

Information Package:

High and Low Ropes Challenge Courses

RECL 3P45 Campus Recreation

Jordan Clark - Brock University

April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## Literature Review

High and low ropes challenge courses are a growing part of the outdoor recreation and education industry and have become a key tool in leadership and team development as well as a therapeutic tool to treat hundreds of mental physical affliction. The amount of research for this growing trend is considerable but is not completely extensive to all aspects of the potential high and low ropes courses. The journal article *Meaningful Involvement Opportunities in Ropes Course Programs* (Haras et al., 2006) gives an interesting insight into this current situation as does Wolohan's (2009) *The Thin Red Line*. These two individual perspectives on the current use and idea's in the culture of high/low rope challenge courses give two unique insights on how these powerful character building tool scan be used and some of the current restrictions of why they are not being used to their full potential. Participation in these challenge courses are something that could be a mandatory part of elementary and secondary education giving every student the opportunity to work on their self-esteem, social skills and physical/mental well being. Seaman's (2008) *Balancing Evidence and Authenticity in Research on Experimental and Youth development in Diverse Settings* helps to understand a more holistic but also creates understanding of the negative attributes that can intercede if not full understood and prepared for.

Preparation is a huge part of rope courses from hiring the correct staff to determining the brief activity all processes must be meticulously be examines to ensure a successful program is run. *Outdoor Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Martin et al., 2006) as well as Rossman & Schlatter's (2003) *Recreation Programming: Designing leisure experiences* are two of the most relevant text's available for those involved in the process

of designing or implementing rope course programs nor to mention necessary reads for anyone in the Recreation Profession. The steps to using a challenge course correctly, safely, and to its fullest potential can be very complex especially depending on whom the program is targeted towards and these different texts have the ability to work in tandem and help guarantee a successful program. Subsequently for the actual leaders involved directly with the participants of a program of this sort Bryan & Starr (2005) have written *The Experience of Being a Leader During a Low Ropes Course Program* which is a perfect guide for all staff and leaders involved as it dissects the interaction of participant/instructor in a challenge course setting and essentially is a psychological review of how your attitudes and actions as the operator of the high and low ropes can be a detrimental or monumental to the participants being served.

The usefulness and need for these programs is something that practitioners constantly fight to define and defend. The article by Gatzemann et al. (2008) *Effectiveness of Sports Activities with an Orientation on Experimental Education, Adventure-Based Learning and Outdoor Education* helps to give more validity to these programs by getting a greater understanding of what effect these programs have on the participants involved and truly outline the effectiveness. In the world of challenge course and experimental education as a professional you must be well versed in these understandings to be able to relay this information to clients, sponsors and more.

Risk management of course is a huge entity in all forms of adventure recreation safety for the participants and staff is absolutely essential. In rope course the potential risks seem very obvious which can actually have a negative effect and blind the risk managers from seeing the less obvious and potentially more harmful risks. Cloutier's

(2000) *Legal Liability and Risk Management in Adventure Tourism* is one of the more predominant tools in the Outdoor Recreation industry to understand how to properly manage the inherit risk involved in these types of activities. The reason this literature review has given little attention to the topic of risk management is simply due to the complexity and amount of literature/data available to discuss this subject and would distract from the discussion of the positive and negative attributes of high and low rope challenge courses.

### **Recommendations**

High and low ropes challenge courses are effective tools for team building, leadership development, enhancing self-awareness and confidence as well as an exciting physically workout. Each individual course has its own different set of obstacles and challenges to help develop these skills and have become more and more popular for participants ranging from children in grade school classes or summer camps, to adults getting to know their office colleagues. Integration of special needs has also become a main focus in the world of challenge courses as both the physical and mental skills learned from these experiences can be transferred into real life situations. This paper is meant for program designers who are interested in making use of the wide variety of benefits associated with challenge courses and to give a clear view into the process of how to have a successful day at a high and low ropes venue.

The three documents found in the appendix are typical examples of the risk management and liability involved with such an event. Certified challenge courses go through rigorous planning in the initial development stages and are designed and build to be very safe regardless of the risky perceptions some may have. Staff are also required to

undergo proper training and must have updated certificates proving their qualifications. Participants themselves are also trained how to properly use the equipment and are constantly monitored to ensure the ultimate level of safety for everyone involved. Additionally proper insurance is an obvious requirement as even though safety is the number one concern and accidents are very rare however this is usually obtained by the institution that runs the course.

Taking a look at the first document in the appendix you will find a program description from McMaster University Athletic and Recreation Departments Peak Performance Programs. Each challenge course will have their own program descriptions, goals and activities that they have designed according to their specific set of high and low ropes. The Peak Performance Programs at McMaster are renowned for their excellence and effectiveness in leadership development and team building. The description of the events, expectations, and very clearly outlined goals make it easier for the participants and organizers to understand exactly what this particular challenge course will be developing during the program. Negative or uneducated perceptions of ropes courses may not be able to distinguish the difference between free play on playground equipment and the highly specialized development that happens on challenge courses and this document and others of this sort clearly outline the physical and emotional skills that are built and discovered while participating in these team building and leadership exercises.

The second document from the Victoria Department of Education is the proforma for excursions and activities requiring school council approval. This is the type of document that an elementary or high school teacher would need to become very familiar with not only for a challenge course excursion but any class trip that leaves the school

premises. Each individual school board will have their own similar document that outlines such as rationale, program details, risk management plan, budget, parental consent, program itinerary, staffing details, equipment lists, emergency response details, and documentation of student pre-requisite skills/knowledge. As a teaching professional this type of document may already be familiar from prior experience booking a field trip however ensure that the proforma used is the most current version as typically school boards and parents councils are constantly changing and upgrading the forms to ensure the ultimate safety of the participants and practitioners.

The third document found in the appendix is an example of something that all participants must fill out before participating and may come in many different forms depending on the circumstances and geographical location of the challenge course. This example comes from the Alaska Mountain Guides and Climbing School and is used as a registration form, liability waiver, covers the trip policies/condition, obtains parental consent, outlines medical information and insurance details. This form is very detailed and might contain much more information than what you might see during a typical day-trip however most program consent waivers will resemble what is seen in this document. Make sure to fully read everything on the form and if working with youth ensure they also understand the policies and procedures of the events. Personal health insurance combined with the insurance of the agency most often are sufficient however if unsure contact the program administration and they will have all the answers you need as typically these things differ slightly from one organization to another.

For any person or group planning on participating in a high and low ropes challenge course research is an essential part of the planning process. The literature

review in this paper gives an overview of this are however looking further into the actual companies or institutions is a crucial part of the planning process. Looking into such details as how long the course has been accredited for and by what creditor, risk management detail such as liability and nearest medical locations, even details such as staff training and certification. Sometime there are options between different venues and researching these fine details will lead you to the best choice and the most beneficial results.

Getting educated in the area of risk management is something that will benefit you and your participants not only for challenge course activities but any type of out trip as well as everyday life. This topic although only briefly covered in this paper has a large area of study and is too enormous of a topic to consider it just during an excursion of this sort. Getting educated through directed readings or even taking courses at the university and college level will greatly enhance your awareness of the considerations in an event of this sort. This is especially important as an educator at the elementary, high school or post secondary level as risk management is something that should constantly be on your mind while holding the responsibility of ensuring the safety of your students.

There is a great deal to know and learn from high and low ropes challenge courses and is guaranteed to push the participants outside of their comfort zone confronting issues of self-confidence, emotional boundaries, physical limitations, leadership and much more. Programs of this sort have become main stream and more and more are becoming part of educational systems curriculum as it uses a much different learning style than the typical classroom while teaching life lessons that can sometimes be much more essential in the development of individuals and groups.

## References

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## McMaster University Athletics and Recreation Department

### Peak Performance Programs:

Peak performance is an innovative program designed to teach the foundations of leadership, teamwork, nutrition, movement skills, exercise progression, sport specific training and more. The program is ideal for sports teams, physical education classes, exercise physiology and anatomy classes, outdoor recreation classes and any group of people that are eager for a unique opportunity to learn about sport performance, teamwork, and leadership from outstanding program staff at McMaster University.

- **For School Groups:** Each program focuses on grade curriculum expectations. Students will develop skills that will allow them to maintain and commit to lifelong healthy active living and will help them identify their leadership styles.
- **Sports Teams:** Programs are tailored to the performance goals and sport of each team. Participants will be educated on high performance training concepts and will actively participate in team development training and performance training.

### Introduction to High Performance and Sport Leadership

This introductory program is designed to teach the foundations of performance and leadership. Performance topics may include long-term athlete development, nutrition, strength training, flexibility and speed/agility training. The Indoor Feather Family Climbing Wall, Alpine Tower, and Team Development Course will be used to promote enhanced group cohesion and develop leadership skills.

#### Goals:

- To introduce students to the fundamentals of strength training with a focus on dynamic warm ups, weight training technique, proper recovery (including flexibility), and self myofascial release.
- To expose athletes to basic sport nutrition including pre and post exercise meals, meal timing and hydration.
- To combine individual athletic ability with team performance and cohesion.

These goals will help your athletes develop fundamental training skills and leadership qualities to take with them to their game!

#### Activities:

- Strength training session including warm up, strength circuit, cool down, flexibility training and/or speed agility quickness session.
- Presentation on LTAD (Long Term Athlete Development) and/or sport nutrition.
- Learning concepts such as the full value contract, challenge by choice, and the importance of goal setting will be discussed.
- Team building activities where the group is required to problem solve, set goals, and resolve conflict, many of which are on our Team Development Course (A low-ropes challenge course).
- High-Ropes Alpine Tower climbing, or Feather Family Indoor Climbing Wall.
- Several "ice breakers" to develop a comfort zone with other group members.
- Creative and interesting briefing and debriefing techniques.

### **Advanced Performance and Sport Leadership**

This advanced program will focus on selected aspects of performance and leadership. Interactive seminars, training sessions, team building exercises and the Feather Family Indoor Climbing Wall or Alpine Tower will be used to facilitate and increase in physical fitness and leadership skills. Training sessions can include metabolic training, resistance training and plyometric training (training background required).

#### **Goals:**

- Combine individual athletic ability with team cohesion and leadership.
- Understand the importance of plyometric and power training for enhanced sport performance

These goals will help your athletes develop fundamental training skills and leadership qualities along with plyometry.

#### **Activities:**

- Plyometric training session.
- Learning concepts such as the full value contract, challenge by choice, and the importance of goal setting will be discussed as it pertains to sport.
- Team building activities where the group is required to problem solve, set goals, and resolve conflict, many of which are on our Team Development Course (A low-ropes challenge course).
- High-Ropes Alpine Tower climbing, or the Feather Family Indoor Climbing Wall.
- Several "ice breakers" to develop a comfort zone with other group members.
- Creative and interesting briefing and debriefing techniques.

### **Active Science**

An interactive program designed specifically for exercise science classes or high performance athletes with focus on sports nutrition or performance testing demonstrations. Participants will further develop their understanding of the body through selected topics in functional anatomy, metabolism, and an active session that will allow them to see muscles in motion or experience each energy system in action!

#### **Goals:**

- Expose students to high performance testing equipment including  $\dot{V}O_2$  max, wingate and bodpod body composition testing.
- Gain understanding through active participation of functional anatomy.
- Apply anatomy concepts to strength training for better understanding of muscle physiology.
- Gain greater understanding of energy systems and physically experience each one.

These goals will help your athletes develop a strong understanding of exercise physiology and the science of movement and coordination.

**Activities:**

- VO<sub>2</sub> max and wingate demonstration.
- Bodpod demonstration.
- Functional anatomy interactive lecture.
- Strength training session.
- Learning concepts such as the full value contract, challenge by choice, and the importance of goal setting will be discussed.
- Team building activities where the group is required to problem solve, set goals, and resolve conflict, many of which are on our Team Development Course (A low-ropes challenge course).
- High-Ropes Alpine Tower climbing, or Feather Family Indoor Climbing Wall.
- Several "ice breakers" to develop a comfort zone with other group members.
- Creative and interesting briefing and debriefing techniques.

**ONE Team**

A fresh perspective on the idea of "team" roles within the group will be challenged as participants are expected to move through various roles of leadership and cooperation. A strong emphasis will be placed on debriefing to ensure participants learn from their experiences. The Indoor Climbing Wall or Alpine Tower will help to enhance team cohesion and will provide autonomy for every individual. Participants should expect a challenging day that is sure to produce a unified group or team.

**Goals:**

- Establish trust between team members.
- Enhance a team's communication and cooperation.
- Identify team weaknesses and focus on improving those areas.
- Develop a strong sense of team unity through activities that exemplify support and commitment.

**Activities:**

- Sport-specific scenarios and debriefing.
- Learning concepts such as the full value contract, challenge by choice, and the importance of goal setting will be discussed.
- Team building activities where the group is required to problem solve, set goals, and resolve conflict, many of which are on our Team Development Course (A low-ropes challenge course).
- High-Ropes Alpine Tower climbing, or Feather Family Indoor Climbing Wall.
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### **All About Climbing**

This program has a strong focus on climbing technique and skill and is perfect for an outdoor recreation or physical education class. Both the Indoor Climbing Wall and Alpine Tower will be used to help individuals develop their technique and skill. Participants will learn climbing knots, and how to belay on different devices.

#### **Goals:**

- Learn belaying techniques and knot tying.
- Investigate a variety of climbing equipment and safety factors.
- Understand and apply a variety of climbing techniques.
- Learn climbing warmups and exercises.
- Climb both a 30 foot wall and 50 foot tower!

#### **Activities:**

- High-Ropes Alpine Tower climbing
- Indoor Climbing Wall.
- Belayer training.
- Equipment training