

URCA NEWS

Duke of Edinburgh Award: The Ultimate Educational Experience

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When I was invited to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award, I had no idea of its high educational value.

When I started working in The British School ten years ago I was invited to participate in a DoE expedition. Not being British I did not have a clue what it was about. I was informed it was related to camping, nature and open air activities. So I accepted immediately, since I was keen on such things and I've always sought adventure and wanted to share such experience with teenagers.

Since then, I have got hooked: I have been part of it for all these years. It has given me lots of great memories which fill my mind with happiness and has given me many life experiences. The most important of all is to have had the opportunity to be part of an amazing educational experience that has an impact on the lives of everyone who takes part in it.

If you are now in the same situation I was ten years ago, let me explain a little bit of what DoE is about. Founded, obviously, by the very Duke of Edinburgh, it is a programme that, through activities in the wilderness, provides life experiences such

as independence, group integration, leadership skills, responsibility and orientation, among many others.

It now starts in Class 4, through activities such as Horse Riding expeditions; and at age 14 for trekking and climbing expeditions. I am a leader of expeditions, in which there are three levels: Bronze, Silver and Gold. Students start their training for the Bronze award with one night's camping and a trail of 25 km minimum to conquer, carrying everything they need on their backs: clothes and personal items, tent, sleeping bag, food for two days, cooking stuff (stoves, pans, plates, etc). Their orientation training starts also from scratch: they are given a map and "alone" (this means with our "mute" supervision and care) they have to find their way, find their campsite, set up their tents properly (providing for the probability of rain) and cook a complete meal. Of course we let them go with Cup Noodles in the beginning, but we push for healthier food and more sophisticated cooking skills as time goes by.

After a few expeditions, once they have conquered the basic skills, they can move to

Silver: a minimum of 50 km, camping in complete wilderness (no contact with civilization), and longer expeditions in which equipment use should be thoroughly planned because of weight. Finally, the Gold Medal Award is for those able to plan a full trip without any adult assistance, choosing a route of 80 km minimum to perform completely "on their own" (this means with the teachers' remote supervision). Learning a skill and providing some community service complete the Award Scheme.

We, *normal* teachers, apart from the natural "on-field training", are continuously provided with specialization courses such as Leadership Training for Outdoor Activities, First Aid Training, First Aid in Wilderness Training and others. We *normal* teachers attend courses with specialized professionals and to our surprise we realize that we are as well prepared as they are - if not better. I would like to thank The British School for the opportunity of this training. I believe that this is the only school in Brazil which offers this kind of programme without hiring "external" leaders. This way, adults well known

by the students, who also know the students and their capabilities and limitations and care about them, are the ones to provide and share this experience.

In conclusion, by providing the safest environment possible, prepared staff take your very well cared-for child into many situations which they overcome without adult interference, becoming **self-sufficient** and **independent**. Climbing a mountain demands **decision** and **perseverance**. Cooking a meal in the wilderness requires **creativity** and **dedication**. Setting up a tent in the middle of rain encourages **discipline** and **control**. Living together with a group of people for many days is an exercise of **understanding** and **tolerance**. Learning to appreciate and respect nature is a process of extending our **sensitivity**. Overcoming tiredness and coping with weather conditions leads to **self-control**.

When I started my teaching career, as many of my colleagues, I aimed for more than teaching just my subject and looked forward to real life experiences from which students could learn values and grow healthy (I mean mentally healthy). For me this is a present The British School offered me: an invaluable opportunity.

