

Case Study

physical education

EasyDay Student Camp | September 2007 | Sant Aniol, Spain

Course: **7-Day Professional Development for Physical Education Students**

Theme: **Can the Interplay of Body, Mind and Environment inform Physical Education?**

Client: **Department of Physical Education | Gent University (Hilo) and Artevelde Hoogeschool**

Participants: **80 third-year Students with Lecturers**

Outdoor Activities: **Adventure Trail / Via Ferrata, Rock Climbing, Canyoning, Trekking, Sailing, Windsurfing**

Overview and Concept

In close cooperation with sports travel specialist FlowTrack, EasyDay worked with two Belgian universities on outdoor-based professional development for Physical Education (PE) students in their third year of study. Situated at the fringes of the Spanish Pyrenees near Barcelona, the course combined the liveliness and fun of the Costa Brava (facilitated by FlowTrack) with the wild beauty of the Sant Aniol mountain valley (facilitated by EasyDay). Intellectually challenging content, experiential adventure practice and a unique camp setting allowed students to develop their physical and emotional potential while spending an enjoyable time with peers.

Students learned and improved their technical skills in canyoning, rock climbing, sailing, and wind surfing. Theory sessions complemented the outdoor experiences and covered teaching style, framing in education, program design, communication skills and emotional development. The combination of practice and theory inspired students to reflect on and discuss the social and environmental challenges of our time.

The students' background in physical education influenced the course design, making experiences and discussions relevant to the students' academic development. As students

explored the connections between body, mind and the environment the many opportunities to bring ecological awareness development into physical education practice became apparent. Students and teachers reported the learning experience as motivating and empowering, enabling them to work in the field of physical education with compassion and creativity.

This highly successful program has now been running for four consecutive years involving more than 800 students and their teachers.

Accommodation and Catering

This course was based at a cosy camp in the foothills of the Spanish Pyrenees and at a beach on the Costa Brava. A large Native American Tipi provided communal space. Supervised by FlowTrack staff, students enjoyed cooking together using organic foods.

Educational Aims

- Technical introduction to a variety of outdoor activities
- Introduction to theory and philosophy of outdoor education
- Investigating the interplay of body, mind and environment
- Exploring ecological awareness development through physical education
- Fun, recreation and social bonding

Course Content of the three Mountain Days

Adventure Trail | Introduction to the Theory of Adventure Eco-Education

After a warm welcome groups of ten students to one guide started their adventure by navigating a dry riverbed with several natural obstacles to be overcome.

To master the steep sections, students had to help each other. A dome-like smooth rock basin, carved out by the river over thousands of years, provided the setting for the first group-work exercise. Students considered the questions: "What is the aim of education?" and "What is the purpose of outdoor education?" After a swim in the mountain creek and lunch, the guides laid out EasyDay's approach to outdoor education and program design. Students were then able to draw parallels with physical education.



The afternoon was spent climbing high above the valley along a via ferrata. Views were stunning and concentration at a peak - an ideal moment for the group to take a break and explore the psychological effects and educational benefits of adventure and physical activity. A guided relaxation session at the summit calmed adrenalin levels and created space for silence and reflection.

On the way back, students gathered objects that represented a significant experience of the day. These were used at the daily evening review to help students express their feelings and motivations. Those not talking practiced deep listening, a communication technique that creates a safe space for students to express deep thoughts and emotions.

Canyoning | Emotional Development

The day was devoted to emotional development through physical education. An early start and a long hike took the group to a steep and colourful canyon, the heart of the Sant Aniol valley. Canyoning is an activity that gives access to a pristine and timeless world of light and shade, rock and water. Long abseils down waterfalls, daring jumps and slides into deep pools make descending the Sant Aniol canyon an inspiring journey that demands commitment and teamwork.

Before entering the canyon, students learned about psychological theory regarding emotional transformation and were introduced to hands-on practices for calming an 'emotional storm'. The canyoning tour provided plenty of opportunities to test the theory in practice. During the trip students entered a state of sharpened awareness and, with subtle guidance, could observe the constant interplay of feeling, thought and environment. This provided invaluable direct insights into the interdependent nature of emotional wellbeing.

During the review session, students engaged in animated discussion about applying emotional development techniques in physical education. The group shared the view that formal education should enable children and young people to deal with their emotions in a healthy and constructive way.

Rock Climbing | Ecology & Interbeing

The last day at the EasyDay mountain camp introduced the group to the art of rock climbing. The valley is one of the greatest climbing areas in Europe with routes in all levels of difficulty. The guide introduced belay techniques and supported each student to improve their climbing skills step by step.

At lunch time the group looked deeply into the interrelated nature of a cup of coffee. Amused at first, they were struck by visualising their coffee as a plant, rain and sunshine. They came to see a simple cup of coffee as an accumulation of knowledge, culture and technology. After only five minutes there was a sense of wonder as a student remarked laughingly that "This is more than just a caffeine kick. Essentially there is the whole universe in this little cup of coffee".

After an extended lunch with sunbathing and a refreshing swim everyone went off to find a nice spot alongside the river to spend an hour alone. Students enjoyed this 'solo' experience. They spoke about a strong sense of adventure during their time alone, and that it had revitalised their connection to nature.

"As an educational institute with an outdoor education program, we're always searching for ways to enhance the development of our students into complete human beings. EasyDay contributes to our work with their unique approach to outdoor education that inspires students to reflect on our society and the significance of our relationship with nature. They achieve this through a sound educational framework that combines theory with exciting outdoor activities and time to reflect in a beautiful natural environment. By choosing the EasyDay concept, we are able to introduce our students to a different way of outdoor education that informs our more classical approach."

Hans Van Boven | Lecturer at the University of Gent

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