

Skill & Care: Incorporating craft into your Outdoor Program

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Session Aims

We are going to craft something today, and I'm going to remind you just how engaging, and beneficial some 'craft time' can be to your outdoor program.

"Decline of skill & care due to the weakened tradition of craftsmanship"

Antidote: Projects including crafts & Skills – Kurt Hahn

I'm going to start this session with a recollection from my early days at Outward Bound. We would typically set up temporary 'mobile basecamps' around the country, and operate for 2-3 even 4 months at a time, running large multi group programs from a Launchpad made of canvas roofs, a ramshackle collection of furniture, kitchen ware, and improvised toilet facilities. This whole camp would be built in a whirlwind of activity over about 3 days, kind of like a bunch of carnies setting up for a travelling circus.

Program staff would live communally in this space for the coming months, in the heart of the operational area- a national or state park- and spend a lot of hours sitting by the fire, socialising, studying, or busying themselves with communal tasks.

As the weeks wore on people naturally starting making home improvements; privacy screens were erected around the bush shower, racks and hooks appeared in the kitchen tent to store pots & pans. Gutters were dug into the soil to carry downpours of rain, and dunny-roll-holders were carved from native timber- because they didn't create dunny paper on a roll so that it could sit in a box on the ground. Over time every aspect of this space was improved, customised, crafted and created into a space that worked better and was now ours. We were little ants all contributing to a common goal of a sweet-ass camp site.

And then we would rip it all down and start again somewhere else.



Outward Bound Coolleman basecamp, Kosciusko NP. circa 2007

I love customising things, and I strongly believe in the virtues of a well-crafted THING. I've been forever adapting, improving, designing and crafting things. It has given me self-confidence and a feeling of resourcefulness that I carry into many aspects of my life.

I believe for the Outdoor Professional, developing your crafts-person-ship can improve your ability to be self-sufficient and resourceful in remote locations, and for our students, it can achieve many outcomes that will improve their camp experience...

We can find skill & care in almost any task- from how we prepare a meal, to how we pitch a tent, to how we conduct a conversation around the fire. As much as we would love for our students to nail all of these areas and take amazing skill & care into all of these tasks, it is not likely. Why not?

Why bother with skill & care?

- It feels good- we take pride in hand crafted items, especially if we made them ourselves
- Safety & security (e.g. A well-pitched tent in a storm)
- Creativity- It's an avenue to allow for creativity (a gap in many programs)
- Functionality- we can create functional items (or improve the performance of equipment)
- It develops fine motor skills



Sick snow camp kitchen. Snow goals. Google images.

Project



I want to engage your hands now for the next 20 minutes and make something of function and beauty. I have started a project and I need your help to complete it.

Split into groups of 4 or 5.

Use the length of rope to form the base structure for a hammock. Use additional off-cuts to weave among the main strands and create a net.

The more knots, the better!

I chose today's project for a few reasons:

- Lashing rope is a common material that we are all familiar with and it's normally free
- Its workable using simple skills & tools
- Outdoor educator's seems to freaking love hammocks! This is important.

P.S. I have never made, or even thought of, a climbing rope hammock prior to about a week ago.

When deciding on a project to incorporate craft into a program- ensure you focus on creating something of value for your group.

That is, something that THEY value or will make THEIR camp experience better. Participant 'buy-in' to the project is essential for it to get the effort and attention required to make a quality product.

Key things to remember when designing a craft project:

- Consider your approach/ entry strategy. Sometimes role modelling a craft is the most effective way to engage interested students...
- Allow enough time! Allow more than what you think...
- Allow space for *design creativity*- it's their project. Don't set all the rules.
- Empower participants with the SKILLS & TOOLS required to complete the project. Be available
- Consider small groups OR individuals, or both

So I'm not suggesting that building a hammock would be a good project for your next group. It would be a nightmare to decide who gets to sleep in it each night and the meticulous attention to detail may be a little above the average group of high schoolers. (Or maybe not?)

There are many areas of camp life where skill & care naturally can be highlighted:

- Cooking (meal in a packet Vs. Ingredients & spice kit)
- Rope activities & tying knots (using clip & go Vs.. tying in with a fig 8)
- Fire building (Lazy firestarting Vs. kindling)
- Tent/ shelter building (Tent Vs. Tarp)
- Toilet site (hole Vs. grand throne with epic view, a tree to lean on and handles to hold onto for balance)

Some of these areas obviously involve the core tools of the trade, or procedural change; the type of shelter your employer provides or the technique approved to attach a client to a rope. They require planning and programming support to incorporate into a camp. These are areas you can advocate for to your supervisors & managers to allow you to teach skill & care on programs.

We can also encourage Skills & Care in programs by-

- Role modelling
- 1-on-1 skill building to enable participants to continue on their own
- Carrying a repair kit & tool kit as a piece of group equipment (and remember to consider using it, before you call in your supervisor for a replacement item of gear)
- Focussed sessions
 - Initiative such as the egg drop for younger students
 - Trap/snare building
 - Shelter building
 - ***insert fun project here**

Appendix: Educators' Toolkit

Lighter - for sealing nylon fabric, cord, rope ends.

Sewing awl ("speedy stitch") - shoe repair, backpack repair

Needle & thread – clothing & tent repair

Knife - (small for shaving, engraving. Large for major woodwork)

Pliers- bending wire, fixing zips, moving hot pots & lids

Wire- 1000 and 1 uses. Fixing boots. Reinforcing things

String/cord – multi use

Fishing line- snares/ multi use



Feel free to get in touch for more resources or any feedback from the session!

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