



Activities

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- What are Scout activities
- How to propose interesting activities?
- Our activities are very dull
- We always do the same things!
- Sources of funding for activities

WHAT ARE SCOUT ACTIVITIES?

Q - A friend of mine, who is a Scout leader, thinks that some activities are real Scout ones whilst others cannot be done in Scouting. Is she right?

A - It is true that some activities are considered traditional in Scouting, because they have been practised since the origin of the Movement or for a very long time. Some people identify Scouting with them. Therefore, these activities are often called "Scout activities", for example camping, hiking, exploring, organising camp fires, etc.

However, it is important to note that these so-called "Scout activities" are not specific to Scouting. A lot of other youth organisations and clubs also practise them. What we should realise, in fact, is that Scouting does not have a limited "catalogue" of activities. Everyday Scouts invent new activities and renew "traditional" activities.

In the "RAP User's Guide", reference material produced by the European Scout Region for youth programme developers, we can read: "A good educational activity has four characteristics:

- It is challenging: the activity should present some difficulties, stimulate creativity and inventiveness and encourage the participant to do his or her best. The challenge should, nevertheless, remain within the limits of the capabilities and level of maturity of the young people.

- It is attractive: the activity should arouse the young person's interest and desire to participate, because it appeals to him or her, because it is original or because he or she feels drawn to the values inherent in the activity. Young people's interests vary according to their stages of development, as well as to their socio-cultural background, so it is necessary to offer a wide range of possible activities suitable for different situations.

- It is rewarding: participating in an activity should give the young person the feeling of having derived some benefit for him or herself: pleasure from taking part in something exciting; pride in doing something for the first time or in unexpectedly achieving something; joy at having his or her contribution recognised by the group.

- It is useful: the activity should provide experiences which enable young people to discover and learn new things. An activity which is merely spontaneous, involves action for its own sake or is repetitive is not always educational. The main characteristic of an educational activity is that it enables a young person to make progress."

If you want to respect these 4 criteria, you need to have a creative approach towards activities, continually improving those you know and looking for new ones. In fact, what defines the Scout characteristic of any activity is not its content but the educational objectives it is supposed to achieve.

HOW TO PROPOSE INTERESTING ACTIVITIES?

Q - I make a lot of effort to propose interesting activities to my Scouts, but they don't seem to be interested in anything. What should I do?

A - The difficulty you are facing is quite common. Sometimes it is not easy to identify young people's interests.

If you propose them an activity without asking them anything, you are likely to miss the mark. However, if you just ask them what they want to do, you are also unlikely to get a clear answer. Selecting activities needs to be an active process!

The best advice I can give you is to use the "Programme Cycle" method, which was developed by the Interamerican Scout Region. The advantage of this method is that it takes two important aims into account:

- meeting the interests of young people
- meeting their educational needs.

The Programme Cycle is developed in 4 steps:

- a) Personal and collective evaluation; diagnosis of the unit and pre-selection of activities
- b) Proposing and selecting activities
- c) Organising, designing and preparing activities
- d) Implementing and evaluating activities

You can learn more about this method by downloading the Leaders' ToolBox: How to manage the programme cycle

OUR ACTIVITIES ARE VERY DULL

Q - My Scout troop is facing several problems. First and foremost, our activities are very dull and boring. Could you suggest and give steps as to how to revive and instil interest in the students to join Scouts and to those who are already Scouts.

A - You yourself have already diagnosed the illness that your unit is suffering from: the proposed activities "are very dull and boring". It is not surprising that Scouts are leaving. The solution is clear: make the activities more challenging, interesting and varied. However, this is not so easy and this is the reason why you are still having problems even if you have made a good diagnosis.

You have to change, but you cannot. Why? Because you are closed within some mental models. In our heads, all of us carry images, assumptions and stories that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting. These are "mental models". The problem with mental models is that they shape our perceptions and our ways of thinking, but we are unaware of it.

Let me give you some examples of mental models that limit our vision of Scouting:

1. Scout activities correspond to a limited catalogue of stereotyped actions: hiking, camp fires, camping, games...
2. Scouts have to learn how to practise these activities before doing them. Therefore, adult leaders have to organise meetings in order to teach young people how to tie knots, how to make a fire, how to put a tent up, etc. Tests and exams are organised to check if young people have acquired these skills.
3. Drill, marching, uniforms and ceremonies are essential in Scouting and enough time should be allocated to this kind of activity.

I limit myself to these 3 common "mental models", but there are many others that have been developed throughout the years. Some mental models are even disseminated through training!

Let us take the example of a Scout leader working with the 3 mental models that I have presented above. What will the consequences be? Whereas young people come to Scouting because they are looking for adventure and friendship, they often actually experience:

- Boring meetings in which they have to pass tests and exams like at school...
- More time spent in ceremonies, procedures, drills, lessons than in adventurous and challenging activities...
- Stereotyped activities which are imposed on them without any choice...
- Top-down relationships in which everything is decided by the adult leaders...

So what is the solution?

1. Become aware of the mental models that limit our creativity.
2. Challenge them and adopt the following principles:

- The catalogue of Scout activities is unlimited!

- The experts at selecting activities are young people themselves (Baden-Powell said exactly that; his motto was "Ask the boy!")

- The first thing a Scout leader has to do is to develop a framework of youth participation.

- Reduce to the minimum drill, marching, ceremonies, etc. Drill is against the true spirit of Scouting (said Baden-Powell).

- Leave lessons, tests and exams to school. Forbid them in Scouting! Give priority to learning by doing, through activities and experiences.

- Discuss with young people what new attitudes, skills, knowledge they would like to acquire through Scouting in order to prepare themselves to become the free, happy, active and responsible citizens that their country needs.

- Note what they say and transform it into personal educational objectives to be adapted to each young person.

- With young people (using patrol councils, the unit council and unit assembly) identify and select activities that will give them the opportunity to acquire the previously identified attitudes, skills and knowledge (educational objectives).

- After each activity ask young people to evaluate what they have discovered, learnt and acquired and what should be changed to improve the group life and the quality of activities (collective rules should be freely discussed and adopted).

- Understand that Scouting should give young people the opportunity to do things that they have never done before.

- Look at your Scouts, note their needs, note their progress. Propose to the unit council and the unit assembly to assess and recognise the efforts and progress made by each Scout and deliver them the badges they deserve.

In conclusion: give priority to imagination, creativity, youth participation and true communication with young people: this is the key to success.

You may consider that this is a very difficult and ambitious programme, but don't be afraid. Start and progress step by step. You will learn through experience. This approach will make both you and the young people happy. You will find your role much more pleasant and they will find Scouting more challenging and attractive. Enjoy Scouting!

WE STILL DO THE SAME THINGS!

Q - I think what I want is something I have never tried before, but even if we go to a new place, we still do the same things: camp, do pioneering and make gadgets. Although standards are improved, e.g. the time needed to do something is reduced, the number of people to do it is reduced, there are less tools to do it, it is still the same. It is like exams in school - the essay you have to write has to have more words in it, but is still the same. Because of this, many students get bored having to do the same thing again. It is the same in Scouting!

A - I understand very well the problem you and your friends are facing in Scouting. You are always doing the same kind of activities and you are becoming more and more bored with Scouting. My reply will be in three parts:

1. The purpose of Scouting is to "contribute to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potentials as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of their local, national and international communities". (Constitution of the World Organization of the Scout Movement).

There is a text, written by Scouts in the Interamerican Region which gives a good summary of Scouting's final objectives:

The man and the woman we would like to be:

A person with freedom and integrity (character, "Duty to self")

- clean of thought and true of heart
- strong of will, responsible and self-reliant
- with a personal commitment for their life
- constant and true to their word

Ready to serve others (social development, emotional development)

- involved in their community
- defender of other people's rights
- pledged to democracy and committed to development
- lover of justice and promoter of peace
- who values human labour
- and builds their family on love
- is aware of their own dignity and that of others
- and who shares with everybody joyfully and affectionately

A creative person (intellectual development)

- who leaves the world better than they find it
- and strives for the integrity of natural world
- learning continuously and searching

- for ways still unexplored
- who does their work well
- and, free from the hunger to possess
- is independent of material things

A spiritual person (spiritual development)

- with a transcendental sense of life
- who opens their heart to God
- lives their faith joyfully and makes it part of their daily life
- and who, open to dialogue and understanding,
- respects others' religious beliefs.

2. Therefore, Scout activities are not only linked with nature. They should cover the 6 areas of personal growth identified by Scouting. They are therefore much more numerous and varied than you imagine. I give you here some examples of activities done by Scouts all over the world:

- Building rafts and exploring a river, observing wild animals and birds, making a video film (intellectual development).
- Developing contacts with other Scouts abroad and learning about other cultures and religions. Preparing an international camp. Identifying ethnic and national prejudices and learning how to challenge them (social development).
- Preparing and doing a theatre performance (emotional development).
- Meeting various religious communities in one's region and preparing an exhibition with pictures and texts showing their main values (spiritual development).
- Identifying the needs of children from an underprivileged community and developing an action to cover some of these needs (e.g. building a playground, collecting school books, helping the community improve housing, etc.) (social development).
- Organising an "inventors' fair" involving several Scout units where Scouts are invited to exhibit their inventions on a special theme such as "robots", "saving energy", "communication", etc. (intellectual development)

There is no limit to Scouting activities, as you can invent new ones everyday.

3. Activities should not be decided by the adult leaders alone: all Scouts should be involved in selecting, organising and designing activities. On this last aspect, look at the ToolBox handouts I have prepared on "Understanding the team system" and "How to manage the programme cycle". Also look at a document called "Let's do a Scout Project".

SOURCES OF FUNDING FOR SCOUT ACTIVITIES

Q - What are the sources of funding for Scouting Activities? Locally? Nationally? And Internationally?

A -Your question is very broad and it is difficult to give a detailed answer. The situations may be very different from one country to another one.

1) At world level:

a. The Scout Movement is principally funded by the fees paid by National Scout Organizations. The system of fees is quite complex, because the fees paid by a National Scout Organization depend on the GNP of the country.

b. The second source of income is the annual grant given to the World Scout Bureau by the World Scout Foundation, an organisation created by the Movement to support Scouting. These funds are placed in an endowment fund and the interest is used to pay the annual grant to the World Scout Bureau.

c. We also try to find money from donors who might be interested in supporting a specific project (street children, preventing AIDS, etc.)

2) At national level:

Basically the same means are used but on another scale.

a. In many associations there is a system of membership fees. Each member must pay a small fee every year.

b. Some associations have also created endowment funds for contributions.

c. In some cases, national or local Governments may give grants to youth organizations such as Scouting to support their actions. To obtain such grants, it is important to be able to show governments the real social service that Scouting is able to do.

d. Special projects can be supported by funders. You need to prepare a file explaining the social usefulness of the project and detailing the budget you need.

At all levels, national and world - it is extremely important to have some officers (volunteer and/or professional) specialized in identifying and testing the various ways of raising funds. It is also extremely important to have a strong accounting system in order to be able to show how the money has been collected and used.