

Sequencing Low Adventure Activities in Elementary Physical Education

by *Brian D. Clocksin*



Increasingly, schools are purchasing adventure equipment, hiring teachers with adventure backgrounds, and even building climbing walls and other high ropes elements. The popularity of Adventure Education has led to an increase in convention sessions aimed at teachers. For example, at the 2001 National AAHPERD Convention there was only one such Adventure session.

By 2005, there were twelve. So, it seems Adventure Education activities and initiatives are likely becoming more commonplace in physical education. While students point out the “fun” aspect of adventure education, teachers are realizing its potential for improving communication and problem solving skills, enhancing teamwork and trust, and developing goal setting and responsibility. There are also opportunities for students to demonstrate competency in motor skills, enhance cognitive development, and provide them with alternative leisure time physical activities. Thus, adventure education has the potential to meet NASPE standards.

This article provides physical education teachers with a practical, sequenced Adventure Education unit they can easily integrate into a curriculum. This unit was developed for a two week (e.g., 10 days) Adventure Education camp at Hofstra University. Students in 3rd through 5th grades participated in daily adventure activities during a two-hour session. The unit presented here is designed to show a sequential approach to Adventure Education programming. You may need more or less time for each theme, depending on your class characteristics and teaching objectives. Activities within this unit follow the *Project Adventure Sequence* (Bisson, 1999). Figure 1 provides an overview of the unit’s daily themes. A number of activities can be utilized to meet the daily themes (see Figure 2) and several resources are available to help teachers find activities that better meet their needs. The first week sets the stage for the learner and can be accomplished with minimal equipment. The second week (Part 2) is

a transition from experiences learned in week one that utilizes high ropes elements and requires special training, facilities, and safety considerations.

Each day of the unit builds on students’ previous experiences, a typical *Project Adventure* (PA) sequence. Thus, the sequence is constructed and maintained throughout the unit to reinforce student learning. Many of the activities can be found in *Silver Bullets* (Rohnke, 1984) or similar activity books.

DAY 1

The first day of an Adventure Education unit sets the tone for the subsequent days. We use the first day to focus on safety, both emotional and physical, and as an orientation to Adventure Education. We begin with a discussion called the Full Value Contract to help students start to understanding strengths and weaknesses of self and others and to stress the importance of giving “full value” to self and others. This segues to Challenge by Choice, further discussion about finding ways to challenge one’s self (Rohnke, 1989).

Figure 1—Overview of adventure.

| Day | Theme | Culminating Activity |
|-----|--|----------------------|
| 1 | Introduction (a) Icebreakers/Warm-ups, Acquaintance & Deinhbitizers | Peek-A-Who |
| 2 | (b) Trust | Willow-in-the-Wind |
| 3 | (c) Communication | Trolley's |
| 4 | (d) Problem Solving | Traffic Jam |
| 5 | (e) Teamwork | Bull Ring |
| 6 | (f) Social Responsibility | Blob Belay/Catwalk |
| 7 | (g) Personal Responsibility | Climbing Wall |
| 8 | Teamwork | Dangling Quad |
| 9 | Problem Solving | Vertical Play Pin |
| 10 | Goal Setting | Zip Line |

(a – g demonstrate the Project Adventure Sequence, adapted from Schoel, 1988)

Figure 2—Sample activities for adventure unit.

| Teamwork | Communication | Trust | Problem Solving |
|--|---|--|---|
| Trolleys Helium Stick The Cure Hoop Pass Inchworm Italian Golf Pipeline Human Ladder Rope Knot Pyramid Bull-Ring | Blind Polygon Italian Golf Mine Field Tank Impulse Everybody Up Human Alphabet Key Punch | Willow in the wind Single/double falls Dives/trust falls Commitment Levitation Chair Flip | Team Canyoneering 5 th Element Group Push-up/sit Yurt Circle Pizza Party Spider Web Hot Chocolate Toxic Waste Traffic Jam Infinite-Circle Hands-Down Bonk |
| Tag games/Warm-ups/Ice Breakers | | | |
| Smaug's Jewels Pirate's Gold Race-is-on Captain's coming Mirror Tag | Blob tag Evolution Team Rock, Paper, Scissors Giants, Wizards, Dwarves Samurai | Picnic Party Peek-A-Who Up Chuck Rope Jousting Kamikaze Samurai | |
| Low Initiatives | | High Elements | |
| Spider Web All-Aboard The Amazon Fidget Ladder Over-Under-Through Nitro Whale Watch Mohawk Walk Commitment (Wild Woosey) | | Catwalk Two Line Bridge Multi-Vine Vertical Play Pin Centipede Flying Squirrel Climbing Wall Zip Line Pamper Pole/Leap of Faith Dangling Duo/Quad | |

Whether an adventure unit is conducted indoors or on an outdoor course, you need to spend time discussing physical safety with students. Adventure elements are attractive to kids of all ages, yet they have the potential to cause injuries if used without supervision or improperly. Orientate your students to potential hazards (e.g., cables, wires, poles), set protocols for use, and plan activities that utilize space effectively while minimizing the opportunity for injuries.

Icebreaker/Warm-up Activities— The Race is On/Giants, Wizards, and Dwarves

The Race is On is a fun way to show students some similarities that exist between them. Create a large circle using poly spots, one for each student or for

each pair of students. Students begin by sitting or standing on the poly spot, with the leader (likely you) in the middle. The role of the leader is to state something personal (e.g., likes/dislikes, what they are wearing, number of siblings, etc.). The statement begins with, "The Race is on if . . ." For example, "The Race is on if you like ice cream." All students who like ice cream have to move to a new poly spot. Students cannot return to the same poly spot or move to one that is directly next to them. The leader also tries to find a poly spot. The result is a new leader.

Giants, Wizards, and Dwarves is a variation of Rock, Paper, Scissors. This activity works on teamwork and communication skills. Divide the class into two teams. Demonstrate a movement for each of the creatures: Giants stand tall with arms outstretched and growling; Wizards stand in zapping position (like Harry Potter dueling Malfoy); and Dwarves crouch down. Explain that Giants squash the Dwarves, Wizards zap the Giants, and Dwarves eat the kneecaps off the Wizards.

Set up cones (outdoors) or use court lines (indoors) to establish a center line and a safe zone (10'-15' from the center line) for each group. The two teams huddle-up. Each group decides on a creature they will all perform. After allowing about 15-20 seconds to determine their creature, call the teams back and have them line up facing each other at the center line. The game begins with all students chanting and performing each creature, ending with their group's chosen creature. For example, Team One "Giants-Wizards-Dwarves-Wizards." Team Two "Giants-Wizards-Dwarves-Dwarves." Since Dwarves beat Wizards, Team Two chases Team One toward Team One's safe zone. Students that get tagged join the chasing team (Team Two). The game continues with the two teams huddling-up again and choosing another creature. If both teams choose the same creature, they huddle up and pick again, or you may want to have them pick a primary and a back-up creature to save time.

Name Game Activities—Group Juggle and Boppity Bop Bop Bop

Divide the students into groups of 8-10 and have each group form a circle. Place five or six small objects (e.g., tennis balls, bean bags, stuffed animals) at the center of each circle. Have students select one object and pass it around the circle, saying their name and a descriptor (e.g., fruit or vegetable, animal, adjective) that starts with the same letter of their first name (Brian Banana, Brian Bat, Brave Brian). When everyone has introduced themselves, they begin to pass the object randomly about in the circle. Before each throw, they call out the name of the recipient. After catching the object the recipient thanks the thrower (i.e., "Brian Banana" "Thank-you, Sarah Strawberry"). Add additional objects to throw as the groups become comfortable.

An alternative, or possibly a culmination, to this activity is to have the students throw the object in a pattern in which each student tosses and receives only once (so the object begins and ends with the same person). In this variation, students are not allowed to pass to the person directly next to them. Once they have established the pattern and can repeat it several times, add additional objects so there are several being thrown at the same time. For a challenge, keep adding objects to see how many they can get going at the same time, or time the group to see how quickly they can an object through the pattern.

Boppity Bop Bop Bop can be played in the same groups of 8-10 students, or expanded to include an entire class. Start with one student in the middle of each group. That person picks one student in the circle and says either "Left," "Right," "You," or "Me" followed by "boppity bop bop bop." That student must say the name of the person located in the designated direction before the center student finishes "boppity bop bop bop." If successful, person in the center must try again with someone else. If unsuccessful, that student goes to the center and the person in the center rejoins the circle. If you play with the whole class in a single circle, place several students in the center and have them all go at once.

Culminating Activity—Peek-a-Who

Divide the class into two groups. Hold up a divider (sheet, mat, etc.) so the two teams cannot see each other. Instruct each team to send one student forward to sit near the divider. When both sides are ready, drop the divider. The first student to name the other "wins" and brings that person over to their team. Teammates can help with the names, but the student sitting at the divider must say the name for it to count.

Day 2

Trust Warm-up Activity—Tank

The warm-up activity for day two begins the notion of trusting others and also sets the stage for day three's focus on communication. Have students partner up. Designate one as the "tank" and one as the "driver." Provide each pair with a yarn ball and blindfold. The tank is blindfolded and given a yarn ball to hold. The driver must maintain physical contact with the tank but may not touch the yarn ball. The object of the game is for each tank to knock out other tanks by hitting either the tank or its driver with the yarn ball. Once either player is hit, the pair moves outside the playing area and waits for the next game. Encourage the pairs to use this time to strategize. The game moves fast, so having to sit out does not result in much waiting time. An alternative is to have the tank and driver switch roles and then re-enter the game immediately.

Adventure activities have inherent attributes that can be powerful tools in the physical education curriculum. Taking the time to highlight these attributes enhances the learning experience. Utilize processing strategies and techniques to draw students' attention to relevant attributes of the activities. While specific *processing* techniques are beyond the scope of this paper, an example with the tank activity is to lead a discussion of the different roles (tank and driver) and how the actions of each partner impacts trust, communication, or other important attributes.

Trust Sequence—Spotting

Trust falls are a common feature of adventure units. However, prior to any actual falling, it is critical that students develop competency in *spotting*. To begin, demonstrate a proper spotting technique (hands in ready position, fingers closed; legs staggered with knees slightly flexed; hands at shoulder height). Then, discuss important aspects of spotting: (a) Protect head, neck, and spine; (b) slow the fall and do not attempt to *catch* the faller; (c) work at a *comfort* level appropriate to both the faller and the catcher; and (d) stay focused.

Have students practice the spotting position with you or another highly experienced spotter. Introduce the first call, "Spotter Ready." Have students practice getting into spotting position when they hear, "Spotter?" This can be practiced as a group or during an instant activity. (Spotter Ready Tag: As players are tagged, they freeze in the "Spotter Ready" position. Also, randomly throughout the game yell "Spotter." The last student to get into the spotting position becomes the new tagger.)

Talk about the role of the faller: (a) communicate with spotters, (b) keep body straight and tight, (c) work at comfort level of both the catcher and faller, and (d) stay focused.

Demonstrate the proper falling position: arms over top with palms together, clasp fingers together, pull up and through (hands should be clasped together on chest with elbows close to the body). Have students practice the falling position. Work on this as a group or as a variation of the preceding tag game.

Have students practice controlling and decelerating their own bodies before working with partners. Wall falls are a good way to do this. Ideally, this requires mats hung on a wall and on the floor as well. If no mats are available, DO NOT allow students to fall from further than two feet from the wall. Have students stand, facing the wall (about one foot away). Review falling cues: "straight and tight and feet together" (**students will not have their hands clasped for this activity**). Demonstrate falling to the wall; show how to catch yourself with arms in the ready position. Use your arms to decelerate your body as it approaches the wall. Allow students to practice this several times. Continue to demonstrate and have students practice, beginning a little further from the wall with each subsequent fall.

This is also a good time to demonstrate "stepping out" of a fall if it feels uncomfortable. Take a step forward with one leg during the fall (in effect, "catching" the fall with the leg instead of the arms).

Encourage students to maintain a distance within their level of comfort, while allowing them to take a small step back after each fall. Three to four feet is probably the furthest you will allow them to fall. You can end the activity with a falling push-up on the mat. Throughout all demonstrations of the spotting and falling positions, continuously review the safety aspects noted earlier. Now, introduce the calls:

1. (FALLER)- Spotter?
2. (SPOTTER)- Spotter ready!
3. (FALLER)- Ready to fall

4. (SPOTTER)- Fall away

5. (FALLER)- Off spot

Demonstrate this procedure with a student as the faller. When the faller calls out "Spotter?" the spotter should already be in spotting position behind the faller. When the Spotter calls out "fall away," that is the cue for the faller to fall back. After the fall and catch, the spotter returns the faller to a standing position. Once the faller feels stable, the call is "off spot," to end the sequence.

Begin by have spotters place their hands on the shoulders of the faller. On "fall away," the spotter lowers the faller to a level that is comfortable for both students (maybe 4-8 inches). The spotter then returns the faller to a standing position and maintains contact until "off spot" is called. Allow the students to practice spotting/falling several times. Fallers and spotters can collaborate on deciding on how far they would like to fall.

Next, allow spotters to start with their hands 2-4 inches away from the faller (but still in proper ready position). This allows the faller some "free fall" before being caught by the spotter.

Dual Spotters

When working with younger students, or groups that have not fully demonstrated personal and social responsibility, I begin with dual spotters. The calls and the sequence are the same as above. Two spotters position themselves, one slightly to the left and one slightly to the right of the faller. Their inside hands should nearly meet in the center of the faller's back. Their outside hands should be placed on the shoulder. Repeat the sequence above (hands touching, 2-4 inches back, comfort level).



FIGURE 3 Students creating "trust."

Culminating Activity—Willow in the Wind

Divide students into groups of 8-12. One student stands in the middle of a circle. Students in the circle close it in until their shoulders are touching one another. The circle is the "wind." Students in the circle position themselves to spot the student in the middle, the "willow." Beginning with the calls described above, the willow is gently (wind, not hurricane) passed around the circle. The willow should maintain a *fall* position during the entire episode. Further, the willow can choose to keep eyes open or shut, but must attempt to stay on either heels or toes to maximize the movement around the circle. For safety, the "wind" needs to have a minimum of 4 hands on the "willow" at all times; no one student should be left supporting the willow alone. Keep the circle close together to prevent the "willow" from falling out of it.

Day 3

Communication Warm-up Activity—Italian Golf

Italian Golf is played in partners. Each pair needs one six-inch diameter deck tennis ring. Students will be tossing and catching their ring. To catch the ring, they must hold their arm up with the back of the hand facing their partner and the thumb tucked in. Throwers attempt to loop the ring on their partner's arm. Catchers can move their arm or body but cannot catch the ring with a hand.

To start an Italian Golf Race, teams line up on one side of the playing area. The object is to be the first team to cross the playing area. A player cannot move while in possession of the ring. A ring can only be tossed and caught as described above. Each player throws the ring to a partner. If the ring is caught, the thrower runs past the catcher and becomes the new catcher. If the ring is not caught, the thrower must retry from the same position; however, the catcher is allowed to move closer or further away. Pairs continue alternating thrower and catcher until they cross the playing area.

Communication Activity—Minefield

Students continue to work with partners for this activity. Mark a playing area with 4 cones. Inside the playing area, place a variety of objects (mines). Make it unlikely that anyone could walk straight across the area without hitting a mine.

Blindfold one partner. The other partner stands outside the playing area. The object of the game is to verbally guide the blindfolded partner safely across the

minefield. Anyone coming in contact with a mine must return to the beginning and start again. After a successful crossing, or perhaps three unsuccessful crossings, have the partners switch roles.

Culminating Activity—Trolleys

This activity requires the construction or purchase of trolleys. Traditional trolleys are constructed of 4" x 4" boards (construction details located in Rohnke, 1984). Divide students into groups based on the number of people the trolley will support (generally 6-10). Introduce a challenge. For example, "You need to find a way to get across the fire swamp. No part of your body can come in contact with the swamp. Shoes and clothing will instantly catch fire if they touch the swamp." Encourage students to engage in strategizing for several minutes before beginning to move. You might also have each group decide on consequences for touching the swamp (e.g., start over, have the student who *touch*ed face backwards, switch order, etc.).

Day 4

Problem Solving Warm-up Activity—Rope Knots

This warm-up activity requires rope (e.g., 15-20 feet for a group of 8) with overhand knots tied every 2-3 feet (one knot per student). Students in the group grab the rope so their hand is directly behind one of the knots. The object of this activity is for the group to get the knots out of the rope without anyone letting go of it. No one may let go of the rope; they may not slide their hand over a knot, and they must all maintain contact with the rope until all the knots are out. To complete the task, students must work together. In general, they need to create enough slack in each knot to allow people to step through it (but, don't tell them that).

Problem Solving Activity—Team Canyoneering

Team Canyoneering is a challenge activity that incorporates math skills, problem solving, and listening skills. Within groups of 4, have the students assign themselves the following numbers: 1, 2, 5, and 10. Use playing cards, or write the numbers on small slips of paper, to help students remember what number they represent. The goal of this activity is to get everyone in the group across the canyon. The rules for this activity are the following: (a) Exactly 2 people must cross from side A to side B at a time (no more, no less); (b) For the 2 people crossing, the person with the highest point value contributes that value toward a total (Example: If 10 and 2 cross, 10 points are counted toward the total);

(c) before any more people may cross, the person with the lowest value on side B must travel back to side A; (d) that person's value is also counted toward the total; (e) crossing back and forth continues (following the pattern described above) until all 4 team members are together on side B. The goal is to accumulate a total of exactly 17 points.

This activity can lead to some frustration (the numbers total 18 points) and conflict within groups. If students are struggling to find the solution, consider the following hints: (a) Stop the activity and have the groups repeat the rules, (b) tell them they need to find a way that one person's number doesn't count, and (c) tell them that they need to find a way that the number 5 is never counted. The key to this activity is for students to realize the smallest number on side B returns, not necessarily the smaller of the two that travel across together. The solution: (1) 1 and 2 to cross together, 1 returns (total 3: 2 for the higher number crossing and 1 for the lower number returning); (2) 5 and 10 cross together, 2 returns ($3 + 10 = 13$, $13 + 2 = 15$); (3) 1 and 2 cross again, no return ($15 + 2 = 17$, all are across).

Culminating Activity—Traffic Jam

Students remain in teams of 4. Join another team to create a group of 8. Each group needs 9 poly spots. Position the poly spots in a straight line, about two feet between each poly spot. The two teams each stand on four consecutive poly spots, with the middle poly spot free and the two teams facing each other. The object of this activity is for the two teams to switch ends. Students may take one step forward (to an open poly spot) or leap around one person from the other team (to get to an open poly spot). However, they may not go backwards or leap around more than one person. For younger students, use groups of 6 (3 on each side with 1 poly spot in the middle open). The groups are to work together to solve this problem. If they get into a *traffic jam* (no more moves possible), have them start over in their original starting positions. The solution is as follows for teams of 4 (the pattern is similar for smaller or larger teams). Team A: one move (forward); Team B: two moves (1 leap, 1 forward); Team A: three moves (2 leaps, 1 forward); Team B: four moves (3 leaps, 1 forward); Team A: four moves (4 leaps); Team B: four moves (1 forward, 3 leaps); Team A: three moves (1 forward, 2 leaps); Team B: two moves (1 forward, 1 leap); Team A: one move (1 forward).

Day 5

Teamwork Warm-up Activity—Inchworm

Inchworm provides an opportunity to challenge even the most skilled students in your class. Students select

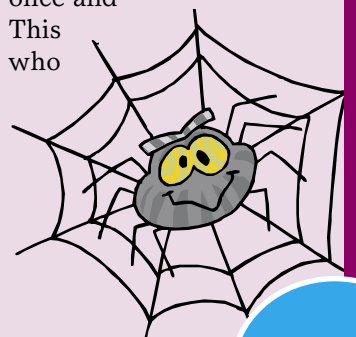
partners of similar size and sit on the floor facing each other. Students sit on their partner's feet and maintain contact with their arms. Only the feet can be touching the ground. The object of the game is to move across the playing area (ten to fifteen feet is sufficient) using inchworm movements. With only their feet touching the floor, students need to figure out the fastest way to move across the playing area. Allow a 2-3 minute practice period for students to explore different ways to move, then line up the inchworms for the Inchworm Marathon Race. This activity works on communication skills, problem solving, and teamwork.

Teamwork Activity—Spider Web

Spider Web provides an opportunity for students in midsized groups (8-12) to problem-solve and work together. The Spider web can be constructed from a variety of materials or purchased from Project Adventure or similar companies. Two portable volleyball standards and some type of rope (e.g., bungee, long jump ropes, twine, or string) works well. You may also want to place a mat below the spider web. The Spider web can take any shape you or your students want to create. Using the rope, create a spider web five to six feet high and eight to ten feet high. The openings in the web should be big enough for students to carefully pass through. Create enough openings for every student to pass through, with a majority at a level that will allow students to pass through with limited assistance.

The object of Spider Web is for students to successfully pass through the spider web without making any physical contact with the web. Traditionally, each opening can only be used once (before the spider seals it up), so students have to problem-solve ways to get everyone across, particularly as they realize there are not enough openings at levels that all students can pass through unassisted. Do not allow students to dive, jump, or be thrown through an opening. Ultimately one or more students will need to be passed through an opening by being lifted off the ground. Require at least two students on each side before students can be lifted and passed through an opening. Have students decide on penalties for any contacts (e.g., starting over).

An alternative approach to Spider Web is to have students pass a rope through every opening. This version requires a long rope (30+ feet), but the openings within the spider web can be any size. To solve this, students need to weave the rope through the openings so every opening is covered only once and the rope never touches the web. This is a good alternative for students who are not ready to be responsible for lifting their peers off the ground, or as a second station while another group performs the original version with direct supervision.



Culminating Activity—Bull Ring

Bull Ring is played in groups of 12-15 students. To create a Bull Ring set, purchase an actual bullring (2" diameter) from a hardware store. Cut string into twelve to fifteen twenty-foot sections. Tie one end to the bullring. The string forms spokes around the bullring. To begin the activity, place the bullring around the top of a cone. Then place a ball (e.g., ping-pong ball, tennis ball, softball) on the top of the cone. Each student picks up one of the strings. The entire group then attempts to lift the ball off the cone with the bullring and transfer it to another location. Larger balls increase the challenge. You can also design a course that passes underneath objects, through doorways, or up or down stairs. Have students collaborate on goals for the number of drops they expect to have and assign themselves penalties for additional drops (e.g., starting over, blindfolding members, etc.).

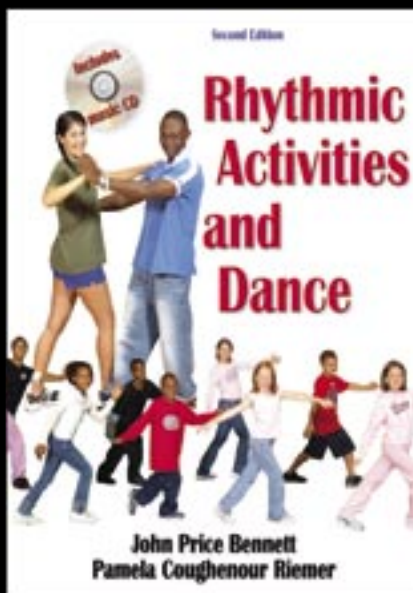
Transition to High Elements

Through proper planning and sequencing, the preceding low adventure activities develop cognitive, affective,

and psychomotor skills necessary for a successful transition to high elements. The goal is to provide students with multiple opportunities to enhance their level of comfort with adventure activities before leaving the ground. Students must demonstrate an ability to work together, problem solve, communicate, and show trust in their peers before moving to high elements. If students do not demonstrate readiness to accept personal and social responsibility, or if you have no access to high elements, continued exposure to low elements and initiatives still promote valuable learning objectives. On the other hand, should you have access, the second part of this series describes a sequence of adventure activities for high ropes elements.

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