

STRAND: Special Education

OBJECTIVE: To use experiential education with classified students to increase social skills and modify behavior.

Overview:

An important goal of the special education programs at Southern is to help students attain social skills necessary to be successful in today's society. The Challenge Course provides a context in which social skills can be learned and practiced.

The activities used by Southern Exposure facilitators focus on skills such as decision making, communication, respecting others, changing destructive behavior, and the ability to work as a team member. Through using experiential education, the students not only hear about these important skills, but actually apply these skills to help complete an activity.

There is a debriefing session following each initiative. Emphasis is placed on the processes used rather than the final result. Students are asked to take part in a discussion that covers issues such as what was done, how they felt, what helped, what impeded progress, and what roles they took. Students draw parallels between what they experienced on the Challenge Course and real life situations. Being involved in these discussions provides students with a learning experience that gives them information about themselves and others while allowing special education students the feedback necessary to strengthen communication skills and function better academically.

Special education teachers who have utilized the Challenge Course with their classified students have noticed quicker class cohesion and a general improvement in relationships between students as well as enhanced student / teacher connections.