

Sequencing Activities For Youth Climbing Programs

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As coaches and climbing instructors, breaking down our goals for participants - either technical, social, or recreational - into achievable steps can be a daunting task. The key to helping participants reach their goals and giving a familiar learning structure to our programs is sequencing activities.

Sequencing means creating a familiar structure for activities that responds to the way our participants learn. Proper sequencing responds to how participants learn and gives coaches the structure and boundaries to make the most learningful and engaging programs they can.

Properly sequencing activities during a youth climbing program accomplishes a number of things:

1. It forces the coach or instructor to identify their goals initially, making for a more meaningful climbing experience.
2. It allows the coach to keep the flow of the program organized, which enables a seamless process of learning and transference for the participants.
3. It matches the experiential learning cycle in which people learn by briefing, experiencing, and building new knowledge.
4. Planning a well-structured sequence allows the coach to orient the program towards the overall goals of the program and specific goals of the practice.
5. In a well-structured sequence of climbing activities, each activity is carefully selected and enforces intentional planning on the coach or instructor to meet their goals. These goals or outcomes can be social or technical/athletic goals, but the most effective sequences are built to meet both a technical and social goal.

We recommend building a sequence of activities that mirrors the way people learn and is derived from best practices of experiential education. This includes an introductory activity (pre-teaching), a primary (core) activity, and an activity that promotes transference (reflection activity). The function of each activity is outlined below.

1. **Pre-Teaching** - Activity that introduces the concept/skill being taught. Primes the participants for learning, establishes group norms, begins group bonding process, introduces the goals (technical and social) of the practice.
2. **Core-Activity** - An activity that allows participants to engage in the skill(s) being taught, challenges participants, allows participants to fail, learn, and improve.
3. **Reflection** - An activity that allows the participants to process the experience, reflect on what they did, how they did it, and why they did it. Participants reflect on how what they have learned applies to them as climbers as it relates to the technical and/or social goals.

Before planning a sequence of activities, it is essential to identify the overarching goals of the program, the goal of the practice, and the goal of the sequence itself. The following questions should be asked and answered prior to building the sequence:

- *How does the goal of the sequence work to meet the goal of the practice?*
- *How does the goal of practice work to meet the overarching goal of the program?*

Once these questions have been answered the coach can begin plugging relevant activities into the model.

It is often easiest to first identify a core activity that will challenge the desired skill. This will help the coach identify a pre-teaching activity that will appropriately prepare the participants and a relevant reflection activity. Every step of the way during the planning process the coach should ask, is this activity serving its function and how does this activity help the group toward meeting the goal?

The three activities below are an example of an activity sequence. It is important to note that with creativity, a coach can use virtually any activity as a pre-teaching, core, or reflection activity.

The following example sequence could be used to meet a variety of goals based on how the activities are facilitated.

Goal: Goal Setting and Peer Encouragement

Pre-Teaching Activity: Mingle Warm Up

1. On the coach's call, climbers will begin the designated warm-up exercises (traversing, push-ups, jumping jacks, running in place, jumping jacks, etc.).
2. When the coach calls out a number, climbers have 5 seconds to assemble into groups of that number.
3. Coach asks the group a question or states an activity; groups discuss the question with each other or engage in the activity together.

4. This process is repeated as many times as needed.

Make sure to prepare questions and activities that encourage climbers to begin thinking about the goal. Ex: How will you support your teammates during practice today? How do you set climbing goals for yourself? What is your current climbing goal?

Core Activity: Partner Bouldering

1. Climbers are partnered and told they will have a set amount of time to have a bouldering session with their partner.
2. Before they begin climbing each climber must tell their partner what their current climbing goal is. Partners do not have to have the same goal.
3. Partners will then discuss and make a plan for how they will organize their session in a way that will allow each partner to work on their goal.
4. Partners will also discuss how they will support each other throughout the session.

Reflection: Metaphor Debrief

1. Hand each climber a piece of climbing equipment. Ex: harness, quickdraw, chalk bag, any equipment you have available at your gym
2. Ask each climber to tell you how their piece of equipment represents how they think about their personal climbing goals or how they can support their teammates in reaching their goals.
3. Give climbers time to think about the question and then have each climber share with the group.

About The Headwall Group



The Headwall Group distills the lessons learned as educators and leaders working in dynamic and high risk environments and brings them to youth-serving organizations. The Headwall group provides trainings, consultation, and curriculum development services that are rooted in our experience as outdoor experiential educators for climbing gyms, summer camps, and schools.



The Headwall Group was founded by Bix Firer and Pat Brehm. Bix Firer (MA, University of Chicago) is currently the Director of Outdoor Programs at College of Idaho and has worked as a wilderness educator, trainer, facilitator, and experiential educator for over a decade. Pat Brehm works as a professional organizational trainer and has spent his career as a climbing coach, facilitator, and outdoor educator.



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