

High 5 – Intro to Low Challenge Course
Reflection Paper
(Sample)

I participated in High 5's intro to low challenge course elements two day workshop. I have taken adventure workshops and classes before, so the content was not new for me; however, I wanted to refresh my knowledge regarding facilitating low challenges. Not only did this workshop act as a refresher, I learned some new processing methods, experienced a couple new low challenges, and my commitment to teaching adventure education was rejuvenated.

I am a physical education teacher. I have been teaching for nine years and been facilitating adventure challenges for my students as part of the phys. ed. curriculum. We have mostly focused on initiatives and trust building as we don't have access to a challenge course. Currently we do have a small climbing wall and a few low challenge elements in the gym. We have been working to build a challenge course on site and hopefully we will have a small outdoor low element challenge course ready to go for the upcoming school year.

The building of a low challenge course will take our adventure programming to a higher level. My goal for attending the workshop was to gain a better understanding for facilitating the low elements that we will be getting on our course. Due to the activities that we participated in, the modeling that our facilitator demonstrated, and our group processing, I achieved my goal and so much more.

The experience that I gained from this workshop is very applicable to my own teaching. I believe it will help me to improve student outcomes through a better sequencing of activities, new and exciting challenges, and new methods of group processing. I gained a high level of understanding in these areas due to the methods and leadership of the workshop facilitator.

We began, like most groups do, with ice-breakers and name games. I've always done these, but I learned a few new ones at this workshop which will be successful with my high school students. "High 5 mingle" was the first activity that we did to get to meet the members of our group and learn their names. "Name roulette" and "peek-a-who" were two activities that were new to me and I enjoyed participating in them. In addition to helping everyone learn each

others names, each of these activities builds on each other, and when sequenced appropriately acts to bring the group together. New games such as these are like gold to a facilitator. I am always looking to add activities to my bag of tricks. It can be difficult to find good ones that I know will work with high school age students, but I feel that these three will be very effective.

High school students are an interesting group to lead adventure programming with. They have a tough outer shell, but once you break through, they buy in and are really a joy to work with. Good ice-breakers are an important way to start. They have to get the kids up, moving, and interacting. The best ones, such as the three new ones that I learned, have all of the students engaged at the same time so that no one person feels like they're standing out. They can be a tiny bit goofy, but if they're too crazy the students won't open up and get anything out of it.

Sequencing from ice-breakers into initiatives happened very smoothly in our workshop. This was a valuable lesson for me. I wanted to get more out of this workshop than just the activities. I wanted to experience for myself how we transitioned, how the group responded to certain challenges, and I wanted to see what a good progression of activities looked and felt like. Experiencing these important pieces for myself helped me to gain a better feel for good facilitation. This will directly impact how I facilitate adventure education for my students.

A few initiatives that we did were ones that I currently do with my students. Turning over a new leaf is one examples of this; although I learned a new wrinkle that will make it more challenging to my classes. Magic carpet ride is an activity that flows nicely as an extension to turning over a new leaf. Once we turned the tarp over, we then had to transport ourselves and the tarp across the room without touching the ground around us. This was a natural progression of challenge. Our group did extremely well with it. I believe that high school students will find it a little more challenging, but they always seem to rise up and exceed my expectations.

Trolley is another initiative that I currently do with my students; however, I enjoyed the twist that our facilitator put into the challenge. She connected goal setting with the activity. We

each had to set a goal and place an object out in the field that represented our goal. Once each member had set their goal, the entire group worked together moving the trolleys. We helped each other successfully reach our goals. The processing of this activity and metaphor to life with high school kids would be important. I would highlight the key point that we all have certain goals that we want to achieve. It can be difficult to get there sometimes, but with help we can all be successful. Some of my kids would find this a little corny, but they would clearly grasp the concept.

Prior to moving on to the low elements, our group had established trust, togetherness, respect, a base understanding of backgrounds, and the ability to communicate clearly with one another. This was due to the challenges, the sequencing, and the processing. I hope to recreate the same community within my classes. Accomplishing this with twenty-five high school students is a little more difficult than doing it with 10 educators; however, I believe that if the facilitation is done correctly, any group can get there. One important lesson I learned from the workshop was that a good facilitator does not take the group to this stage of closeness. The facilitator should provide the opportunities for the group to take themselves there.

The first low element we tackled was the TP shuffle. We were ready and I was excited because I knew we would be getting this particular element on our course. We established our own group goal based on what we felt would be a good challenge for us. Because we were comfortable with each other, we were able to physically help one another to move on the log. This element of being in each others space and physically touching each other can make things complicated for high school students. It will be extremely important that the class gets to the comfortable stage before we move on to the low elements.

Our group moved on to the whale watch activity. We had to take into account peoples different sizes in order to balance out a platform. The neat thing was this happened without ever mentioning size or weight. People naturally just moved to where we needed to go to make it work. I believe the same thing would happen with my classes.

The next set of low elements that we did required spotting to promote safety. This meant that we had to take some time to teach good spotting techniques and reinforce the importance of being able to enjoy ourselves safely. I would use this same progression with my classes. I felt that it was direct, provided opportunities to practice, and helped to develop a higher level of trust among the members of our group. I clearly understood what the expectations were of me as a spotter. I also felt more comfortable trying some challenging activities because I trusted that my peer would be there to keep me safe.

Once our group demonstrated that we understood spotting and were ready to move on to tougher challenges, we successfully completed the multi-vine, swinging log, nitro crossing, wild woosey, and lord of the rings activities. Each of these elements was challenging individually and together, and they were fun. I tend to process after each element. I noticed through my participation in these challenges that our facilitator did not. She chose to process when the moment called for it. She referred to it as picking out the teachable moments and making them meaningful for the group. This seems to be an amazingly simple concept, but one that is new to me. Reflecting on my experience with this concept has led me to really buy into it.

Processing of adventure programming is obviously extremely important, and I've learned that it can be more meaningful if the timing is right. I know that waiting for these teachable moments will make me a better facilitator. It will allow me to help the group guide themselves, rather than me waiting until the end of the challenge to ask the same questions each time. I have found that by the third activity, my students know what I want them to say and they just start to throw out the key terms and buzz words. This is the point where I know that it is no longer meaningful for them. By not scripting my processing, I can react more to what each group or individual needs at the time. This will make it more valuable and the students will get much more out of the overall process.

My new plan is to introduce the elements and let the group go where they need to go. I will facilitate for safety and teachable moments throughout the activity, pulling everything together at the end of our time. I was excited to pick up a few new methods of processing that I could use to begin or wrap up a particular class period. I have always used questioning as a

method of processing. This can be effective if it isn't done over and over. Our facilitator at this workshop introduced us to buttons, chi cards, dice, postcards, and treasures, which she uses to process with groups. I found these methods to be a creative way to help individuals and the entire group guide their own processing. I know that my students would enjoy a change from the traditional questioning method and would benefit from these new ideas.

I am eager to facilitate new and improved adventure education challenges. I gained knowledge of new ice breakers, initiatives, and elements as well as learned a few new wrinkles to add to activities that we already do. My new knowledge will provide my students with more exciting, challenging, and appropriate adventure programming opportunities. I feel prepared to facilitate the new low elements that we will be using next school year. In addition, I am confident that I will do a better job as a facilitator. I have a better understanding of what a good progression and sequence of challenges should look like. My recognition of what good processing is has changed for the better. I have experienced what processing the teachable moments feels like and I'm excited to bring this concept to my classes. This workshop far exceeded my expectations. I am more knowledgeable, more prepared, and more confident. Most importantly I am more excited to facilitate quality adventure programming for my students.