



The pleasures and the perils of school camps

Ben Vining on running a successful and safe school camp

Camps offer enormous benefits to students, but when you take young people into unfamiliar settings, removed from the formal structure and constraints of the school, a camp poses potential risks. Every holiday, we read bad news stories about a camp that went wrong.

For me, the school holidays signal camp time. I assume responsibility for several busloads of rowing students at a lakeside or river location, for a week or so. I take the responsibility seriously. While it may look like calm waters when everything runs smoothly, a lot of work goes on below the surface. Here are some of the measures I use to ensure that students have a happy and productive time and supervising staff have an enjoyable experience.

Planning on a low budget

There are the usual things like accommodation, catering and transport to organise, but a school camp is not like a normal holiday. Usually, we have to work with a low budget so I try to use the school's resources to best advantage – school buses and vehicles, our own equipment instead of renting, volunteer helpers and group discounts.

Good organisation builds confidence, so it's valuable to have things in place well in advance... then to have a contingency plan in case things fall apart.

Parents

Providing parents with assurance that their child will be in safe hands against a backdrop of ongoing

media alarm about camps is a masterly feat of persuasion, so start early to build confidence.

Announce the camp at the beginning of year in every possible place; don't spring it on them. Give parents prior written information and, about two weeks out, brief them at a meeting where you urge them to raise all their concerns.

Issues raised will usually focus on safety, supervision, drivers of vehicles, qualifications of staff, accommodation and policies relating to behaviour. Parents want to know all the details so you need to be ready with factual information and some of your vocal supporters, such as the president of the parent's association and/or the principal.

When the permission notes come back, there may be a tail of hesitant parents (who probably did not attend the briefing meeting) so be prepared. Explain it all again and ask the head of sport and the president of the parent's association to ring the parents. This responsiveness to their concerns will be reassuring.

Behaviour at camp

I find that most students want to fit in and do the right thing, so I make it easy for them by articulating my expectations at the first briefing at the campsite. Camp rules may be different from the expectations in a formal school setting so students need to know the limits and the consequences for disregarding the rules.

At rowing camp, our students are so physically active with daily training, themed rowing, talent shows, games, and other wholesome

entertainment that generally they are too exhausted at nighttime to get up to hijinks. They just want to go to bed and talk for a while before lights out. Hard work makes an excellent natural sedative.

Expectations for staff/coaches also need discussion. Staff members have obligations regarding supervision, accessibility, rostered work, communication standards, equity, inclusion and respect. But whether a coach is on-duty or off-duty they need to realise that they are role models for all students, hence they need to talk and behave as professionals at all times and in all situations. Everything a coach says and does is likely to be repeated back home.

Risks

You are invoking risks whenever you take an excited group away from their familiar environment with the promise of freedom and fun, so it's an essential to prepare an overall risk assessment in advance.

Risks are both internal and external. For example, a trip to the beach for the uninitiated needs careful instructions about swimming between the flags, ways to attract a lifesaver, high-speed surfboards etc. Outdoor education camps need guidelines on river hazards, slippery crossings, water eddies and swift currents.

It is inviting disaster to take environmental factors for granted and neglect adequate supervision and training. The simplest thing to an adult, such as sunburn, can be a hazard to a child. These dangers can easily be overlooked.

In my case, coaches need to be familiar with the waterway territory, so we do an orientation run in the motorboat to identify hazards, emergency safe spots and no-go zones.

One of the difficult external threats is the attention of unwelcome outsiders. A careful watch and tactful action can avoid bother. You need to know who to call for backup if a threatening disturbance occurs. The school's security company should know where you are and you should have their phone number.

At a more local level, when I take a group into a new area, out of courtesy, I call the area commander of the local police and mention our location, numbers and make up of the group.

All students are required to put staff contact numbers on their mobile phones and all staff members have security numbers at hand. If students leaves the campsite (for example, to go to the shops) they are required to go in threes and have a mobile phone in the group.

Rewards

The best part about a holiday training camp is the capacity for uninterrupted focus. Away from distractions and without reason for lateness or non-attendance, each student can really concentrate on instruction.

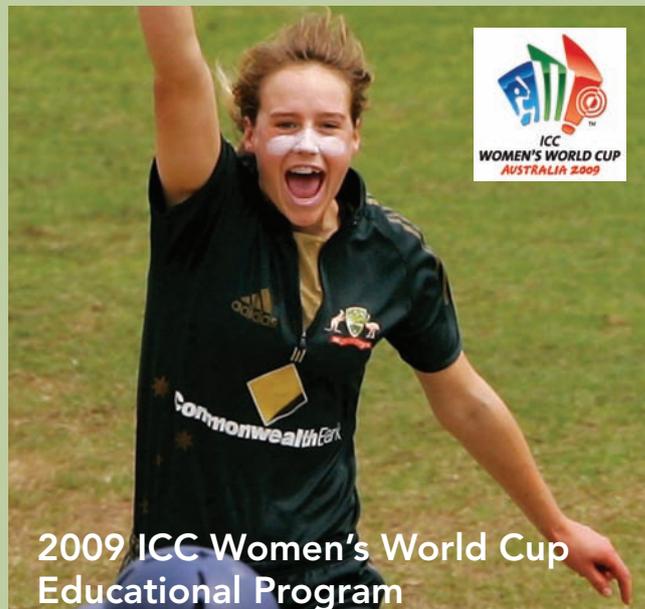
I schedule long hard sessions (broken into manageable units that increase in intensity over time) and gradually the students begin to realise their capacity for hard work. It's quite a revelation.

They feel what it is like to be in top condition, to set goals and to pull really hard to achieve them. They feel the satisfaction of improving their performance and they come to realise that, with attention and application, they can achieve way beyond their initial standard.

And so, after a week of camp, the students gain physical condition, but they also develop mental stamina and a deep sense of unity and team commitment that will equip them for the challenging competitive season ahead.



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2009 ICC Women's World Cup Educational Program

The ICC Women's World Cup 2009 school curriculum resource is an online teaching and learning program that celebrates and builds awareness of the players, teams and the spirit of cricket values of the ICC Women's World Cup to be hosted in Australia in March 2009.

The resource utilises both classroom and outdoor activities to promote and teach about the important community and cultural values of participating teams. It is a student centred teaching and learning program designed to support your students to model their learning in the classroom, school, at home and in the community.

There are five lessons in the classroom component and the program culminates in the class hosting a World Cup Festival at their school. The lesson titles are: *Playing for My Team*, *My Team, My Country*, *Teamwork – Playing in Harmony*, *Me and My Teammates – Being Proud to be Part of a Team*, and *Doing it for My Team*.

The *Our World Cup Festival* component is an opportunity for students to showcase their learning to their school. It is a day when students who have completed the program adopt a Women's World Cup 2009 country and, through a series of cultural exhibitions and cricket-playing activities, promote their team and adopted culture to the rest of their school community.

Contact Rebecca Mulgrew Senior Officer – Schools Cricket
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2009 ICC Women's World Cup Education Program

Australian schools are invited to join in the fun and celebrate the 2009 ICC Women's World Cup!

In March 2009, Australia will host the first official International Cricket Council governed Women's Cricket World Cup. Defending World Cup champions Australia will take on India, England, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, West Indies, South Africa and Pakistan in the month long tournament showcasing the best female cricketers from around the world.

The 2009 ICC Women's World Cup education program is:

- Free of charge and downloadable from cricket.com.au from October 2008
- Designed to be taught in upper primary and/or lower secondary schools
- Meet relevant curriculum framework learning outcomes across a variety of key learning areas
- Provide students with an opportunity to interact, showcase work and publicly celebrate the 2009 ICC Women's Cricket World Cup.



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