be built through the gradual exposure to experiences that challenge feelings of safety and competence” (Booth & Neill, p. 48), with outdoor education experiences demonstrating the potential to develop coping strategies.





Examples of CB approach in Outdoor Adventure Programming

Social Learning & Self-efficacy in Action



Observing and learning through experience

Engaging in outdoor activities allows participants to learn from each other, enhancing their skills and fostering a sense of community through shared experiences and collaboration, also impacting the self-perception of efficacy.



(Propst & Koesler, 1998)

Cognitive Reframing

“Reframing has been defined as changing the conceptual viewpoint in relation to which a situation is experienced. Placing the situation in a different frame that fits the concrete “facts” equally well changes its entire meaning (“Reframing,” 2009). Revisiting and reconstructing one’s view of an experience imbues it with a different usually more positive meaning in the individual’s mind (Jonas, 2005). Specifically, cognitive reframing involves changing the way people see things and trying to find alternative ways of perceiving ideas, events, or situations (Throop, 2012)”

(Robson & Troutman-Jordan, 2014, p. 56)

Recognizing Limiting Beliefs in Outdoor Adventure

- Catastrophizing potential failures
- Overgeneralizing past experiences
- Minimizing personal achievements
- All-or-nothing thinking

Connecting Theory to Practice



What *reframing* opportunities can you find in your Micro-Adventure experience & journaling?



FEELINGS
THOUGHTS
ACTIONS
CHOICES





Techniques & Strategies embedded in OA

Planned (intentionally built) **mastery experiences** in programming (e.g the Outward Bound Process Model)

Structured **goal-setting** and review of outcomes (including SMART goals)

Behaviour-, problem-solving- & solution-focused models (such as GRABBSS for planning and assessment, or facilitation approaches)

Intentional application of **adaptive dissonance** (as in the Adventure Experience Paradigm)

(Collard, 2026; Priest & Gass, 1997; Priest, 2024)





Techniques & Strategies embedded in OA

Planned opportunities for **problem-solving** and **collaboration**

Processing/debrief connected to feelings➡actions/responses➡changes to implement the next time➡transfer to everyday life (such as in the metacognition process in the Experiential Learning Cycle)

Gradual exposure to challenges, in a pre-planned sequence to engage with safety and increasing skills

(Kolb & Kolb, 2009; Priest & Gass, 1997)

Challenges and Critiques



01 **Individualisation**

Change is often **personalized**, neglecting broader social and historical contexts that influence behavior and experiences in outdoor adventure education settings.

02 **Instrumentalisation**

The outdoors can become **merely a tool**, leading to a disconnection from the more-than-human awareness essential for a deeper appreciation of nature and its complexities.

Challenges and Critiques



03 **Conquest**

The use of adventure narratives can inadvertently **reinforce a conqueror mindset**, framing nature as something to be dominated rather than respected, which undermines ecological awareness.

04 **Risk**

Misinterpretations of risk & perceived challenge have led to **coercive practices** in adventure education, where fear is manipulated rather than understood, negatively affecting the learning and emotional growth of participants.

Final Thoughts

What elements of the cognitive-behavioural approach can you identify in your adventure experiences at UWTSD so far?

Which elements can you carefully include in your programming and facilitation tools?

What are the implications for your practice as an outdoor adventure professional?



Next Week

Journaling through art

Complete the creative journaling prompt during the week.
Upload to the shared Padlet on the Block 3 Tile.
We will reflect on this experience during our session.





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