

Reflection Paper Advanced Skills and Standards Workshop (Sample)

I recently attended the Advanced Skills and Standards workshop at a Project Adventure facility in Massachusetts, and it was a wonderful experience for me. I have been teaching the last twenty-five and a half years at the elementary level, kindergarten through grade five. This year I was transferred to the high school level, and what a big change it was for me! It was something I requested, and I have enjoyed reconnecting with my former students and being able to continue to be a part of their educational experience. As part of my “new” teaching position, I have two Project Adventure classes. I was really excited to teach this program since I have attended Project Adventure workshops in the past. I have also used pieces of the elementary adventure-based curriculum over the years, and I was fortunate enough to have experienced being a student taking Project Adventure while I was in high school.

Despite my connection with Project Adventure over the years, I was a bit worried about this workshop. I have been working on my belaying skills this year, and I have a rope hanging from an exposed beam in my home so I can practice tying knots. I spent a few weeks before the workshop going on line and reviewing how to tie the knots we were required to know. This was a great way for me to practice my knots, as well as think about what we would be covering in the workshop. I still feel as though I need more experience with ropes and belaying, and I was hoping I would be able to master all the skills we would be asked to accomplish during our four-day workshop.

My goal for the entire workshop was to try to do everything the instructor asked us to do. This would mean taking myself out of my comfort circle each and every day—

and probably many times within the day. On the first day of the Advanced Skills and Standards workshop, I just tried to absorb all that I could. I hung onto every word the instructor said and was really pleased when we went over the Standard Operating Procedures and GRABBSS for one of the low level initiatives. This review eased me into the mindset of creating and maintaining a physically, socially and emotionally safe learning environment. It reinforced the practices I have been using with my classes since the beginning of the school year. GRABBSS is a great assessment tool to utilize during programmatic decisions. It has been especially helpful to me in creating the scope and sequence of my curriculum with the two different Project Adventures classes I am teaching this year. These interactions with my colleagues and our conversations about what works or does not work were invaluable. These interactions and conversations allow us to honor our own comfort levels as teachers and decide what will work in our own particular teaching environment.

When we came to climbing and belaying, I was worried that I was in over my head. I was afraid that everyone had far more experience than I did, and I would not be at the same skill level as they were. As we know in Project Adventure, challenge by choice is a large part of the program. Individuals must learn to stretch themselves and their level of comfort. I knew I would get to practice climbing and belaying, and the success I would experience would give me confidence for the rest of the workshop. My colleagues were very patient as I reviewed all the pieces of belaying and got ready to go. Of course, my family had told me I would be fine, and I was pleased with how well I remembered each safety check, to the point of helping others with their knots and checks.

As the workshop progressed, I felt more confident in my high element skills and reassured about the Local Operating Procedures I had been using in my program. I realized that I was creating a physically, socially and emotionally safe learning environment. But when we came to the part of self-belaying, partner escapes, and then a self-escape, I had to take a deep breath for each one, articulate all the steps out loud, and then just do them. This was something I never dreamed I would be trying to do, so my comfort level was not very high. I even verbalized to my partner, "I am a bit worried about doing this." Fortunately, he was patient with me and agreed to go first. As he climbed, I repeated out loud all the procedures he needed to do and guided him as he went along. It was interesting to hear some of the other people stating they were afraid or that they did not know what to do while they were up so high. Each time before I climbed I decided I would physically mime the process so I could imprint a pattern in my mind. Thus, when it was my turn to do a given task, I was not nervous; I knew each step of the process and realized it was not quite as bad as I had thought. This process of verbalizing the steps and of practicing each part is something I plan to schedule into my monthly calendar. The more I articulate and practice, the more it will enhance my comfort level, as well as my confidence in using these vital skills.

Despite my worries on the first day, I feel the workshop was wonderful, and I learned a tremendous amount. I realize I was prepared for this course; I just had not practiced as much as I would have liked before attending. I also came away knowing just how my students feel when they are stretched beyond their comfort zones. I will use my own experience to help them learn how to overcome their various challenges, honor the challenge-by-choice philosophy, and concentrate on making the Project Adventure

experience personally rewarding to each and everyone of them. I am eager to practice all the skills we reviewed and to become a far more confident facilitator in the process.