

A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of a diverse group of people, mostly women, wearing teal-colored t-shirts. They are gathered around a central point, holding up a small, wrapped gift box with a red ribbon. The background is a bright, clear blue sky with some light clouds. The overall mood is positive and collaborative.

# Learning through adventure

Engaging, learning, succeeding together

## COOPERATIVE APPROACHES #6

“The only way that offers any hope of a better future for all humanity is through cooperation and partnership”. Kofi Annan

<https://approchescooperatives.com>

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**Cover photo** : Participants each contribute one index finger as they attempt to elevate foam blocks without them dropping . This activity 'Block Party' appears in the PA publication, 'The Hundredth Monkey: Activities that Inspire Playful Learning'.

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## EDITORIAL

# A fascinating odyssey

Biorn Maybury-Lewis and James Ito-Adler



James Ito-Adler and Biorn Maybury-Lewis

A fascinating odyssey of friendship and commitment, stretching back over decades and across continents, undergirds this special issue of the *Cooperative Approaches* journal. The immediate stimulus began with a conversation between Biorn Maybury-Lewis, executive director and co-founder of the Cambridge Institute for Brazilian Studies (CIBS), and his long-time friend and colleague, Dominique Bénard, editor-in-chief and founder of the *Cooperative Approaches* journal. This resulted in a decision for CIBS to partner with Dominique's international team to support a new venture—an e-journal devoted to

cooperative approaches to education.

In the course of these conversations, CIBS agreed to organize this special issue of the new journal. Issue #6 would dedicate itself to telling the story of Project Adventure (PA), a Massachusetts NGO with a half a century of sustained commitment to immersive, experiential education. CIBS has partnered with PA for several years, supporting their efforts to internationalize, especially in Brazil.

James Ito-Adler, president and co-founder of CIBS, is a long-time friend of Dick Prouty, the former executive director and president of Project Adventure, who served at PA from 1980 until his retirement in 2015. Enjoying a friendship of more than half a century, Jim and Dick first met while studying together at the London School of Economics in the mid-1960s. They found themselves together again in New York City, in the late 1960s, as Jim prepared to leave for a stint in the Peace Corps in northeastern Brazil while Dick worked at Volunteers in Service to

America (VISTA: the Peace Corps' domestic version).

As fortune and fate would have it, Jim and Dick would collaborate again, in 2006, when Jim coordinated a week-long workshop for Kellogg Foundation Social Leadership grantees at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Jim made use of a day-long PA workshop to enrich the Kellogg Foundation grantees' experience at Harvard, which was highly praised by the participants in their final evaluations.

Adding to Jim's experience with Project Adventure, other CIBS people have experienced PA methods and activities. Along with two of CIBS' interns, Biorn had the opportunity to participate in a PA workshop that Larry Childs led. Larry has been a Senior Trainer and Consultant at Project Adventure for 15 years. His specializations include building teams and collegial culture, advancing school-wide social emotional learning, and adventure curriculum integration. He has served PA clients across the US and has led multi-year PA initiatives in China, France, India, and Israel. Like Dick, he is an active volunteer—writing and acting on local climate change and environment justice issues. Larry would participate in the development of PA workshops

and activities in France, with Dominique's assistance..

As a result of these various long-term personal and professional relationships, Dick and Larry – leaders at Project Adventure – both proved enthusiastic about participating with *Cooperative Approaches* and have written the lion's share of this special issue #6.

While serving as executive director of Harvard's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Biorn Maybury-Lewis worked with Dominique and Eduardo Missoni to help plan and execute the World Scout Movement (WOSM) Congress on Education in 2007 that would be held in Geneva, Switzerland. Eduardo, a public health doctor, who was then the secretary-general of WOSM, and Dominique, a psychologist, who was deputy secretary-general of WOSM, shared an inspiring vision for the role of youth education in tackling a myriad of issues facing the world, particularly in developing areas. Youth and development would be the central theme of the Congress.

As Biorn embraced their vision, Dom asked Biorn to chair the Scientific Committee that would plan the upcoming meeting in Geneva. The two, in turn, invited experts and youth leaders from around the world to participate in

the planning, as well as to present workshops at the Geneva Conference. They invited Jim to deliver a paper on the Anthropology of Adolescence at this remarkable world conference of scout leaders and youth educators.

At the Cambridge Institute for Brazilian Studies, Jim and Biorn had originally focused on higher education issues. They would add a new research agenda, in 2013, when Jim received an invitation to organize a research project in Brazil on the factors that influence students' academic performance. This in-country investigation involved forming a research team and interviewing 24 adolescent students (14-15 years old) in four schools in three Brazilian states. Jim presented the results at the 2013 SalaMundo, an international conference on education held in Curitiba, Brazil, which drew on background research that Biorn conducted. In this way, CIBS began to go beyond its focus on higher education to begin addressing issues concerning the earlier years of pre-university education.

Jim would be invited to speak at subsequent education conferences in Brazil concerned with innovations in education, where he presented the PA model. This brought CIBS closer to the world of educational reform at the primary and

secondary school levels, among the key concerns of Dominique and his long-term friend, Eduardo.

The organization of Issue #6 of the *Cooperative Approaches* journal basically follows the template for the e-journal in its first five editions, with a few tweaks. We open the issue with a **Conversation** between Jim Ito-Adler and Dick Prouty. The interview enables the reader to gain insight into the remarkable history of Project Adventure from its humble beginnings as an extension—so to speak—of the Outward Bound (OB) model. OB remains among the best known models of immersive, experiential training in the annals of educational innovation. Many of the founders of PA had connections and ties to Outward Bound and worked to find ways to adapt its principles and practices to new contexts. In the course of this opening interview, Dick explains how they did so.

We know that the experiences of pilot projects and individual schools – often either unable 'to scale-up' or demonstrably unsustainable over time – litter the history of educational innovation. By contrast, PA would find a way to go against this trend.

How did this small, local group in Massachusetts manage to grow and prosper for almost 50 years? Dick

Prouty was engaged during this period on many levels: as special project manager, executive director, and finally PA's president, until his recent retirement. Dick is in the best position to chronicle and explain the organization's remarkable history from its founding through the period of rapid growth.

Following the **Conversation**, the issue moves to **Decipher** the key concept that marks the PA approach: Adventure. This section explores the many facets of adventure as a guiding principle that has enable PA to become such a unique and significant force in experiential education.

The issue next moves in the **Dossier** section to consider the practical methodologies that PA uses to apply this principle in its wide portfolio of programs and projects. This is critical because without effective ways to put Project Adventure's beliefs and values into action, the Mission remains just a statement without substance.

In the next section, **Stories**, Larry, Dick, and Jim present a series of cases and vignettes of PA in action ranging from long-term full involvement in a single school over decades, to one-off programs and trainings. The goal is to provide

examples and give the flavor of how PA functions in practice.

Finally, we close this issue with a positive **Letter** from Caitlin Small, the executive director of Project Adventure, as she considers our future challenges as we face the uncertainties of responding to the global pandemic. As she aptly puts it: this is an adventure that none of us chose, but one that all of us can choose to face with resolution and resilience.



During freshmen orientation one new Milton Academy student guides their sightless classmate in hot pursuit of others. Trust builds in a context where vulnerability and risk are navigated by attentive hands-on communication.

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Meeting with . . .

# Richard Prouty



*This opening section is a long conversation between Dick Prouty and Jim Ito-Adler. Dick is the former Executive Director and later President of Project Adventure. He played a leading role in the organization from 1980 until 2015. This then is the story of the founding and subsequent growth of Project Adventure as seen through his eyes.*

**JIM: So tell me Dick how did you get from your VISTA service, organizing African-American welfare mothers in New York City, to participating in Project Adventure?**

**DICK:** I started working at PA in June of 1980, 12 years after leaving VISTA, in the winter of 1968. When I started

working at Project Adventure, in 1980, I came with some definite life experiences that shaped the way I began my work at PA.

My marriage to an African- American woman, in 1968, and my experience living and working in black communities in New York City, from 1966-68, as a VISTA volunteer in Brooklyn and Manhattan gave me insights that few people from my background had. After this life experience, I had a definite commitment to education focused on racial and economic justice.

After our marriage, we traveled to Norwell, a small town on the South Shore near Boston, Massachusetts, to stay with my father, Charlie. We were saving money so I could earn my teaching credentials in a master's degree program at the Antioch-Putney School in Bennington, Vermont.

I ended up getting a teaching position, in 1970, at the senior high school in Manchester, a town north of Boston, where I was responsible for senior psychology and sociology. While teaching at Manchester H.S., I

got a chance, in the summer of 1971, to attend a 26-day Outward Bound (OB) Teacher Practicum course that had a powerful impact on me.

The experience of being with fellow teachers, and forging a strong team under difficult and challenging circumstances was invaluable to me personally and professionally. Our instructor, John Rhodes, used goal setting brilliantly. One of my adventures, in fact, could have been life-threatening. We had to land a small boat on a lee shore in heavy seas with 5-7 foot waves. At one point as I was directing the crew, I stood up, and a wave knocked the tiller out wide to the lee side. I ended up in a precarious position outside the boat, hanging on for dear life. My companions dragged me back into the boat to safety, and together we were able to get safely to shore. This was a powerful and life-changing lesson in cooperation and trust.

It was this team and goal-setting experience, in the immersive experiential education process at the heart of the Outward Bound experience, that prepared me for my first encounter with Project Adventure (PA). PA was launched in 1971 at Hamilton-Wenham High School which was right next door to Manchester, on the North Shore of Massachusetts.

One of the instructors on my OB course, was Jim Schoel, who was one

of the four founders of PA. One of his specialties was to work with students having difficulty at the high school, and he named his program 'counseling on the run'. Jim developed many of the early precursor activities that later led to the ABC program—Adventure Based Counseling—at PA.

**JIM: *What was the relationship between Outward Bound and Project Adventure?***

**DICK:** Bob Lentz, the original director of PA, and the individual who set the course in the first ten years of PA's now almost 50-year history, was a key figure. He was a brilliant man who had worked at Outward Bound, in the nineteen sixties, as an administrator and trip leader. Bob had been recruited by Jerry Pieh, then the Principal at Hamilton-Wenham High School, to implement a grant called Project Adventure at the school. Jerry was the son of one of the first OB School Directors, Bob Pieh. At the time in 1971-2, he was finishing his Ph.D. at Harvard with a thesis entitled, *Project Adventure*, based on his own deep history with OB and its immersive education processes.

Jerry and his father, Bob, were both steeped in the philosophy of Kurt Hahn, the founder of Outward Bound. They were driven by a vision to bring the wilderness-based experiences of the traditional OB 26-day course to

the environment of the public school system. They wanted to allow all students to have similar growth experiences. Kurt Hahn, the Headmaster of the Gordonstoun School in Scotland, was deeply influenced by the experience of seeing which sailors had survived after their ships were torpedoed by the Germans.

Contrary to expectations, it turned out that the younger and more fit sailors did not survive as well as the older and less fit ones. Trying to duplicate the lessons of these sailors was at the heart of the Outward Bound experience, which in turn had a strong influence on the pedagogy of Project Adventure.

**JIM: *How did this philosophy get incorporated into Project Adventure?***

**DICK:** Karl Rohnke, another creative and strong group leader on the original staff, basically created the first 'ropes course' for PA in the early seventies. His book, *Cowtails and Cobras*, first published in 1977, became a classic in short order. By the early 1980's, hundreds of physical education teachers throughout New England were taking "Train the Trainer" workshops led by Karl and using that early text as a guide.

The in-school academic courses used project-based learning, with socio-

emotional skills developed using PA activities on the ropes courses and other problem-solving activities called 'initiatives'. These were supplemented by peak experiences on short field trips in the community and longer camping trips to Acadia National Park in Maine, for example.

Karl was a genius at creating new obstacles in the 'ropes course,' now called the Challenge Course, and in creating and leading students in engaging initiatives, especially in cooperative games. His ability to make the approach to challenge engaging and even fun was and still is at the heart of the PA pedagogical experience.

Another founding staff member of PA was Mary Smith. She, with Bob Lentz and many of the original teachers at Hamilton-Wenham such as Kahil Bogdan and Alan Sentkowski, were instrumental in developing the curriculum of the early academic model of PA in the classroom. The curriculum included many classic OB/PA immersive experiences with a controlled level of stress and challenge, but made engaging with lots of team support and fun.

**JIM: *What was your role in this early history of PA?***

**DICK:** I began working with people from Project Adventure while I was still teaching high school. One of my

notable colleagues was Paul Radcliffe, who had started a group counseling program based on the work of Project Adventure at Gloucester (MA), the famous fishing port. In 1974-75 he and I started a similar program at Manchester. At this point in time, Project Adventure addressed two aspects of a suburban high school: Physical Education (PE) and Academics.

In 1980, after four years of developing the group counseling model based on PA principles with Paul, I left my tenured position at Manchester High School to join Bob Lentz, the Executive Director of PA. I had a specific assignment: to develop a group counseling program we named Adventure Based Counseling (ABC). We won a three-year federal grant (1980-83) that Paul Radcliffe directed, and I coordinated, in my new full-time position at PA. Thus was born a counseling model to accompany the very successful PE model that was growing rapidly, and the more modest academic model.

Paul and Bill Cuff co-led this three year grant, ending in 1983, that created a development model for group counseling using PA activities. This work drew on several strands of theory, including goal setting from Kurt Lewin and William Glasser (we found that goals have an almost independent power); trust building from Carl Rogers and Eric Erickson;

stress and eustress from Hans Selye and Sol Rosenthal; humor/fun from Norman Cousins; and problem-solving from Bandura's Theory of Self-Efficacy. The power of PA is its ability to make a powerful brew of immersive experiences that hooks participants from the beginning in a challenging, yet fun set of activities. For the interested reader there is much more on the theoretical frameworks we drew on in our first text, *Islands of Healing: A Guide to Adventure Based Counseling*, co-authored by Jim Schoel, myself, and Paul Radcliffe. First published in 1988, the book has sold over 100,000 copies to date. It was followed, in 2002, by a second version, *Exploring Islands of Healing: New Perspectives on Adventure Based Counseling*, written by Jim Schoel and Richard Maizell.



PA Staff 1983: (Left to Right). Karl Rohnke, Dick Prouty, Bonnie Hannable, Steve Webster, Patty Nichols, John Ritter, Alan Sentowski, Mickey Ratte, Paul Radcliffe

**JIM: *What was the path that led to your management role in PA?***

**DICK:** After Bob Lentz recruited me, I was looking forward to working with him. Unfortunately, he left PA for a position as a school principal, shortly after I arrived in the fall of 1980. He had not named a successor, leaving it to the five staff members to choose one. Karl Rohnke was the best known and most charismatic of the group and was chosen to lead in a democratic process. But Karl soon learned that he did not particularly like administration and trusted me to deal with such tasks as preparing budgets and managing PA's planning processes. By 1982, he became the President and I was named the Executive Director. It remained that way until Karl left PA in the 1990s.

One of the critical challenges I faced in this position was to incorporate Project Adventure as a charitable 501(3) c organization, which included naming a new Board of Directors. This happened, in 1982, when PA separated in a friendly, but formal way from the Hamilton-Wenham School District, which had been our fiscal sponsor for the first decade.

Project Adventure, in the eighties, was a hot property, even in an era

of Reagan education budget cuts and the rise of the "back to basics" movement. During this period, PA had several distinct advantages to build our national name:

We had an original Joint Dissemination Review Panel (JDRP), from 1974, that evaluated PA as having a significant effect on the self-esteem of participants, especially young women. JDRP was an independent, external review by the U.S. Department of Education.

We had well-designed "Train-the-Trainer" workshop models that had a flow, sequence, and a professionalism not matched in other experiential workshops for teachers at that time. This built an alumni network that enabled us to disseminate our results more widely.

We had an installed base of over 100 adoptions from the 1970's funding from the U.S. Department of Education that lasted until 1982. This resulted from the JDRP 'stamp of quality' and positive, externally-validated outcomes.

All of these contributed to "word-of-mouth" advertising about our workshops, so we did not have to invest much money, time, or energy in marketing our services.

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### *The Case of the Older Teacher*

*Sometimes the most difficult group to reach with new ideas are the grizzled veterans who are the most wedded to their traditional approaches and less open to change. One day, in the early eighties, Ralph, an older PE teacher came up to the registration booth I was manning at a five-day residential summer workshop. "I don't want to be here," he said dejectedly, "but my department head made me come." He then turned on his heel and walked off to join his group in the warmups on day one. Three days later, I went to a local bar with the members of my small academic workshop of eight people. When we entered, we saw the 30 plus members of Karl's PE workshop, lined up in two lines with arms together in the classic 'trust dive' position. There was Ralph standing on the bar, about to dive into the arms of his colleagues, now clearly his new best friends. As they shouted, "Ralphie, Ralphie, Ralphie," he dove into their arms, belly first. As he got to his feet, he had a huge smile on his face—far from the dejected figure he appeared on the registration day. He returned home after the Workshop with a new focus and dedicated to bringing PA back to his school system.*

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As a result of the word-of-mouth enthusiasm of participants in our programs, the eighties were a story of 20% growth in revenue for PA in both training workshops and the installation of challenge courses all over the U.S. I was directing the company, on a day-to-day and month-to-month basis. We had quarterly meetings of the Board of Directors. Karl was on the Board, and still President until he left in the nineties, and I ran all major decisions by him. Karl and I trusted each other to do our respective roles, and this relationship worked out well for many years.



Dick on team leadership retreat in 1994 in Maine. Investing in team building and team coaching was a big part of addressing management challenges at PA.

**JIM: What were the leadership and management issues you faced in steering PA through the many changes in the political environment?**

**DICK:** PA faced many challenges in light of the shifts in academic theories and national education policies during the decades after I assumed the new position. PA was an early precursor and exemplar of the interdisciplinary and project-based learning models of the 1970's. In the 1980's, after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the Reagan administration began its focus on 'back to basics' as a reaction to what they believed were the excesses of the 70's.

Accountability was the new watchword, which eventually led to the No Child Left Behind initiative enacted during the presidency of George W. Bush in 2001. This introduced the era of intensive testing to make sure all students were achieving satisfactory levels of achievement, especially in reading and math.

In the 1980's, a new approach to understanding teaching and learning started to gain traction in education circles, called brain-based learning. Using the rapidly growing research in neuro-science and cognition on how the developing brain worked, this new field provided us with information on how the PA model could be better

understood. Two overarching best practices of this brain-based education movement were identified in the influential book, *Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain*, by Renata and Geoffrey Caine (1992):

1. Designing and orchestrating lifelike, enriching and appropriate experiences for learners.
2. Ensuring that students process experience in such a way as to increase the extraction of meaning.

It was increasingly evident that human beings and their brains are wired by evolution to be using all our senses in small group settings, to cooperate physically and socially, and to find meaning within our group and in the greater environment. We are 'meaning-makers', and learn through all our senses in a group that is actively engaged in a meaningful pursuit.

Meaning-making takes place in what we now know is a quantum field of thought, not the stimulus-response model of behaviorism theory. In the words of the physicist, David Bohm, "Only meaning arouses energy". Deep meanings provide a sense of direction because they govern what people are looking for and what they are willing to do. Ideas and goals have power, and build momentum in

an organization, especially if leadership knows and encourages this type of thinking.

Immersion is the concept that best captures this type of learning. It can be used to describe a small hunting party, members of a boat crew on an Outward Bound expedition, a PA workshop and, most definitely, the experiences of the children in integrated school-based PA programs. If students are involved in a meaningful and engaging class that engages them as co-creators of the meaning, we find they literally cannot forget what they learn, or find it much harder to do so. The outcomes of highly functioning PA classrooms like those described in the Stories section about PA's Columbus, Ohio experience find that students do better on standardized tests, even when their teachers do not teach to the tests, as most schools still do.



Four Original Staff of PA at the PA 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration in 1991 : Mary Smith, Jim Schoel, Karl Rohnke, Bob Lentz

**JIM: As you moved into the 2000's, what were the new directions PA pursued?**

**DICK:** By 2000, PA had become better known as a world-wide innovator and name brand in the experiential field. I will just list a few developments below, several of which (Columbus, Ohio; Covington, Georgia; France's UCPA, and Japan) will be discussed at greater length in the following section, Stories.

- **Youth-at-Risk Model:** Cindy Simpson, who had first learned of the ABC model, in 1981, at a workshop in Savannah, GA with her partner, Lisa Galm, went on to develop successful modifications of the basic ABC model to deal with youth-at-risk with multiple diagnoses, including both moderate and severe issues.
- **Corporate Training:** The Corporate world discovered the experiential model, in the late 1980's, and outdoor and experiential education began to boom. A determined young woman, a graduate of both Dartmouth College and Tuck Business school, walked into our office one day in the early 80's, a refugee from Wall Street. Ann Smolowe told me she wanted to join PA and develop an application for the corporate world. She was a good salesperson, with an infectious laugh, a credible story to tell corporate customers, and a



determination to have the highest quality programming.

By the mid-nineties, we were engaged with large corporate clients with programs at places like Kodak, Digital Equipment and others. One contract with BMW, in 1996, was for \$2M and needed a large pool of trainers to accomplish the terms of the contract.

Human Resources professionals engage in a risk related initiative during a 2014 PA Chinese partner key note address in Shanghai. Many PA adoptions occurred in China over the last decade.

- **Physical Education:** By 2000, we were well known by almost every PE teacher in the country, and most had used some of our activities through the dissemination of publications initially written by Karl Rohnke and later by Jane Panicucci, a former PE teacher who was a leader, writer, and facilitator at PA for over 20 years. This created a loyal base who think of

PA as the mothership of adventure curricula and activities.

- **Risk Management:** Of necessity, we developed a strong risk management stance to deal with the threat of lawsuits by third parties. Bob Ryan, working with a wonderful lawyer from Houston, Rebb Greg, developed an indemnification agreement, which after implementation, reduced our lawsuits to almost zero and made our budget less vulnerable and easier to balance.
- **Community Development:** From 1987 to 2000, Jim Grout worked at PA, and with our very talented Director of Research and Development, Nancy Terry, developed a new model for community development. The presenting symptom for the series



PA Long Range Planning Team (Senior Leadership) Cindy Simpson, Dick Prouty, Nancy Terry, Jim Grout, Ann Smolowe, Bob Ryan and team coach, Tim Churchard. Circa 1993

of large federal SAMSHA grants we received was the presence of high levels of drug addiction in a community. The model basically brought a wide diverse group of stakeholders in a community: students (including users), teachers, administrators, and community leaders, and built a trusting team using PA methods. Then a plan was made to address the underlying causes of the drug abuse as identified by the participants. This model also received high evaluations from SAMHSA and was replicated in multiple communities with the use of federal funds.

- **International affiliates:** In 1993 a man from Tokyo came to participate in a PA workshop and asked to speak to me afterwards. Toshio Hyashi wanted to know how he could become the PA of Japan. Led by Tham Yew Cheong, we developed a legal affiliation contract, which had four stages of adoption, certified by observation and testing, to allow PA Japan to come into being in the fall of 1995. We also developed affiliates in Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands, but PA Japan was the most successful, and is thriving today with US\$2M revenue.
- **Publications and our Zipline Magazine:** Tom Zierke, our Director of Publications, liked to

say that our publications were the ambassadors of our mission. And, it is true that the over 26 books we published, with total sales in the millions of copies, earning millions of dollars, brought many people to our workshops.

A typical progression might be for someone to be given or to purchase one of our books, to be motivated to attend a workshop, to be further energized, and to proceed to raise money to develop a program for their home organization. Lisa Furlong became our Director of Publications and, under her guidance, our magazine called Ziplines featured a different theme in each quarterly issue.



For readers wishing to follow up on our publications, many are available through the following link:

[https://www.flaghouse.com/Physical-Education/Project-Adventure/Publications/#page\\_no=2](https://www.flaghouse.com/Physical-Education/Project-Adventure/Publications/#page_no=2)

**JIM: *What were the key lessons you learned in this position?***

**DICK:** This is a question I have asked myself over the decades of leading PA, since I stepped down in 2015 to pursue other interests, especially climate crisis work in my local region. The main themes I come back to are:

- **Key Idea:** One key idea was to bring the magic of Outward Bound to the world in a high quality and well evaluated package of engaging and fun workshops. Building teams and leaders of teams are the greatest strengths of the PA model. Our tag line for many years, and our best one, was “Bring the Adventure Home”. Bring the magic to your home community and bring it home to your heart and mind through study and experience.
- **Great people:** Another key lesson was having a group of interesting, highly motivated people come together to learn with us at PA and then choosing the best of them to work with us as full-time staff or as certified trainers dispersed throughout the country and the world was a critical step.
- **Culture:** I worked hard to foster a culture that exemplified our work: together we all developed an intentional culture of engagement, and empowerment

of staff. Dialogue was always available to anyone. Questions were always encouraged, and while this could sometimes seem to burn time and be frustrating to some in leadership, I always thought that ‘walking our talk’ of empowerment of staff was a key to our success.

- **Board of Directors and Board Chairs:** We were fortunate in having two dedicated people; Jerry Pieh, the originator of the term “Project Adventure,” who served as the PA chair for over ten years, followed by Kit Weld, who has been chair since 2006. I had great relationships with both of these men, and they were great advisors and leaders in their own right.
- **Goals and Plans:** One thing we started in 1986 and followed religiously ever since was to have an outside facilitator help us develop a strategic plan with a high degree of buy-in from the staff, through much dialogue and communication at the heart of the process. This is Lewin’s goal-setting again, coupled with the magic of dialogue that I learned from David Bohm. Goals have an almost mystical power beyond reason, especially when your whole organization is committed to achieving those goals.



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## DECIPHERING

# What is adventure?

Larry Childs with PA staff

## Mission/Vision

In June 2020, Project Adventure staff undertook a revision of its Mission/Vision statement, which in its concise form reads as follows:

***PA's mission is to support the development of people, schools, and communities through the power of adventure.***

This could be elaborated to read:

***Project Adventure creates, adapts, and promotes active, adventure-based teaching and training methods along with activities and tools that inspire and accelerate learning in individuals, organizations, and communities.***

As part of a global movement for change, PA is convinced that communities whose members are skilled at collaboration and committed to the social/emotional development of all can advance towards a more secure, just, and sustainable planet.

In practical terms, PA delivers exemplary trainings, programs, publications, and challenge courses that are readily adapted across diverse cultures and inspire such transformation. The embrace of PA across

so many diverse ages and cultural contexts can be attributed to universal human attractions to connection, challenge, meaning-making, and fun. This has been fostered by program design and facilitation that affirms and builds on local wisdom and conditions. PA methods and programs are always a co-creation, rather than a structure imposed from the outside.

## A response to pressing human needs

The Project Adventure model emerged in response to educational systems in the U.S. and globally that have not adapted well to social change, the evolution of work, pressing human needs, and widespread appeals for a more just global community. This is clearly aligned with the approach of Cooperative Education as set forth in the founding of this journal. The key concept in the PA approach, as signaled by the name of the organization, is **Adventure**. In this section, we will decipher the meaning of “adventure” as it is embodied in the philosophy and practice of PA.

While widely recognized as an instructional modality for youth, a focus on adventure offers parallel support to school

administration and management for better integration of abstract pedagogies and alignment with empirical behavioral practices. Operating on both student and professional pathways, it supports positive and healthy school-wide cultures. In this sense adventure helps to catalyze and integrate pedagogies and practices and weave together the social and cultural life of a school from classroom to teachers room, from staff meetings to parent conferencing.

Adventure is a highly engaging and powerful model. It is grounded by the core concepts and methods of Experiential Education and can be applied to create classroom communities within which a sense of individual agency, inclusive belonging, and collective competence are universal. In these classrooms learning is experienced as engaging, socially connected, and relevant. Teachers and students can learn to co-create their



Staff members at LA's Best, an after school program serving 195 public schools in Los Angeles California, learn to integrate PA's 'Adventure in Peacemaking' model. They are guided here by PA trainer Jose Martin.

classroom culture in a deeply participatory, democratic, and continuously evolving manner. The model has been readily adopted and creatively adapted across diverse schools, geographical settings, ages, and cultural settings.

## What is meant by Adventure? How is it related to Experiential Education?

We often describe Adventure in a pedagogical sense as a **way** of doing things. In this sense Adventure is not just an activity in and of itself. This is too limiting. If the word adventure conjures up images of activities like rock climbing, kayaking, and parachuting, pause for a moment and imagine instead the way in which such activity is performed. Any activity or lesson becomes an adventure if a real element of surprise exists, especially if the activities compel one to do things not imagined possible. Adventure exists when there is deep engagement - an engagement derived from experiences perceived as challenging, unique, and relevant. In a word, educational.

In challenging outdoor group activities such as those offered in the traditional wilderness setting during an Outward Bound (OB) course, it is easier to envision adventure. However, since not everyone can pack up and disappear into the wilderness for three weeks, the PA challenge was to serve more young people by adapting these same

elements to urban and suburban school settings.

The answer was to create an immense catalog of novel activities that, through similar facilitation methods, would engage and inspire the participants. Karl Rohnke, a creative former OB instructor and member of the founding PA staff, basically created the modern 'ropes course' in the early seventies. The in-school academic programs involved project-based learning with socio-emotional skills developed through PA activities on ropes courses along with other cooperative games and problem-solving activities called 'initiatives'. Karl was brilliant at this and his ability to make the approach to challenge engaging, fun, and transformative was, and still is, at the heart of the PA pedagogical experience.

One classic example that encapsulates this was the famous 'mud walk' created by Karl and Alan Sentkowski at Hamilton-Wenham High School. Students in a 10<sup>th</sup> grade biology class were asked to wade into a swamp behind the school up to their chest for a few hours and collect samples of various flora and fauna for examination back in the classroom. This was a classic OB/PA immersive experience: a stressful, but controlled experience, made engaging with lots of team support and squeals of excitement and delight. There was also the added spice of a perceived element of danger



Staff members at LA's Best learn to integrate PA's 'Adventure in Peacemaking' model while working on a number sequencing challenge.

since there were real turtles and snakes in the swamp!

Adventure fundamentally involves challenge—moments when one can stretch and grow to experience the possibility of success as well as the risk of failure. This is especially true when it takes place within a shared experience with a group. Along the way, the individual can learn to become more comfortable with others in the group.

Adventure is about taking risks—not necessarily physical risks, but emotional and social risks as well, where people see the natural consequences unfolding before them. Perhaps just the act of connecting action to consequence is the vital link. Learning something in a classroom lecture is one thing; being able to experience it is yet another.

## Adventure and Trust

To fully participate in any program like this, an atmosphere of safety needs to exist—a space where one can speak one’s mind without fear of rejection and push oneself to new limits. While this is often difficult, it also needs to have some purposeful elements of fun/playfulness. It is through the juxtaposition and balance of serious and playful, action and reflection, that participants become more willing to engage with others, learn to be vulnerable and increasingly known by others. In this sense trust is foundational and we have learned through years of successful experience it can be achieved relatively quickly within a group by skillful facilitation and the novel, engaging, and holistic features of the adventure!

## Significance

Individuals who embark on an adventure are conscious that something about the experience is both out of the ordinary and important. It requires commitment and discipline, extra effort, and risk-taking as well as sacrifice and some level of emotional strain. Proven results over many years of experience have included gains in cognitive, socio-emotional, technical, and physical skills.

## Support & Safety

Some level of support and safety assurance is needed for healthy risk-taking. Consider physical logistics on an expedition or social supports on a

journey into the intellectual unknown. In these settings, the learning community member:

- Becomes focused and invests effort
- Offers encouragement and appreciation to fellow group members
- Admits what they don’t know and learns to ask for and accept help from others

Together these features foster a sense of belonging with members seeing themselves with certain rights as well as responsibilities. Because support and safety are present the members, students and teachers alike:

- Take on greater risks
- Assume ownership for collective and individual goals
- Have high expectations & hold one another accountable
- Give and receive feedback more readily

These behaviors represent the developing of personal agency allowing members to become more powerful change agents in their own lives and those of their communities. The locus of control shifts further to individuals enabling them to tap this sense of self-efficacy and power to

generate meaningful and satisfying activity (Carver, 1996).

## Stimulation

While the adventure is planned there is the surge of adrenalin as new questions are faced: What will we see? How will it go? What relationships will emerge? Can I do this? Will we succeed? There are elements of the unknown, surprise, extreme fun, and high anticipation.

Stimulating intellectual engagement involves a process of discovery, personal meaning-making, and the exposure to new ideas. Experience is thereby transformed into the construction of knowledge and learning. A healthy stimulation of thought sets the stage for moments of 'Ah Ha!'

While the teacher instructs around the specific skills needed for the particular activity, sets parameters, and provides resources, the students themselves are given the freedom to grapple with materials and group strategies. They often surprise each other with their observations and the questions they raise as they settle on new strategies to achieve the activity goals. The process of complex problem-solving is then as much the lesson as getting the right answers.

Adventure lies at the intersection of emotional involvement and unexpected outcomes - where adventure is more than the sum of its



All Aboard! Students share their satisfaction once having successfully supported one another through a PA rope swing crossing to land on a set of narrow platforms.

parts. It is more than fun, high expectations, and support – it is the turning point to the internalizing, transference, and construction of learning.

## Satisfaction

Meeting a challenge and feeling satisfied encourages further pursuit. When fully immersed, excited, and experiencing joy, people of all ages understand, retain, and use what they learn. (Caine & Caine, 1991)

The Adventure-based classroom uses multiple modes of perceiving, experiencing, and processing. Satisfaction is derived from using various strengths, behavioral styles, and multiple intelligences, which values the contributions of all the group members.



Students support each other as they simultaneously lean back holding a rescue style rope tied into a large loop; Connected to a rope by a triple eight knot and carabiners students form a human anchor as support for a climber who they just successfully lowered to the ground.

## DOSSIER

# Methodology of adventure

Larry Childs with PA staff

***Adventure can appear as a spontaneous and intuitive approach to learning, yet it is grounded in a set of operating principles and facilitation strategies that have developed over decades.***

Current Project Adventure trainers and consultants benefit from the wisdom and creativity of their predecessors over the half-century of PA experience. As one veteran teacher recently remarked, PA was 'ahead of its time.' The evidence, she said, is that these very techniques, elaborated in books from 35 years ago are still relevant, fresh, and incredibly effective today. They have not only stood the test of time, they travel well to new social and cultural settings.

## PA Foundational Concepts

### The Full Value Contract (FVC)

The FVC is a powerful adventure-learning tool and distinctive Project Adventure approach for establishing and living out values and behavioral norms in a group



PA Senior Trainer & Consultant,  
Larry Childs

setting. In this context, norms and values refer to the ways members of a 'community of learners' desire and agree to treat one another within their group or team. Effectively, they commit to co-create and maintain their own positive, safe, and productive culture. In such an environment members are better able to understand, value, and express



Student created graphics help make FVC values visible in a 2007 PA adoption in the Boston Public Schools

healthy, pro-social behaviors. Since as humans we are learning and growing in our social competencies at all stages of our lives, this method is as effective for school-age children as it is for teachers and senior administrators.

The Full Value Contract, now often referred to as 'Commitment', is a participatory, thoughtful, and fun method for developing social norms for any group. It is fun because the

agreements emerge in part from engaging in and reflecting on shared community-building activities. Identified norms are those to which all agree, practice, and assume collective responsibility for maintaining over time. If there are leaders, whether a teacher, instructor, or manager, they are part of the group when developing a FVC and are fully expected to share norms they also feel are important. They should also attempt to integrate any values and language that the broader community or organization has embraced. For example: "Be Here, Be safe, Be Honest, Care for Others, Let Go & Move On, Set Goals" - are common values that can help define organizations, including classrooms and schools, which have been found to be both powerful and actionable.

### Challenge by Choice

PA coined this widely embraced term as an adaptation of Choice Theory. It helps a community to build commitment and trust by extending to every participant the right to choose their own level of engagement, while the choices made by each member are respected. This practice shifts a certain amount of power and responsibility from teacher/leader, who is intentionally less directive or coercive, to the student/

participant. The results for students are increased agency, sense of belonging, and ultimately competence.

Challenge by Choice asks that participants challenge themselves and participate fully in the experience. Recognizing that any experience or goal may pose a different level and type of challenge for each group member and that authentic personal change comes from within, Challenge by Choice creates an environment where participants are asked to search for opportunities to stretch and grow. Determining what kind of participation represents an optimal learning opportunity is the responsibility of each group member. All are asked to add value to the group experience by finding a way to contribute to the group's efforts, while also finding value in the experience for themselves as individuals.

Challenge by Choice does not suggest that participants should disengage or simply walk away from the group. Rather, if feeling disinclined to participate directly in a manner that the activity suggests, participants are encouraged to seek alternative ways to engage and add value. Most activities have a variety of ways individuals can support the group at a level they

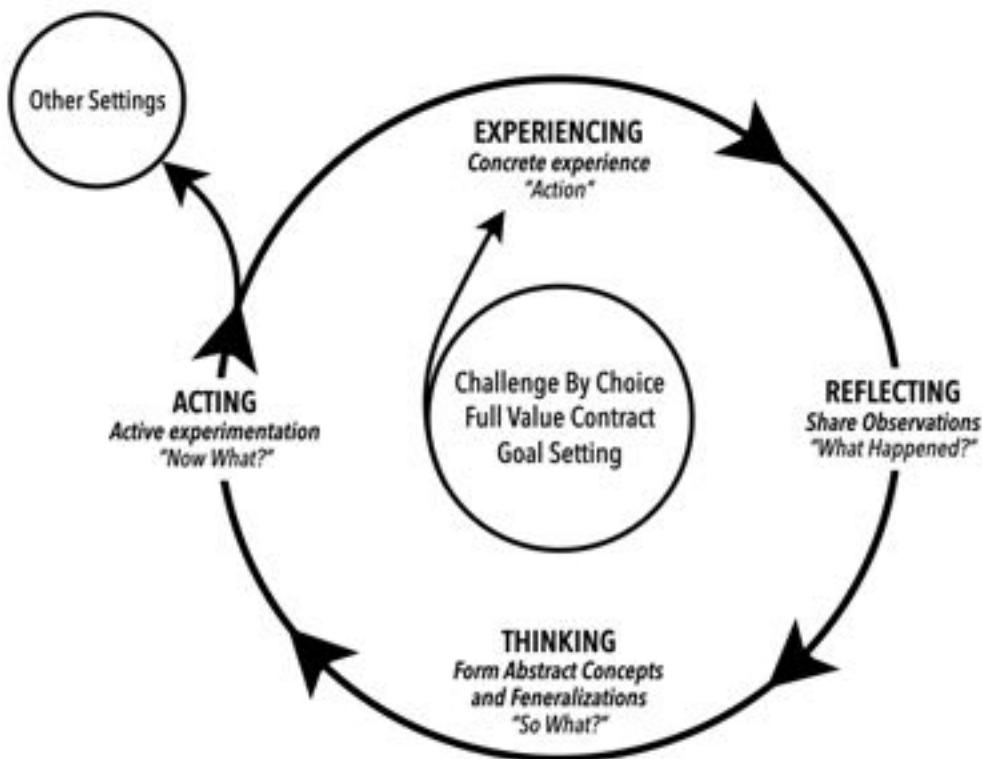
are prepared and willing to undertake.

## **Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC)**

David Kolb's brain-based theory of optimal learning process offers a scaffolding facilitation structure that is inquiry-based and sequenced. It assists participants to engage in an experience, then reflect upon it, make meaning or conceptualize, and finally imagine how to transfer their learning experiences to the situation at hand and/or to other settings.

Once an activity has been completed, a period of reflection (or Debriefing) helps students to draw relevance from the experience. Connecting the present experience to past experiences also enhances learning. In this curriculum, the Debrief comes in many forms. During this phase, the simple questions, "What happened in the activity?" "So, what can we learn from what occurred?" and, finally, "Now what can we do with this information?" or "How can we apply what we've learned to other areas of our lives?" provide the structure.

This Debrief period can be active and involve action-oriented experiences, or it can be discussion-based. If no reflection period is provided, we limit the potential learning opportunities for our students and ourselves. A trained facilitator learns how to do this effectively without manipulating or imposing his or her desired outcomes. In many groups



Dr. David Kolb's ELC informs the PA lesson design and facilitation processes.

leaders emerge within the group who encourage and guide their fellow participants in the process.

better approach involves setting strong, yet general intentions and having a sense of direction.

### Setting Goals

Adventure proposes a common process and model for discerning intentions based on which academic and social/emotional goals are defined, pursued, and achieved or adjusted as needed. Goal setting is also a critical life skill that helps students define where they want to go and figure out how to get there. For some participants getting very specific and measurable is important. For others a

In any case a community of learners helps the participants to discern how to balance areas such as individual versus group goals, or academic versus behavioral outcomes. The reflection and dialog emerging from the adventure group process is essential for rendering goal pursuit a meaningful and effective activity for personal growth. Too often the process of goal setting focuses on individual achievement without a strong commitment to community, common



Debriefing often requires participants to seize the moment and share their insights while others listen with focused attention and curiosity. Coffee is sometimes involved especially on cold days.



Team problem solving activities often take place

interests, or service to others. As such, an individualistic focus risks distracting the student from the group and along paths of self-obsession, lofty ambitions, missed opportunities, or shallow achievements.

On the other hand, goal setting in a social context and adventure framework guides students towards a healthy balance of self, group, and the wider world.

## PA Group Facilitation Methods

- **GRABBSS** - This convenient acronym is used to help a facilitator assess a group such that their development needs are met in areas from lesson design to in-the-moment adjustments. The acronym stands for Goals, Readiness, Affect, Behavior, Body, Setting and Stage of group development.
- **Adventure Wave:** The facilitator offers a sequence of learning experiences that progressively build on each other through repeated application of the ELC (Experiential Learning Cycle). A wave is evident in that there is a well-structured and natural segue connecting experiences, applying lessons, and thereby accelerating growth.
- **Calling Group/Quick Class:** Initially a teacher-guided process; 'Calling Group' (aka 'Quick Class') provides a proscribed forum for students to discuss positive and problematic interactions that occur in structured and non-structured school settings. It is a structure and method for helping students practice positive relationships and

productive communication. When 'group' is called, all the participants stand or sit in a circle to address a specific topic, which can range from informational or for celebration to a concerning challenge, or in some cases conflict. Students learn to listen and to communicate feelings in a manner that describes, rather than attacks or defends. In time the students themselves may call and facilitate group as well as determine action steps or consequences.

- **Control to Empowerment:** Over time students are intentionally provided opportunities to assume increasing responsibility. Groups/ classes thereby move from strong teacher control to empowerment, whereby students increasingly take the lead. This dynamic is carefully managed through the use of assessment tools. It honors the human need for power, and diminishes unproductive conflict.

## Teacher preparation: A PA workshop and then what?

Once one has participated in a PA workshop, experienced the methods, and perused published material, there is generally a desire to apply the techniques back in one's home instructional setting. This could be in a traditional school-based classroom with four walls or

an outdoor expedition. The following criteria can help one assess the extent to which adventure principles are indeed being put in practice.

1. **Co-create social norms and common language** – Group operates in the context of a social contract or shared agreement defining desired behavioral norms.
2. **Inclusive structures** – Learning and engagement for all is a goal, expectation, and reality. This is achieved through facilitation and physical organization of space and student positioning.
3. **Evidence of 'Challenge-by-Choice'** – Looks like students are feeling safe enough to enter their stretch zone; taking academic and social risks, while supporting one another in the process.
4. **Relevant, meaningful, and conceptually coherent** – Participants perceive the work as useful and connected to their lives and the wider world.
5. **Play and fun** – Activities are structured, facilitated, and valued for their intrinsic emotional power to motivate, inspire, create, and connect.

6. **Movement** - Physical activity is generally structured and connected to learning outcomes, while operating within safety guidelines.
7. **Noise and interaction** – There is bustle and group engagement as in any productive work site from office or production studio to farm or factory.
8. **Elements of surprise** – There are unexpected outcomes both with successes as well as failures. Regardless, the associated learning is valued.
9. **Embrace the unknown** - Instructors and participants are reminded that often the uncertainty of a journey leads to openness to outcomes, increased self-awareness, and the development of a well-grounded self-confidence.
10. **Spark interest** - Participants are so engaged that there is uncontrolled learning. They just can't help themselves!
11. **Dedicate to active reflection** - Groups explore what happened, the significance or bigger meaning, and finally the applications or relevance. Common themes are group process, personal performance,

new goals and intentions, and academic connections.

12. **'Control to empowerment'** - Instructors are not just doing all the leading and teaching. They develop a trusting environment and participant competence such that a gradual transfer of responsibility occurs and participants practice positive social relations, while acquiring skills for teaching, leading, and following their peers.

## Processing in an 'Adventure Classroom'

"It is not until we explore how we have learned that we can understand how what we have learned affects what we already know, and what we



In an adventure context competition is structured such that winning or losing is far less important than the learning derived and trusting bonds that form. These are peer leaders from a career and technical high school.

have yet to learn” – Belanca and Fogarty, 1991

One of the features that can intimidate instructors is the important feature of processing or ‘debriefing’ group experiences. Processing or ‘debriefing’ in the Adventure model is an essential teaching strategy that enables participants to make sense of the lessons and experiences to which they are exposed. It involves a broad spectrum of reflective and analytical activities through which individuals or a group reviews a set of events to gain understanding and learning that can be transferred and applied to new situations.

“Processing transforms learning at the memory level into knowledge that is personally meaningful and conceptually coherent.” (Caine & Caine, 1999).

- **Processing and the theoretical framework** – Processing asks us to think about the immersion in an activity or lesson and take from it new ways of thinking, new ways of thinking about thinking (metacognition), and new understandings of the world.

Processing achieves the following objectives:

- **Nurtures discovery and construction of knowledge** – Discovery happens in true

intellectual pursuit and leads to felt meaning – the tingling sensation of “I get it!” While the specific information in isolation may not be meaningful, it is the larger context of information and experience that mark the discovery process.

- **Enables connections so that content and skills become accessible to the learner** – Discovery and construction of knowledge means that the student is able to make relevant connections between new and existing knowledge. These connections allow the student to rearrange, reapply, and recombine concepts and skills. It allows us to pursue new connections and new patterns. Without this conscious activity, the information is simply what someone else says the student should know. Most of us prefer to organize our own desks, or organize our own files so we know where to find things. Similarly, the ability to consciously organize our knowledge makes it accessible and allows us to feel powerful, which is critically important.
- **Aids the transfer of learning** – Making a connection between previous knowledge and new knowledge is a first step in the

application of new and meaningful concepts. This transfer requires a mindful abstraction; an effort to search in one's memory for a certain principal. The effort of thinking through, analyzing, generalizing, and forming new concepts that can be applied must be actively facilitated by the student or even by an able peer. Essential outcomes are students developing competencies for self-facilitation and peer teaching without the need for direction from the teacher/leader.

- **Promotes the development of higher order thinking skills** - Processing utilizes higher order thinking skills critical to success in school and life. These skills – assessing and evaluating, analysis and synthesis, integration and transfer – can only be developed through their use in the activity of processing. In addition, the activity of processing learning on a consistent basis validates those skills, sparks a strong sense of self-efficacy, and enables further and deeper application to situations ranging from math and writing to team dynamics and social engagements.

- **Processing and the Adventure Learning Community** – When members of an adventure learning community process they communicate. These processing activities in turn strengthen the community and its members in a number of ways. It facilitates an exchange of ideas and construction of knowledge, develops cognitive and interpersonal skills, and nurtures the Full Value Contract.
  - **Exchange of ideas and construction of knowledge** – Community growth relies on the interchange of ideas and development of shared knowledge. The more lively the conversation, the greater the opportunity for growth. When information is exchanged between the teacher on the one hand and the students as an entity on the other, the communication is limited in two directions. When the learning community exchanges its ideas across its members, the richness of communication increases significantly. More dialog, discussion, and argument occur. From this emerge a better understanding of content, stronger cognitive skills, deeper self-awareness, and more knowledge about the community. Processing also allows students to learn how to

balance the cognitive, metacognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal, which are all interdependent facets of growth.

- **Developing skills** – Teachers must be explicit about developing processing skills since all too often dysfunctional skill development happens in school. Examples include: how to study to the test, how to attract negative attention, how to get into or out of trouble, etc. By conscientious and active facilitation teachers invite students to become active partners in learning, developing a life-long love for learning and supporting one another along the way.
- **Living the Full Value Contract**
  - There is no FVC without processing and communication. Letting go of disagreements or hard feelings occurs only after individuals have processed their difficulties and reached consensus about what can or cannot be done. As the FVC supports the individual and the group, the resulting growth further sustains the FVC which in turn nurtures the learning community and the individual. Willing to be in school and



Students assess their FVC discerning their relative strengths and weaknesses as a group.

work hard feeds the system in a positive way.

- **The processing sequence and the Experiential Learning Cycle**

- The processing experience is captured by three questions which cycle through the ELC introduced earlier:
  - What Happened? = a way to identify and clarify the observable such as words spoken, actions taken, and feelings felt.
  - So What? = asks for interpretation and analysis drawing out broader concepts and meaning that are applicable to other settings.
  - Now What? = asks for prioritizing and decision making to determine how and when to apply the learning.

Finding relevance and making transference to the challenges of daily life is ultimately how the effectiveness of most learning endeavors are measured. By

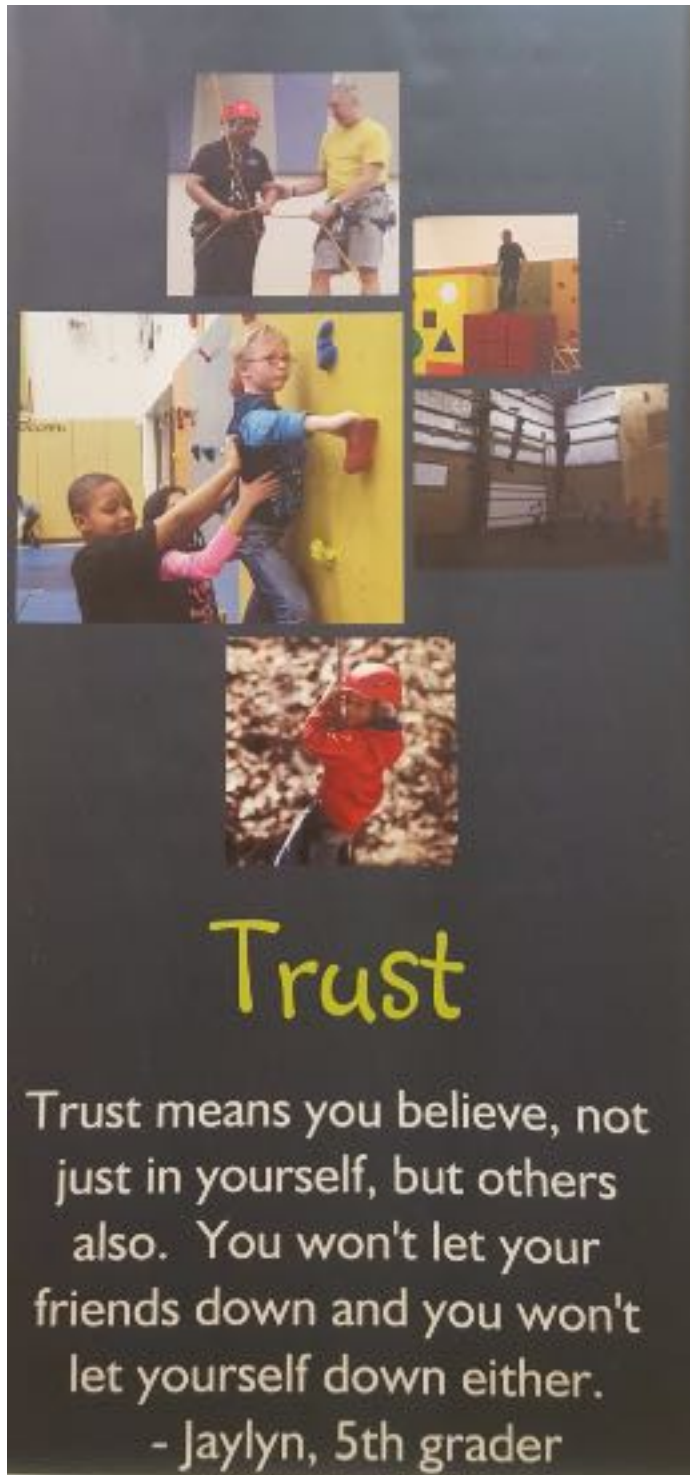
fostering voice and agency, the adventure group process is an especially effective means for helping students better discern their needs and fulfill the growth they seek.



How can this activity be helpful to you in your daily life?' French participants respond to debriefing questions posed by other participants, not just the PA facilitator. In this case questions are linked to stages of the ELC and inserted into an inflatable cube which is then rolled like a dice to determine what to ask.



At the end of a workshop participants in France spontaneously seize the facilitation role forming a 'trust circle' for PA trainer, Larry Childs.



PA values banner displayed at Cedarwood, a sister school to Devonshire also embracing PA

## STORY

# Devonshire Project Adventure in Columbus

Larry Childs with Dick Prouty

*The Columbus, Ohio project is a long story that has its roots in the actions of the principals from two elementary schools in that city. Cedarwood and Devonshire were public Kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade schools that had money from the resolution of a busing issue in their city. They were facing a need to attract students and deal with a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and special needs.*

## Three PA workshops

Initially, in 1988, the school system sent a team to attend three PA workshops:

- Adventure in the Classroom,
- Adventure Based Counseling,
- and Adventure Curriculum for Physical Education.

With PA's permission, they filmed the workshops. They then went back to Columbus and, with ongoing long-distance phone advice, implemented a program that became one of the

best examples in PA's history of a complete replication of the original Hamilton-Wenham model, integrating academics, school community, and physical education applications.

## Behavioral goals

During their subsequent visits representing PA, Larry Childs and Dick Prouty observed that students often had academic and behavioral goals for the month posted on classroom walls beside their names. For example – John: Goal: *'To improve my pronunciation and work on my listening skills'*.

In the physical education class, fourth graders might be climbing the artificial rock walls installed in the gym, while being belayed (a rope safety system) by a team of other students under the close supervision of the teacher. During briefing and debriefs, they each shared how their goals carried over from their classrooms and helped each other work on these goals in the PE class



A mountain landscape in the gym helps narrate the experience of a student climber who, attached to a safety rope, is supported by a team of peers, older students and teachers.

as well. This high level of integration across disciplines is an ideal application of the PA model. This school has carried out one of the best examples of how an integrated approach might function in practice.

## Particular factors

The Devonshire Project Adventure takes place in a public elementary school serving an urban population where the vast majority of the students are of color and a high proportion (higher than the district average) have special needs. This school, which has embraced Project Adventure as its leading pedagogy for 35 years, is one of the longest, continuously running school design adoptions in the country. In this story we take a closer look at the particular factors that educators believe have had an impact on the school's consistently positive academic and behavioral outcomes.

What do observers see when they visit the school? First and foremost, this is obviously a school with a healthy culture defined by a set of strongly held common values and a deep commitment to adventure learning.

Caring and engagement are evident in all areas, from classrooms and the cafeteria to the teachers' room and administrative offices. Students and staff embrace an emphasis on group learning.

Several intentional methods and practices, informed by Project Adventure methodologies, make this priority evident.

Creating a safe and stimulating environment is a high priority and seemingly second nature for staff.

In the classrooms, students are active, inquisitive, and obviously having fun. Former principal Pat

Price once recounted how a Columbus area business leader visited the school and was astonished as she walked through the hall to overhear young children engaged in spontaneous and un-facilitated dialog about dealing with a recent challenge they were facing.

- *'How do you do it?'* she asked.
- *'Do what?'* responded Pat.
- *'Get children to engage in honest and deep dialog. I can't get my professional staff to talk with each other that way.'*
- Pat replied, *'That's what we do. Talk.'*

Support for group work and learning is reflected in the classroom furniture arrangement as well. There are tables with chairs set up around them in all classrooms. There are no classrooms with individual desks or desks set in rows. This is just one example of a common pedagogy and practice embraced across the school, rather than something just done from time to time or in a limited number of places.

The staff consistently and enthusiastically buy into the common values and shared language which are displayed prominently throughout the school—from classrooms and hallways to the teachers' room and cafeteria.



Common values and shared language which are displayed prominently throughout the school

## Adventure Group Process and the Full Value Commitment

Each class begins the school year with a hands-on activity during which the class brainstorms together on desired behaviors for the classroom. The students take their time to generate a list and prioritize the desired behaviors, ultimately creating a workable set of norms in their own words. These agreements derive from a debriefing of direct experiences, facilitated by the teachers and designed to challenge the class. The resulting set of behavioral norms becomes their social agreement, which PA defines as a Full Value Contract (FVC).

Norms give meaning and make applicable the school's values. They are co-created and agreed upon by the group, not assigned by the teacher. The norms then guide their intentions for the coming year. Another aspect of the FVC is to pursue and check in on

performance, not to 'be perfect' but to be aware of their progress.

Reflection is built into the process through regular check-ins during or after group work. Class norms are displayed on doors and in the front of classrooms.

What are the five school-wide values that the class FVC supports?

- Challenge,
- Problem-solving,
- Risk,
- Trust,
- and Cooperation.

These student-generated norms and their pursuit strengthen individual motivation and positive peer pressure. Peer-to-peer feedback begins at an early age and is a strategy for giving students genuine responsibility for personal and group behavior. It is also a key indicator of effective adventure-based facilitative teaching. One teacher says, *'Kids know that if we are going to be successful, we have to work together. Kids will pressure others to buy in, to behave.'*

Giving and receiving feedback is one of the more advanced and challenging skills in the human repertoire and an area where many adults fall short. By learning this at an early age, these children have a

better chance at becoming adolescents and adults proficient at providing and receiving feedback.

As students travel to Specialist classes (art, music, physical education), there is a need to carry forward their FVC agreements. Rather than repeating the norm-setting process, these specialist teachers simply ask students to describe their FVC and relate how they will bring it to life in this different class setting.

## **The Adventure Wave: A commitment to facilitated reflection**

Based on many conversations with staff and classroom observations, it is evident that teachers routinely apply the PA 'adventure wave', a scaffolding and sequencing method for giving context and deriving deeper meaning from any activity.

One teacher explained, *"What strikes me about what makes us different and effective is the sequence – from goal setting and the briefing of an activity to leading an activity and then debriefing. For instance, on Monday after I give students a layout of the day and the week describing where we are headed we get into learning activities. Afterwards we talk about questions like, what have we done today? Where are you in the*

*challenge? What do we need to do next? At the beginning of the year, our weekly meetings are longer with cooperative games. Then, when our community is strong, games are shorter and we press harder on content-focused activities, but we still do a briefing, debrief and have fun."*

Collaboration across disciplines is also common, despite the lack of common planning time for classroom and specialist teachers. A classroom teacher, for example, explained the relevance of Physical Education (PE) to her instruction. *"There are kids who excel in the PE setting who do not excel in the classroom and vice versa. As classroom teachers, we talk about their climbing experiences back in the classroom, ask how they met the challenge, then how to overcome challenges in another setting. Through debriefing, the climbing becomes a powerful metaphor that helps them face academic and social challenges."*

Another teacher is pragmatic about reflection or 'debriefing'. *"I don't get fancy. I just make the connection. We are moving so fast sometimes that it is difficult to get fancy. I ask, 'What does this mean for us? Why did we do this?'"*

Asking questions and leading short discussions about group process and

feelings develops student self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills – socio-emotional skills that have tremendous application to academic pursuits and their lives outside of school.

## **Challenge by Choice and Goal Setting: Applications to Reading and Writing**

'The Daily 5' is a reading program chosen by the faculty (not assigned by the principal or district) for its alignment with Project Adventure principles. Its central structure provides students with choice and responsibility for how they challenge themselves.

In The Daily 5, students are responsible for choosing specific skills to focus on with assistance from their teachers. It may involve reading at a certain level or listening to a story for comprehension. They choose a book, set a specific goal, and work independently or with others, if they choose. Once complete, students use a self-assessment tool to help measure progress on meeting their goals.

Periodically they work one-on-one with a teacher who uses the *Café Extension*, a rubric for assessing student performance also compatible with PA. Teachers feel that student engagement and the resulting reading competency

improvement is enhanced due, in large part, to students' buy-in and motivation derived from PA principles such as having choices, assuming corresponding responsibility, and a goal-setting component that includes authentic reflection on their progress.

The Daily 5 program, requires one-on-one teacher attention, yet that is only feasible and because the students are sufficiently accustomed to and skilled at engaging in both group work and independent work without close supervision. As a result, constant teacher monitoring is not needed.

Students appear to respond positively to the responsibility entrusted to them by their teachers. Observers report that when students are asked about their work they seem engaged, comfortable with questions, and quickly able to describe what they were excited about or working on.

One teacher explained how her students set behavioral goals in anticipation of the eventual need for a substitute teacher. This, of course, is a very deep and often intractable problem in public schools, particularly in urban settings. At Devonshire, when substitutes do arrive, they are instructed to reference the student goals list and to check in with students on their

goals. This strategy helps students take responsibility for their learning, even in the absence of their regular teachers. This also serves as an effective strategy for supporting the substitutes and encourages them to return, while providing students additional practice with goal setting and independent learning.

## **Cross-age Learning, Service, and Authentic Responsibility**

On a weekly basis, 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms join kindergarten classes for period-long instructional 'buddies' experiences. Buddies are paired by teachers in advance with consideration given to individual personalities. The activity for the week is framed by the teachers in their respective classrooms before buddies pair up and get to work.

One example: 5<sup>th</sup> graders assist their kindergarten buddies in exploration of the school yard seeking objects that fit criteria such as living or non-living. Pairs carry a clipboard with these two headings and different letters of the alphabet under each. As they discover objects, the kindergarten students write, assisted as needed, their word under the appropriate column and adjacent to the appropriate letter. As students explore, the teachers observe and coach.

The kindergarten students experience a close connection with older students assuming a teaching role while the 5<sup>th</sup> graders are challenged to teach. Older students are encouraged to allow their young buddies to make discoveries and entries on the clip board versus taking away the responsibility and doing the work for them. They are also coached to keep focused and manage distractions.

After the lesson, the 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher 'debriefs' the experience, asking students a series of questions about methods, lessons learned, and strategies to carry forward to their next buddy assignment.

All students look forward to their buddy time, and older students embrace rather than reject the responsibility.

Another example of students learning through service is in the cafeteria where students (not cafeteria staff) assume responsibility for trash collection and table wiping. In this setting, just two adults are able to monitor more than 100 students. The job becomes one of prestige versus drudgery as students embrace service as normal and desired. For teachers, it is an example of facilitative leadership, and they appear far more relaxed than is the norm for staff in other school cafeterias.

To see many of these Devonshire scenarios in action, please watch this PA produced 10 minute video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RpztYNbGcoM>



## STORY

# PA in Japan

Dick Prouty

In 1993, Toshio Hyashi, a Japanese entrepreneur, visited the U.S. to take a workshop at Project Adventure. In Japan, Toshio designed camping plans and imported camping equipment. He had come to the U.S. with a general idea about taking something from PA back to Japan, but he slowly began to realize that this was more than a commercial endeavor. He sensed there was almost a spiritual aspect to the PA movement, and this realization grew in his thinking over time. Eventually this grew into a desire to become the PA of Japan.

## The birth of PA Japan

Led by Tham Yew Cheong, PA's Director of International Development, we developed a legal affiliation contract, which had four stages of adoption, certified by observation and testing, to allow PA Japan to come into being.

Two years later in October of 1995, the launch of PA Japan was announced at a two-day symposium in Tokyo. Papers were read by university professors on the state of experiential education in Japan, and

there was an audience of several hundred outdoor educators and college students eager to learn about this new endeavor for Japanese education. This new venture '*brought the Adventure home*' through some innovative ropes course technology and an accompanying program for physical education, counseling, and skills training, complete with books, manuals and workshops. The response was extremely positive.

## PA's growth overseas

The timing of the PAJ launch in 1995 came after over a decade of international PA experience. Starting in the early 1980's, Karl Rohnke was repeatedly invited to Australia for a series of workshop tours, all set up by the Outdoor Camping Association of New South Wales, and their Director, Don McNeill. We jointly developed a vision of what PA could bring to the outdoor camping world of Australia. By 1987, we had a licensing agreement for Australia, that the PA Board attorney, Bertram Glovsky and I wrote up, using the principals of a franchise agreement.



The official photo of the launch of PAJ in 1995. Left to the right: Miko Tagagi, major investor in PAJ; Dick Prouty, Executive Director of PA; Karl Rohnke, president of PA; Nancy Terry, Director of PA R&D; Toshio Hyashi, President of PAJ; Bob Ryan, Director of PA Risk management; Tham Yew Cheong.

Under U.S. law, non-profit organizations cannot use profits from franchises, but they are allowed to receive royalties for the use of their brand name and logo.

By 1995, PA had licensing agreements with PA Australia, PA New Zealand, and trial stage agreements with PA Taiwan, and PA Singapore. One interesting case was PA Singapore, where Paul Radcliffe and I had met Tham Yew Cheong, in 1989, when he was introduced to us by the Singapore Boy Scouts. He helped us install the first Challenge

Course in Singapore, in 1990, at a local University.

Yew Cheong, later, came to the United States with our help and completed a degree in Outdoor Education from the University of New Hampshire. Yew Cheong quickly became a PA staff person who could develop new international models, as well as install and inspect Challenge Courses

## Meeting Japanese society

Yew Cheong was a key figure in the development of PAJ, accompanying Dick Prouty on trips to Japan as we negotiated a licensing agreement and a plan to implement it.

By 1995, building on lessons learned in earlier agreements, we designed a multi-phased approach to training and installation licensing, to improve the quality and fidelity to the original PA training content. Toshio and his partners set up a for-profit company, under a different name, and we licensed the PA Logo and Name. PA also received some shares in this new PAJ organization as part of the licensing agreement. Mr. Mikio Tagagi, a scion of a family tutoring business, with centers all over Japan, was a key initial advisor and investor in PAJ.

Before the Symposium to launch PAJ, staff travelled to the U.S. to take PA workshops, and to work with the Challenge Course Installation team. Toshio Hyashi and his special assistant, Yuki Terenaka, were the first two to come for new training. The first challenge course in Japan was designed and installed at an Outdoor Education Center, with Steve Webster, as lead installer from the U.S., working with Toshio and his staff.

Yew Cheong was instrumental in the whole development of PA Japan, especially with regard to observing local protocols and etiquette. This is always important in any culture, but even more so in the highly formal Japanese society. The first workshop at the Outdoor Ed Center with the new Challenge Course took place in 1995. Outdoor educators and school teachers from all over Japan quickly filled up the workshop, as word had traveled fast about this new education technology.

I was co-leading an Adventure Based Counseling workshop, in that first period, and we were wondering how the cultural milieu and the translation issues would affect the workshop. The results were remarkable. It quickly became apparent that Japanese participants approached the problem-solving initiatives differently. The Japanese always let the most senior ranked individual speak first and lead the dialog, if he or she wanted to. And, then they proceeded to solve some problems even faster than a similar American audience.

In Japan, there was no confusion about leadership or control issues. Then, when we needed to have a more open exchange of ideas, they were able to negotiate the hierarchy, with a framing that was able to use



At the Honda Training center.

the most efficient brainstorming methods for maximum creativity.

Another difference was that it took a longer for the participants to become trusting and close to each other and express emotions of affection. Usually that happens in a second day of a U.S. ABC workshop. In this first ABC workshop in Japan, the Japanese reserve and more formal social roles made this all happen more slowly. But when it finally happened, it was if a dam had broken, and people became more emotional and expressed trust and affection more openly, often crying and hugging each other in a way much more pronounced than in

an American workshop. Once the usual social restraints were loosened, it appeared that the pent-up need for close relationships, beyond formal social statuses, became even more intense.

During the first five years of PAJ, most of the installation of new challenge courses and training was in the Outdoor Education world. That is where Toshio's business experience originated, and where he had the most name recognition. But gradually, teachers from universities and public schools began to ask how they could bring this program back to their sites.

In these discussions, a key issue emerged, that of instilling creativity in public school systems. Japanese schools were very good at educating students in basic skills of language, math, and science. But, when it came to problem solving and identifying creative solutions, students were often at a loss. PA curricula became an important option for filling that need.

## Entering the world of education

A key first adoption for education was at Tamagawa University in Machida, Japan, near Tokyo. Tamagawa University specialized in training and certifying teachers for schools in Japan and had a large enrollment. It also had a K-12 school on campus, which served as a 'lab school', similar to those at universities in the U.S. In 1998, a new Challenge Course and a training program were set up at Tamagawa through a grant from the founding family of the University.

One of the trainers from the US who co-led an early workshop for Tamagawa teachers at the site was Adam Cark, a talented and inspiring workshop leader. Katsumi Namba was a participant in the workshop and went on to be a key figure in the training component of PAJ. Adam met and later married a young teacher from Tamagawa, Asoka. They are now both on the staff of Yokohama Independent School where Asoka teaches high school Physical Education and Adam is

a social-emotional counselor in the middle school. Tamagawa's PA program became a key entry point for teachers to learn about PA curricula for both PE and Counseling components, and it also stimulated demand for trainings and installations at Japanese schools.

A powerful example of the influence of PAJ's school programs was the work that PA's Jim Schoel was asked to do in the public schools of the prefecture of Myagi. This was in the aftermath of the Tsunami of 2011, caused by the most powerful earthquake in the history of Japan. Over 15,000 people were killed and there was widespread trauma in the school populations in the vicinity of the tsunami.

Jim Schoel, working with a creative teacher/counselor/counterpart in Myagi, adapted the basic ABC model to use a series of activities in a program he later named, Bamboo Resilience. Teachers were trained to deliver PA-based programming for



Jim Schoel training teachers in Myagi Prefecture, post 2011 Tsunami.

their students. In fact, the teacher training itself proved to be therapeutic for the teachers and counselors, who were themselves traumatized by the tsunami and its aftermath.

Starting in 1990, the phenomenon of using PA-style challenge courses to effect dramatic cultural change and a team orientation in major corporations began to take off in the U.S. This corporate trend soon found its way to Japan.

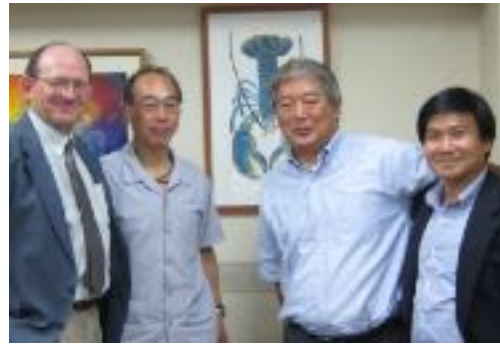
PAJ was hired in 2006, to build a large challenge course on the property of Honda Corporation, to serve as a corporate training center for Honda and as a service open to the public for fees. This proved to be a very successful venture on both counts.

## Results achieved

PAJ is now celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> year and by all accounts has been the most successful international example of PA transferring its knowledge and programming to another country.

The development of PAJ has allowed:

- PA's mission to be brought to millions of Japanese students and staff at schools, universities, corporations, and outdoor education centers.
- Creative adaptations of activities and programming designs, invented in Japan to be brought



Dick Prouty, Mikio Tagagi Toshio Hyashi, Tham Yew Cheong. 2014

back to the US, and worldwide through the PA network.

- The development of a highly successful company with over \$2M in revenues.
- Over 20 PA staff, and many PA trainers from other countries, have traveled to Japan to participate in training workshops.
- And, the financial benefits to Project Adventure, of the royalties paid by PAJ were considerable.

Among the many lessons learned, perhaps the most significant is the importance of strong personal relationships between the leadership team of the licensee (in this case, Toshio and his primary Investor, Mikio Tagagi) and the senior management of the licensing organization (Dick Prouty and Tham Yew Cheong). The values and missions have to be deeply aligned to achieve this level of success.

## STORY

# Mindfulness through outdoors sports in France

Larry Childs



The exhilarating and highly aerobic 'Triangle Tag' played here in deep sand focuses the mind/body while dissolving distractions toward a state of flow. It serves not only essential preparation for collective outdoor endeavors such as surfing but for guided mindfulness meditation.

The village of Lacanau is situated on the southern Atlantic coast of France. I was there with my UCPA (Union des Centres de Plein Air) colleagues co-leading a week-long "train the trainer" workshop focused on integration of Project Adventure methods within their

nation-wide 'Projet Educatif Sportif' (PES) initiative <https://www.ucpa.asso.fr/le-groupe/projet-educatif-et-sportif-ucpa>. This workshop was the culmination of 5 years of collaboration. Founded 50 years ago as a means to make outdoor sports



accessible to all levels of French society, the UCPA has expanded with 150 retreat centers in France and beyond, serving 100,000+ participants relying on 3,000+ instructors annually.

## Adopting the concept of mindfulness

Like Project Adventure, they have been profoundly influenced by recent research in the neurosciences and psychology, gradually making adjustments to their pedagogy and instructional methodology accordingly. One important feature is the concept of mindfulness, not only as a means to accelerate acquisition of sport-specific skills, but as part of the wider UCPA vision. Their mission is to provide

nature-immersive vacations that promote outdoor recreation, social connection, and fun, but simultaneously foster vital social skills and personal growth.

In the realm of mindfulness several UCPA staff consider nature as a highly effective intermediary and even co-facilitator. In recent months many have guided participants through mindfulness exercises and those responsible for their surfing programs, who were present in our training, were willing to share their evolving practice.

Eager to engage in a direct experience, our training group of 18

hopped on bicycles and rode the 3 kilometers from the training center

down through the village of Lacanau Ocean to the beach – part of an expanse of wild public beaches that span 200+ kilometers on the coast west of Bordeaux. After crossing the dunes and settling into the sands just above the crashing waves we tossed our shoes, and I then led a sequence of vigorous beach-adapted adventure activities focused on pairs and trios (*'binome et trinome'*) for relationship building and continued group development. Feeling warm, exhilarated, and connected, we were ready to drop in the sand to un-self-consciously immerse in guided mindfulness meditation in small groups scattered across the beach.

## Mutual benefits

During the debrief that followed the exercises, some commented on the extent to which the calm and satisfying self-awareness experienced, during the guided mindfulness practice, paralleled a similar sensation during our preceding wildly aerobic, athletic, and highly relational rounds of Pairs Tag. This sensation we recognized as 'flow'<sup>1</sup> noting that outdoor sport/adventure activities, when fully immersive, provide access to such a state of being.

Perhaps, we speculated, the benefits of mindfulness can be accessed not only through a still and solitary meditative state, but during the highly active and inter-connected realms of adventure games and outdoor pursuits. Furthermore, each of these equally valid approaches, highly active and still, can reinforce and provide access to the other. This perspective is valuable not only for expanding opportunities for in-depth experiences during a UCPA program ('stage'), but also accommodating different learning styles of the participants (*'stagiaires'*).

This powerful experience, dialog, and insight emerged through UCPA's infusion of Adventure Learning within their PES initiative in France. Its value also cycled back to Project Adventure in Beverly, MA helping to advance our own understanding and appreciation of adventure methods and the way collaboration with client/partners contributes to our own evolving practice

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<sup>1</sup> In [positive psychology](#), **flow**, also known colloquially as being in **the zone**, is the [mental state](#) in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment. In essence, flow is characterized by complete absorption in what one does, and a resulting loss of a sense of space and time. Named by [Mihály Csikszentmihályi](#) in 1975, the concept has been widely referred to across a variety of fields, especially in [occupational therapy](#)). The concept has existed for millennia under other names, notably in some [Eastern religions](#).



## STORY

# Project Adventure in Lawrence MA

Larry Childs



Peer mentors blend serious and fun while they engage in a problem-solving initiative. They post insights to folded up cafeteria tables – an example of adaptation for an adventure classroom

Situated in the Merrimack Valley 30 miles north of Boston, historians recognize Lawrence, Massachusetts as a bustling mill town with a central role in the 19th and early 20th century American industrial revolution as well as its labor movements. Today, the city is still iconic, but by another defining American story, that of late 20th and early 21st century immigration.

The vast majority of the city's residents, today, are people of Latin

American descent. It has also attracted a great deal of attention from the state for the perceived failure in its schools, principally as measured by low test scores on statewide exams. But, recently, in many ways Lawrence has become a success story for its efforts at school reform.

## Helping hands

Since the 1990's, PA has partnered with the Lawrence Public Schools



Students practice holding one another accountable in a peer mentor training

and many community agencies as part of the reform initiatives. One of the structures Project Adventure helped develop within the high school was 'Helping Hand', an approach to peer-mentoring and leadership. Philosophically, PA and school leaders aligned around the critical recognition that student outcomes would improve if students were to assume increased responsibility for the performance of their fellow students as well as their own. We all agreed with the research on best practices - that peer learning cultivates a wide range of social

skills, increases student engagement, and breaks down authoritarian and adult-centric associations with school.

The program design provided 40 selected juniors and seniors (16 – 18 years of age) with the opportunity to develop problem solving, communication, leadership and coaching skills, while providing 40 incoming freshman (14-15 years of age) with the academic and social supports needed to launch a successful high school pathway. Beyond the participating students, the program helped to further embed a culture of academic excellence, mutual responsibility, and concern for others within the wider school community of 3,000 students.

An important aspect of the program was a day-long outdoor adventure experience on the PA challenge course. This short video communicates transformative qualities of this peer mentoring initiative while offering a broader glimpse of adventure programming principles in practice <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2RXHXU8W-U&feature=youtu.be>

## The program's impact

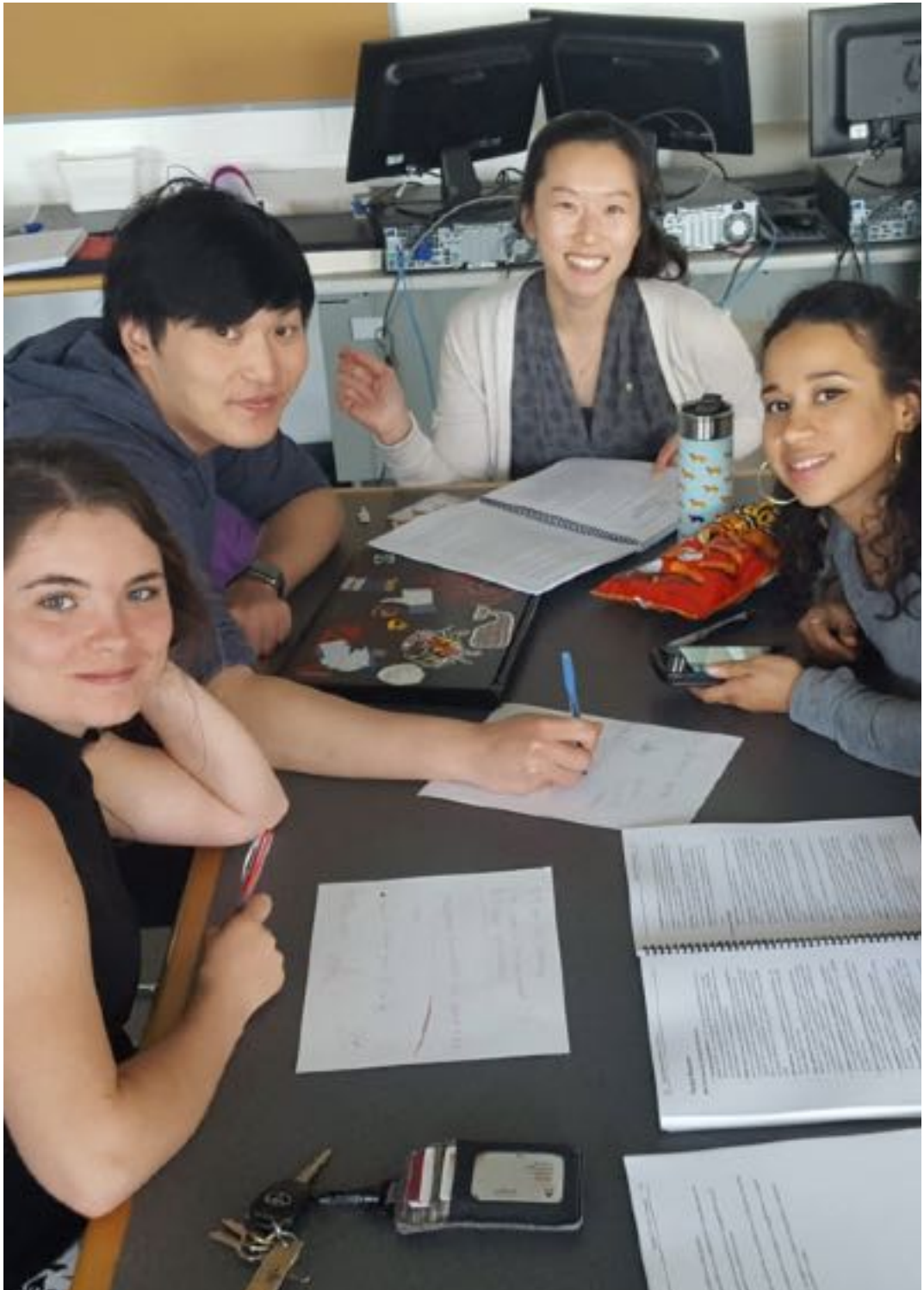
The following comments provide a sense of the impact of the program.

Reflections by the Principal:

*"Helping Hand is teaching our students to be leaders, and we attribute their effectiveness in leadership to Project Adventure and the on-going support from their PA trainer. Having a group of committed students who assume responsibility for not only their own learning but their freshmen mentees has had a significant positive impact on not only attendance and academics, but school climate. One specific indicator of success is that the off-track freshmen now see it as cool to receive help from the older students. In the past, they would not have wanted to be seen as needing help. Another indication is that in the past you would find as many as 35 freshmen in detention. Now, the numbers are down to 3 or 4. LHS is a school community where not just teachers but students really attend to the needs of struggling students. The program also supports the higher achieving students. Since these peer leaders see themselves as role models they are more serious about their own performance and aspirations. They feel more accountable realizing that their grades are a reflection on the program and directly influence their mentee. The achievement and aspiration of these peer leader students raises LHS as a more competitive school".*

Reflections by a peer mentor:

*"Helping Hands is a group of juniors and seniors who help freshmen; helping them with transition, keeping them on check with their classes and sports, making sure they don't fall back and that they graduate the year they're supposed to. It affects me in a good way, knowing I can help someone. It's a struggle sometimes because you have to keep on check with yourself, make sure you're on top on your school and sports, and also help your freshmen. Now, I also have more discipline at home. This whole program is about discipline, especially in your junior and senior year. You're more mature than others and more discipline helps a lot." - Tabitha*



Lawrence High School faculty peruse their PA manuals as they prepare to integrate adventure into their advisory program.

## STORY

# A short-term one-day workshop

James Ito-Adler



This particular case study involves a one-day workshop that PA organized for Kellogg Foundation grantees. It was held at PA Headquarters at Moraine Farm in Beverly, MA on April 25, 2006.

## The workshop

The Workshop was part of a week-long seminar in Cambridge, Massachusetts that LASPAU, an affiliated organization at Harvard

University, created for a group of trainees in Kellogg's Social Leadership program. The Kellogg Foundation supported this program for many years in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Most of the seminar's activities involved classroom meetings with Harvard faculty. The PA Workshop was an outside activity designed, in part, to get the trainees out of the

city and as a break from the more academic sessions.

## The Kellogg trainees

The trainees were all involved in NGOs that worked in community programs, ranging from maternal health and nutrition to youth projects designed to break the cycle of poverty. They were a remarkably heterogeneous group—ranging from sophisticated graduate students pursuing graduate degrees at leading universities in Europe and the U.S. to indigenous community leaders from the Andean altiplano who had never even visited their country's capital, let alone traveled overseas.

Language was a definite issue. Some trainees were bilingual or even trilingual, while others spoke only Spanish, Portuguese, or in one case Aymara, an indigenous language in Bolivia (fortunately there was another Aymara speaker who was fluent in Spanish). This posed serious challenges for organizing a coherent program with such a short duration.

## Meeting the challenge

PA met the challenge with ingenuity and high levels of trust and cooperation. After a long planning meeting at PA, the following framework was worked out—which says a great deal about how PA

works with clients. James Ito-Adler was coordinating with PA staff in the planning.

The planning group made a critical decision at the outset. The principal Spanish-speaking trainer at PA was not available on the dates in question. Instead, an experienced senior trainer, Peter Aubry, stepped up and assumed the responsibility for PA. We discussed in great detail the goals and priorities of the Workshop: 1. Enhanced self-esteem and confidence for developing individual leadership skills; 2. Enhanced social capacity for collaboration and cooperation; and 3. Improved strategic planning skills and team-building.

PA has an extensive published catalog of activities, initiatives, and exercises that have proven to be effective in these specific areas. Peter Aubry probed, questioned, and listened as he worked with LASPAU staff to develop a focused program that could be completed in the short time available. LASPAU, for its part, agreed to handle the language challenges.

James was bilingual in English and Portuguese. He recruited two LASPAU staff assistants, a Brazilian and a Colombian, to accompany the group during the day's activities. Fortunately, both of them had already worked with the trainees and

so the group readily accepted them. As it turned out, these two young women played important and completely unanticipated roles in the workshop.

## The program

The day began with ice-breakers designed to put everyone in the mood—and get the members, many of whom had never met, to share new and personal information. There are a variety of ways PA uses to get participants to share some item of personal information and then sort themselves out by some criterion. It could be by birthday, height, or some other criterion.

In this case, we asked everyone in the group to share their complete name (in Spanish and Portuguese this can be truly impressive) and line up according to the number of letters from longest to shortest. Everyone had to share their names in a loud voice, which occasioned a lot of laughter and not incidentally a great deal of social information.

To this day, I can still remember some of the activities that were brilliant in achieving our goals. One was the strategic planning exercise. We divided into smaller groups of 5 people and each one had to come up with a strategy to complete a timed exercise. There was no obviously superior strategy and in

fact each group developed its own variation. We then ran the first trial and teams were given their times and ranked from fastest to slowest.

They were then given the opportunity discuss their strategy and either repeat it, modify it, or adopt another team's strategy. We ran another trial and shared the results. Finally, there was a debrief in which the teams discussed and evaluated their performance as teams. The key move was iterated trials and the opportunity to evaluate and modify their strategic approach. They had to create a team decision-making process, which was the underlying lesson—but one they had to see for themselves. Peter, the trainer, wisely refraining from pointing this out.

Another exercise, which I called Walking the V, involved two cables stretched between three trees. At the narrow end, the cables were attached to the same tree. At the other end, they were maybe a couple of meters apart. The group formed pairs, and they faced the following challenge: the partners had to hold hands. They climbed up on the two cables facing each other at the narrow end. (The cables were only a foot or so above the ground). They then had to see how far out on the "V" they could move in tandem never letting go of their partner's hands without falling off as they got



Members from a similar university affiliated program exhibit laser focus, support and coaching as two team mates criss cross on a steel cable above.

further apart. Most of the teams fell off very rapidly, sometimes within seconds. All the teams tried to remain standing upright as they moved out and they ended up pushing and pulling each other off as they fought to retain their individual balance.

At the end Peter Aubry, the trainer, chose one of my assistants (who not coincidentally was selected because we felt she might benefit from the workshop to overcome her timidity) and said they were going to show the group how it should be done. This was met by disbelief.

They briefly conferred, and then they climbed up on the cables; they were leaning on each other with their heads on each other's shoulder. They then counted off their steps and easily went twice as far as any other pair. Peter resisted pointing out the moral, but just said to the group something along the lines of, "Think about it, if you want to be successful working with a partner."

I think we all absorbed the lesson—to be successful, put your heads together, lean on each other, and communicate each step of the way. Since so many small (and large)

organizations fail because two leaders cannot collaborate, this is a critical factor. (For an example, see how carefully Dick Prouty navigated the leadership conundrum at PA as he and Karl Roehnke worked out their working relationship).

The last exercise for building self-confidence was the challenge to climb up a tree ladder, climb out on a horizontal log, and cross to the other side – some 10 meters off the ground. Remember, many of the trainees were middle-aged men and women and quite frankly most were hesitant or terrified at the prospect. This was a challenge they were going to have to choose to do!

At this point, my Brazilian assistant, Nínive, a petite young woman, volunteered to go first (not something I expected). She climbed right up the tree ladder (with the safety harness), calmly walked out to the middle of the horizontal log high above the ground, performed a graceful pirouette, and delicately stepped off to fly to the ground in the safety harness as the members of the group secured the belay line supporting her.

One by one, the rest of the group followed her example and went up, each cheered on by the group, chanting their names and shouting, "Sí, se puede!" Yes, you can! Once

again group support and esprit de corps conquered fear.

At the end of the week, as the group filled out the seminar evaluations, this was the highest rated activity of the entire program. The trainees were still talking about it, laughing, and sharing war stories until they left Cambridge. The consensus: Harvard classes were great; but the PA workshop was memorable.

So, every program Biorn and I have planned for CIBS always has a session at PA in the heart of the workshops. What I appreciated the most was that every step of the way—from initial meetings and planning, to the actual workshops, to the debriefing and ongoing conversations – was grounded in the same principles.

PA works. We may spend another half-century figuring out exactly just how and why it works, but the results speak for themselves.



Staff members at LA's Best learn to integrate PA's 'Adventure in Peacemaking' model while engaged in an active debrief structure. The 'thumb ball' they roll has questions about conflict resolution printed on it

## STORY

# At-risk-youth in Covington, GA

Dick Prouty



The story of the Covington, Georgia office of Project Adventure (PA) is inextricably interwoven with the story of Cindy Simpson, a remarkable young woman from Ohio, who had moved to Georgia in the 1970's. With a degree in psychology and a strong empathy with young people at risk, she found her way to an Adventure Based Counseling (ABC) workshop in Savannah, GA, in the summer of 1980.

Savannah was the location of a small office of PA that Alan Sentkowski was directing to expand the PA mission in Georgia and the southeast. Alan had been a biology teacher in the Hamilton-Wenham Public Schools at the start of PA in 1971. In 1980, he hosted an ABC workshop that drew some 20 participants from Georgia and neighboring states. Paul Radcliffe



Dick Prouty and Cindy Simpson Circa 1993

and I were co-facilitators; Cindy Simpson and her partner, Lisa Galm, attended the workshop.

## **A 90-day course for juvenile offenders**

Cindy left the workshop with a vision to use the ABC model of a strong group process, experiential activities, and the PA Challenge Course. Within a year, she had designed a 90-day course for juvenile offenders, using all three elements and a camping trip as a peak experience. As a true entrepreneur, she approached the Division of Youth Services (DYS) in Atlanta, and persuaded them to fund a pilot “Challenge” project, using PA as the receiving non-

profit, to demonstrate the efficacy of her design ideas.

At the start, the participants in the Challenge were juveniles who had been in Juvenile Court, charged with relatively minor offenses. The Judge permitted them to enroll with Cindy and PA as an alternative sentence.

The outcomes, based on course evaluations and observations by the DYS, were very positive. And, more importantly, the subsequent behavior of the students who completed the course, in terms of recidivism rates, were also quite favorable. This was impressive since recidivism for juveniles entangled in the justice system was considered a major problem.

There was strong demand for Challenge enrollment spots and soon Cindy was thinking about adding staff and expanding. Alan Sentkowski believed strongly in Cindy and convinced me to help Cindy add staff and open a new office in Atlanta, closer to the source of most of the at-risk students. Georgia is a large state, and the drive from Atlanta to Savannah was four hours.

Alan decided to leave PA at this point, to explore new career directions in corporate training. We both agreed that Cindy was the natural person to take his place. Cindy's father ran a very successful machine and tool company in Ohio, and her family had helped her become a gifted entrepreneur and risk taker. She was an ideal candidate to expand the presence of PA in the Southeast.

## **A property nearby Covington**

The next years witnessed the growth of PA under Cindy's leadership: first the new Atlanta office, and then a few years later a move to a property in nearby Covington, Georgia. Pierce Cline, a friend and mentor of Cindy, had been looking for a property with potential for a campus for PA in Georgia. The location was 30 miles from the Atlanta airport, and the price was right. The building was an old Elks Club building located on a small lake on 18 acres away from the center of town. It was isolated and only accessible by a dirt road.

Pierce helped PA acquire the property from a bank foreclosure. With a lot of sweat equity, and help from Pierce and other local donors, a home for Challenge, now running multiple courses at once, became a reality.

## **The Choices program**

The second program that Cindy developed was the Choices program, which was designed for young people with more serious drug and alcohol offenses. Launched in 1989, this program added a more structured group process to the Challenge program, and a Twelve Step recovery methodology from Alcoholics Anonymous, tailored to the PA Full Value Commitment.

By 1990, we were holding open enrollments and custom-designed PA workshops in physical education and skills trainings as well as the ABC workshops. Soon there was a newly-installed challenge course and climbing wall on the Rainbow Lake Campus. We also had a small Challenge Course Design and Installation business running out of Rainbow Lake, with a staff member brought from the Massachusetts office, John Call, in charge. The program continued to grow rapidly. Soon, we were hosting corporate trainings at Rainbow Lake, with Cindy convincing clients that the setting was a chance to give back to the community by helping fund our youth-at-risk office.



Cindy Simpson and Lisa Galm at a retreat in Massachusetts

The revenue of the Covington office by 1990 was about 25% of the total revenue of PA. Covington had become a lab school for our therapeutic programming, and people from all over the world began to visit and study the processes.

### **The LEGACY program**

PA's brand was all about innovation; in the design of challenge courses, in creative programs, and in a growing catalog of proven activities. We were a strong leader in a rapidly growing field of facilities-based experiential education. The next program Cindy took on was totally on brand, even breathtakingly so, for me and the PA Board of Directors. Cindy proposed and then launched a program in 1995 for

juvenile sex offenders. It was called LEGACY for the acronym: Learning Empathy, Gaining Acceptance, Changing Yourself. This was probably the most challenging group of all to work with and there were almost no programs that had been successful.

By 1996, PA was publishing a quarterly journal called *Zip Lines* to inform people of our work and motivate people to advance our mission. Here is an illustrative conversation of Cindy with Billie, a juvenile sex offender in Legacy, the new program:

*“We were driving around buying new furniture and getting ready for licensing, when Billie asked me why we started the Legacy program. I wondered how I*



Cindy and Aaron Nicholson. February 2020

*should honestly respond without getting into too much depth about the concerns of many of our staff about working with sex offenders. I answered from my personal point of view.*

*We believe that locking kids up is not effective. We started the Challenge Program in 1981 and Choices in 1989. Both were alternatives to lock-up. Three years ago, the state asked us if we would start a program for sex offenders. At the time, I said no."*

Why did you say no, were you afraid?  
*"No I wasn't afraid...we just didn't have the space, time, staffing or energy to start a new program."*

Billie then described his fears of leaving Rainbow Lake, and his fears of being rejected as a sex offender for things he

did at 14 years of age. Cindy described how even many of her staff from other programs were reluctant to have sex offenders at Rainbow Lake.

The Legacy program was successfully launched in 1995, three years after the state asked PA to develop a program. It continued for many years with very good rates of recidivism for this population, the ultimate standard for evaluating work with juvenile offenders in any area of crime.

Cindy next developed an Independent Living Program to help people from all three other programs have a place to stay upon graduation, to continue some level of therapy and support, while attending an alternative school on the Rainbow Lake campus, and eventually moving to the local public schools.

## Calling Group

One of the most innovative features of the Covington program from a group process standpoint, was the implementation of the 'calling group' process as part of the Full Value Contract. "Calling Group" means that everyone has the responsibility to 'call group', if they observe someone not adhering to their goals in the group, even if in a classroom. The staff circles up everyone, and they process the issue, led by the young person who called group. Sometimes this can last for hours, until there is a resolution to the norm violation.

This level of facilitation to pull off a “Calling Group” session, as a group leader or teacher, takes considerable experience and skill. Cindy developed a great staff training process through co-leading to bring up the individual skill levels of her team. Lisa Galm was usually the person who led the staff training and was there throughout the development of PA Covington, as a member of the management team. Lisa had a calm but fierce demeanor, which was a great balance to the enthusiasm and energy of Cindy.

By 2000, the Covington Campus was 50% of the revenue of PA. Aaron Nicholson, an African American from New York City, who had been drawn to Covington by his experience in an innovative program on Long Island, became the Assistant Director in 2007.

Three different Georgia agencies were responsible for most of the funding of the different ‘direct service’ youth programming initiatives. The 2009 recession was so severe in Georgia, that the Wall Street Journal called the Georgia Banking system, “*the Chernoble of the financial crisis.*” By early 2009, the Georgia funding agencies stopped funding for all community and alternative programs, which forced the PA Board to take the difficult decision to shut down the campus to save PA. Aaron Nicholson managed that process, in a slow and responsible way, as Cindy

had stepped down for personal reasons in 2008.

Cindy is now back in the field of youth work as the COO of Kris Kids in Atlanta, and Aaron is a consultant for organizational development from his home in Covington.

The positive legacy of PA Georgia is immense. Many thousands of young people who are leading productive lives in society now, and many communities in Georgia owe a direct debt to Cindy and her talented and dedicated staff. And, through PA’s ongoing work, the knowledge created by the Covington experience continues to influence youth-at-risk professional communities the world over. Calling Group has become a widely used methodology and is considered a best practice in youth-at-risk programming.



Workshop participants in France attempt to sneak off with a rubber chicken without being caught during a problem solving challenge. The rubber chicken takes on broader meaning in adventure education representing an openness to think different, willingness to try new things and have fun along the way.

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THE GREAT PLANE TREE ASSOCIATES

# The survivors of the green canyon

Michel Seyrat



*The six Great Plane Tree Associates are in their last year of primary school at Les Collinettes. Friends for five years, they've been meeting in front of their school around this plane tree. Always ready for action, they've been on spectacular, exciting*

*adventures. Issue 3 of Cooperative Approaches recounts their first exploit.*

To complete the Youth Day offered by the city, the Associates still need to go down the river. The four large

yellow and grey rafts, fully inflated, are waiting for their passengers. The instructors hand the youngsters helmets, lifejackets and watertight containers to protect their belongings. Everything's in order; the adventure is under control.

The heavy rafts slip into the current. The Associates are in the last one. They're good swimmers, they've got their lifejackets on, and they joke with the instructor. The raft goes faster and faster, and using the paddles starts to require their full attention. Already the front rafts are caught in the wash.

But in the gorges, the eddies are intensifying. The others have got through, and disappeared round the bend of the river. They're being tossed violently from one side to the other.

- *"That was expected,"* says Jojo the monitor. *"After a hot day, the Furon is flooded because of the last melting snow."*

Expected - that's easy to say -, but the water level continues to rise. The water, trapped between the high green stone cliffs that gave their name to the gorges, rages and the boat goes back and forth from one side to the other, bounces back, sets off again and slips back.

- *"We have to get back in the current,"* shouts Jojo, making

desperate efforts to steer the heavy raft back in the right direction.

The gorges change direction abruptly at this point and the water rushes furiously over the cliff. The raft ends up back to front and, in his efforts to right it, Jojo falls into the water. Carried away with his lifejacket, he's caught by the current, carried along in the river and disappears under the eyes of the children who are alone on board, embarked on a crazy boat.

Unable to do anything useful they cower at the bottom of the boat, confident in its legendary solidity, but frightened by the increasingly violently rising water level.

Some minutes seem like hours. Shocked, huddled up, thrown from one side to the other, the six boys are now all alone. All they can see are walls of rock and swirling water. They're soaked through, hanging on to each other, sometimes screaming, often mute.

They don't talk to each other, but each one knows what the others are thinking: there's nothing else we can do. There's not even any need to shout for help, as no-one will hear.

Of course, they're afraid. They think about their parents, but they also tell themselves that all the emergency services will be scrambled to rescue them.

- *"When the others arrive, they'll come looking for us,"* shouts Abel, as much to reassure himself as to reassure the others.

But everything's still on the move. They've tied themselves to the ropes around the boat, and a kind of fatalism invades them. They wait, giving up.

Suddenly an even more violent shock jolts them and, all of a sudden, everything comes to a halt. The boat is motionless, at a standstill on a small pebble beach that has formed opposite the current.

- *"Slowly, let's get off slowly, guys - then we'll see,"* says Abel.

And the six, moving cautiously, step over the enormous sausage-shaped sides and set foot on land with absolute relief.

- *"Saved from the waters,"* shouts Chérif, the poet.

- *"Except that they're still rising,"* David replies.

- *"We have to take the watertight canister with our things, otherwise we'll freeze,"* says Boris.

They carefully pull the container out of the raft and walk up this beach overhung by a vertical cliff that only reveals a tiny piece of sky.

The six Associates take refuge as far away from the water as possible and sit down, exhausted.

The water keeps on rising and the beach shrinks. In a nook, there's a higher mound of dry pebbles, and as they approach it, they take their eyes off the shore and don't see that the raft, now lighter, has been lifted up and is drifting away. Caught by the current, it's carried away at great speed and disappears into the gorge.

- *"When the others see the empty raft arrive, they'll panic!"*

- *"In any case, we weren't going to set out on our own in this chaos what with it getting dark!"*

- *"That's right. Let's take out the dry sweaters, rest for a while and then we'll get organized for the rest of the trip,"* Abel suggests, always practical.

Where the pebbles are dry, the water had gouged out the cliff, forming a kind of shelter. The six settle down and make an inventory of their belongings. Not much to eat except for a few dry biscuits from Farouk's mother. Mobile phones are useless: there's no network in this isolated and boxed-in valley.

- *"They'll still give us some light if we have to spend the night here."*

- *"Don't you think they'll come looking for us before nightfall?"*

- *"Haven't you seen the water level? As long as the flood doesn't go down, we'll stay here and wait."*

- *"The problem with this hole is that you can't see us from above, and if a helicopter's looking for us, it won't see us."*

- *"Do you believe choppers?"*

- *"Well, with six boys lost in the rapids, I reckon they'll do whatever it takes! In the meantime, we need to get organized."*

- *"I'm happy to explore the base of the cliff to see if we can find a way up,"* Eric suggests.

- *"I'll come with you,"* says David.

- *"OK. We've also got to find a way of making ourselves seen."*

- *"If we put our dry sweaters on and tie our wet shirts together, we could make a sort of garland to hang up so it can be seen from above,"* suggests Boris.

- *"Good idea, we'll pass you the shirts."*

- *"We could also tie our lifejackets together and spread them out on the beach."*

- *"Great, they're very visible with their fluorescent reflective stripes."*

Just as Chérif and Boris start tying the 'garland' of clothes, the sound of a helicopter can be heard over the din of the river as it follows the valley. Everyone rushes to the edge of the still bubbling water, gesticulating wildly, but in this deep trough they're invisible, and by the time they recognize the noise and try to make themselves seen, the chopper's already gone.

It's after losing any hope of being spotted quickly that they get discouraged.

David and Éric, back from their exploration, bring little hope of getting out by climbing. There's a gap that could allow them to reach an overhanging ledge, if the water were to rise again, but it doesn't seem possible to climb any higher with bare hands at such a height.

Once the garland of clothes has been finished, they still haven't worked out where and how to hang it. So, sitting deep inside their den, their backs resting on the rough rock, nibbling on Farouk's meticulously shared biscuits, they stay silent.

It's Eric, the one who talks fearlessly to everyone, who's the first to start crying, softly, apologizing for cracking. In response, David tries to find kind words to say, but only tears well up in him too. And there are our six guys with stinging eyes, tears

running down their warm cheeks still wet from the river spray.

- *"I hope our parents aren't worrying too much."*

- *"Get real - right now they're out of their minds with worry."*

- *"Even so, they know we're not kids anymore."*

- *"Wait, put yourself in their shoes, the monitor's gone, the boat's empty - it's enough to make you panic."*

To wipe his tears, Eric pulls out his pack of tissues: all soaked and in pieces. David hands him his tissue. Just as wet!

- *"Ah, we have what we need to get washed, but not to get dry,"* Abel shouts, bursting out laughing. The mood is catching, laughter replaces tears, nerves relax, optimism returns!

By making some short acrobatic ladders and fixing them in place with stones, they hang up their garland signal as high as possible and display the lifejackets in full view. But night has fallen.

So, they huddle together to get warmed up and watch the stars gradually fill the strip of sky above the black mass of cliffs.

And they talk to each other. First, each one talks aloud to himself, then

they start to discuss things. From time to time, laughter erupts.

- *"I can't keep my eyes open,"* says Boris, *"Why don't we go to bed? In any case, now there's nothing to do but wait for daylight."*

So, industriously, they clear the pebbles so that they can lie down on the sand. The full moon helps them. Its round face reassures them.

Boris moves into a darker corner by the bubbling river and plays with his pee in the water.

Fun quickly shared.

- *"My grandmother often used to tell me: When you're scared, pee."* says David. *"Now's really a good time, isn't it?"*

- *"But for a greater need, we'd better go further away,"* says Eric in a solemn tone.

- *"It's very good for the plants,"* says David.

- *"I'm going to bed,"* says Abel, lying down as comfortably as possible.

David does the same, trying to recall what he can make out as stars in the strip of sky.

Chérif recites two lines from La Fontaine that fascinate him: *"Two true friends lived in Monomotapa / One had nothing that didn't belong to the other."* This Monomotapa

country makes him dream and he enjoys this friendship.

Everyone drops off to sleep, forgetting the threatening river and his empty stomach.

They deserved a good night's sleep - the kind that only adventure can provide.

The day has barely dawned when Abel opens his eyes and sees a man in a black wetsuit leaning over him - a police crest on his chest.

- *"Well, well, you're a calm lad to sleep like that after this flood,"* said the man softly. *"Now you'd better wake up you lot, because I know a lot of people who're impatiently waiting for you."*

Another diver comes up.

The river has calmed down a lot.

A large blue and black rubber dinghy, tied to a stake, is waiting for its passengers.

- *"If these gentlemen will take the trouble,"* said the other constable, *"their yacht is ready."*

- *"Where's the helicopter then?"* asks Boris.

- *"In the hangar - it couldn't come down into your raccoon hole."*

- *"So, we have to go rafting again,"* cries Farouk, fed up with navigating on the river.

- *"But we have a motor, and we'll take you a little further up where there's a 4x4 truck waiting for you, my lords."*

- *"And Jojo, the monitor, have you found him? And the others, did they make it?"*

- *"The other boats got through at the beginning of the flood, shaken but safe and sound. Jojo let himself be carried by the current and reached the last boat, but he's bruised all over."*

- *"Well, as you can see, we're fine,"* says Boris with a disarming smile. *"So Chief, we're boarding."*

They pick up their things, and untie the garland of shirts...

- *"It's a good thing you strung your clothes up, because asleep and hidden as you were, we could have passed by your shelter without seeing you."*

They're happy to hear that.

They feel ready for more adventures.

Well, a bit later.

And they embark on a calm river, under a soft rising sun. The engine roars. The raft's nose rises. The water

is tamed by this contraption. A quarter of an hour later, they disembark in the middle of a police camp where they're praised for their courage.

- *"I hear that in the army, you have great field rations, really tasty ones. If you had one or two lying around, I wouldn't mind tasting them,"* Boris asks.

The lieutenant bursts out laughing:

- *"They're starving! We don't have any war rations, thank goodness - they're no good! But bread, chocolate and hot coffee. Get stuck in and hop in the truck. I've let the town know we've found you, and everyone's getting impatient."*

For sure, arriving at the foot of the Great Plane Tree in a dark blue police 4x4 truck, perched on huge wheels, with headlights everywhere, makes quite an impression. And jumping down with ease makes you feel like a jaded adventurer.

Their parents are there, exhausted by a sleepless night. Their mothers are crying, taking their big, four-foot baby in their arms. Everyone in the square has come out and is clapping.

We have to tell the story. Just a bit. GPTAs don't like to brag.

Yes, there was a lot of water, very choppy.

No, they didn't go under.

Yes, they were scared.

No, they hadn't panicked.

Yes, they'd cried.

No, they didn't blame anyone.

Yes, they like adventures.

- *"With this story we've seen that we can get by anywhere, that we can get ourselves organized, and that we're inseparable friends. So, it was worth a big scare and a night under the stars, wasn't it?"* concludes Abel, the philosopher.



A hospital management team celebrates after completing the 'Team Triangle', a PA created low traversing challenge course element involving steel cables and wooden islands.

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**WHAT'S NEXT? RESPONDING TO THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC**

# A letter from Caitlin Small, PA Executive Director



At Project Adventure, our business is building resilience. Anyone who comes to our challenge course, joins a workshop, or invites us into their school or organization, knows that the spirit of adventure enlivens and inspires. They know how moments of triumph and connection feed the human spirit and forge lasting bonds. They know that adventure is transformative.

We are in a frightening time. This is most definitely not an adventure any of us would have chosen. In the truest sense, we are being asked to face our fears and turn within. But those of us trained in the

adventure model have tools for this moment. We just need to remember them:

- We know about the comfort zone, the stretch zone, and the panic zone - and we know that what many of us are feeling each day is, best case scenario, a stretch. Most of us have known panic all too well lately, and the same will be true for our students. The truth is, we don't have a "challenge by choice" right now; so much of our current situation is out of our control. But not all.

We encourage you to find where your choice lies every day and use that small bit of agency to ease yourself back into stretch or even comfort. In each moment, what can you choose for yourself? To work or to rest? To give or to ask for help? All of these choices can move you out of panic. How can you give your students choice too, and help them find their own sense of empowerment?

We know, too, about the power of play! We know that we need to laugh in order to open up, that students are

most engaged when they're curious and excited, and that we all need to connect with each other despite the physical distance. Many teachers have come up with creative ways to play together, even when far apart. Others have found ways to let laughter into writing assignments ("Hotdogs: sandwich or not? Back up your argument!") and used apps, like Zoom, FlipGrid, and Marco Polo, to facilitate games and even get silly.

And of course, we know the importance of group connection and relationships. Whether it's using the Full Value Commitment (how does it apply to your online learning space?) or the phases of group development (what does "storming" look like on Google Classroom, and how will you help a group through it?), we have tools that are still relevant. We urge you to remember that these are still at hand. With a little creative adaptation, they can still serve you.

Above all, however, we want to remind you of what you know is most true about adventure: it is a time for reflection, growth, and bonding. We can all rush to implement curriculum standards and homework assignments that we have little or no ability to enforce; we can make to-do lists a mile long, plan for every re-opening scenario, or try to innovate a whole new way of teaching overnight. But remember that what we

all need most right now, in this uncertain, unprecedented time, is each other.

This experience with the pandemic is profound, and our response to it can also be profound. We can pause and help our young people learn from the reality of the moment how to be more kind, brave, and generous. We can learn that for ourselves.

We are in this together! If you would like support from Project Adventure, we can help you think through using adventure methods in your current work, whether in person or virtual. You can e-mail me at [csmall@pa.org](mailto:csmall@pa.org) and I will be pleased to connect you with a staff member who can offer support and respond to your questions.

We know you're out there innovating, learning, and connecting with those you serve. If we can help in any way, please let us know. On the other side of this we will all be stronger, more aware, and more grateful for our connections to each other. We look forward to seeing you then.

Sincerely,

Caitlin Small,



Executive Director