

AGE-ADJUSTED PROGRAMME OF MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

AUTHOR

Mateja Peršolja

Title: Professor of mathematics and physics, Alpine Association of Slovenia guide

Address: Ulica Simona Jenka 13 a, SI – 1230 Domžale, Slovenia

E-mail: mateja.persolja@guest.arnes.si

Phone: 01 721 57 14

SUMMARY

The article treats the age-adjusted programme of mountain climbing. It describes the reasons for the programme and the circumstances of its formation, and gives a detailed presentation of its structure, focusing on the topical methods of learning and teaching.

KEY WORDS

Mountain climbing, training, mountain climbing school, Alpine Association of Slovenia, Slovenia

Introduction

The Alpine Association of Slovenia would like to advocate mountain climbing as a way of life, heighten the concern of mountain climbers for their own safety, as well as prevent and remedy the detrimental effects of mass visits to the mountains.

The Mountain Climbing Organisation has an established system of training that has been shaped for decades and promotes the values of democracy, autonomy and cooperation of the young which are expressed in its essence, its content, forms and methods of work. In view of the age of the programme participants there exist two methods of approach: work with the young and work by the young.

Work with the young is characterised by conduct and implementation of the teaching process for the children and teenagers, and partly also for the young, by qualified mountain climbing professionals (mountaineering group mentors, Alpine Association of Slovenia guides, mountaineering school instructors...). Owing to the complexity of the mountain climbing activities (e.g. trips, hikes, tours, ridge ski tours, ascents of mountains or climbing grounds...) the mountaineering mentors cannot only be selected from the young. They are also adults with special skills and enviable experience.

Work by the young is the realisation of the contemporary principle of civilian organisations: the programme is entirely shaped and conducted by the young. Simultaneously, there runs an intensive process of informal education and training. The activity assumes a special importance when the imparting of knowledge and passing on of experience are implemented within the scope of the voluntary service. The work by the young method is mostly intended for the secondary school students and the young until 27 years of age (Peršolja, 2001a).

Types of work with the young are as follows:

- The mountaineering group is active at school or kindergarten. At regular weekly meetings the preparations for the outdoor activities are carried out, the members socialize and attend mountaineering school.
- The trips, hikes, and tours are the most widespread outdoor activity. They are the reason why mountaineering has kept its popularity among the young.
- Mountain climbing camps are the elite type of the mountaineering activity. They are widely practised and very popular. A several-day camping

experience in tents or alpine huts is indubitably the highlight of each year's activities. Camping stands as a reward for conscientious year-long endeavour as a mountain climber.

- The tiddler mountain climber campaign has been designed for preschoolers. They enter their impressions from the trips in the *Ringa Raja* Diary and when they have been to a certain number of trips they are rewarded with a trimming, badge and a song book. The campaign concludes with a Young Climber Diary bestowal ceremony, designed for primary school pupils. When they have been regularly going on trips, hikes or tours, and entered them into their diaries, they can win a bronze, silver or golden Young Climber Badge. To receive the Golden Badge they need to pass a mountain climbing school test.
- Mountain climbing school is a regulated system, embracing the teaching of movement in the mountains and mountain safety, orientation, mountaineering equipment, provisions, meteorology, history of mountain climbing, mountain climbing values and familiarisation with the alpine world.
- Other campaigns and competitions: The Youth and the Mountains, Competitions in Navigation, alpine climbing course and a week of ridge ski tour (Peršolja, 2005).

Mountaineering is fostered as family mountain climbing or organised mountain climbing in climbing groups by primary schools and mountain climbing societies.

Guides and climbing group mentors of the Alpine Association of Slovenia organise climbing trips for the young. They also hold regular meetings of climbing groups at primary schools. The climbing group mentors organise and promote the complete mountaineering activities, i.e. in cooperation with the youth section of the mountain climbing society the mentors organise hikes and tours, carry out the Tiddler Climber and Young Climber campaigns, conduct mountain climbing school, and promotional campaigns. They also invite and encourage children to spend their free time in the mountains, enter competitions, contribute to the organisation of climbing Sports Day (each school year, two climbing Sports Days are obligatory at primary schools), as well as the *Zlati sonček* and *Krpan* campaigns.

The Age-adjusted Programme of Mountain Climbing

1 Programme Content and Objective

In the Alpine Association of Slovenia (hereinafter: AAS) the education and schooling of all age groups embrace pursuit of knowledge and skills as well as obtainment of experience in all forms and fields of mountaineering activity and voluntary work within all the sections and levels of the mountain climbing organisation (Peršolja 2001b, 20). The Operational Guidelines of AAS and mountain climbing societies declare that “the responsible comportment and respect for the mountains need to be nurtured in order for the integrality of the educational and pedagogic goals to be achieved. People need to realise that their endeavour in this field is a life-long process that yields tangible results only in the long run. Mountain safety is thus not merely a set of organisational and technical tasks and skills, rules about movement and use of equipment. The safety requirements cannot be satisfied without a steadfast respect for the mountains and respect for a fellow human being in the mountains.” (Guidelines, 2001).

Despite its venerable age, the Mountain Climbing Organisation (established in 1893) still lacks an age-adjusted programme that would comprehensively combine different types of work with the young, attract young members and suit their needs from the tender age onwards (Peršolja 1995, 41). The organisation of mountaineering activity and above all the running of the mountain climbing school (teaching, obtainment of knowledge) has been entirely left to resourcefulness, knowledge and good sense of the climbing group mentors or an AAS guides. Currently, the mountain climbing organisation pursues project type of work, and organises each trip or competition separately, when it should introduce a long-term, comprehensive and development-oriented programme approach.

We are confident that the knowledge for safer mountain climbing that is also more replete with new experience and lessons learnt cannot be obtained casually, by means of a short (although first-rate) preparation before a trip, or one-time taking part in a trip or a several-day camp. Similarly to each field of human pursuit, mountain climbing necessitates carefully planned and systematic preparation of several years (Peršolja 2001a).

Hence, an age-adjusted programme of mountain climbing (hereinafter: programme) has been devised. The basic guidelines for the formation of the programme were adopted during the Youth Sections Assembly in autumn 1995. Besides the goals of mountaineering training, the stressed values were the promotion of voluntary activity of the young («The Young for the Young») and the loyalty to the Mountain Climbing Organisation. The programme will introduce age-, physically- and socially-coordinated as well as gradual obtainment of mountaineering knowledge, skills and experience (Peršolja 2001, 20). It will facilitate exchange of experience to its implementers, and to its participants transfer or acknowledgment of acquired knowledge within the further system of mountain climbing training (Peršolja, 2001, 40).

The major objective of the programme is for the children, adolescents and the young (hereinafter; the young) to acquire practical and applicable knowledge, skills and experience that will enable:

- comprehensive experience of and active engagement in the making of mountain climbing,
- quality and gradual personal development as mountain climbers: making progress and advancing – as regards knowledge, relationships and achievements,
- boosted awareness of the importance of civil society and importance of active role of an individual who with a critical approach assumes responsibility for the environment (people and nature) (Peršolja, 1995, 43).

The programme subjects and materials have been selected from the available mountaineering literature (Drab 2000, Golnar 1999, Kristan 1993, Škerbinek 1983, Teze... 1996). We have devised a Catalogue of Mountain Climbing Knowledge that has provided us with subjects appropriate for a particular stage of development of children, adolescents and the young. The programme was supposed to combine and advance knowledge of children, adolescents and the young acquired in kindergarten, primary and secondary schools or from family members. The subjects were taken from natural (especially physics, biology, mathematics...), sociological and humanistic (especially geography, history, Slovenian language, fine art and musical

education) sciences. We are not only dealing with the broadening and deepening of knowledge, but also with gaining of skills and experience.

2 Programme Structure and Purpose

The Age-adjusted Programme is designed for mentors of mountain climbing groups, the Alpine Association of Slovenia guides and others who are involved in mountain climbing training of children, adolescents and the young. It will serve as an aid in planning the work with the young of all age groups and different types of socializing. The programme is adapted and tailored to the requirements of the nine-year primary school curriculum. Work with the young will improve when it is adapted to suit the needs of an individual, a mountain climbing group and accommodated to the particularities of a certain environment (domestic and alpine) in which it is pursued. The programme can be implemented in an organised (mountain climbing group within the youth section, kindergarten or school) or informal way (family mountain climbing).

Since the mountain climbing activity at schools is usually designed for participants of different ages (usually separate groups are formed of pupils in grades 1 – 4 and pupils in grades 5 – 9), we have divided the programme into several horizontally and vertically interconnected levels: the first level includes preschoolers, the second level primary school pupils in grades 1- 3, the third level grades 4 – 6 and the fourth level includes pupils in grades 7 – 9. The person in charge of the mountain climbing activity may sensibly organise subjects in order for the same generation not to be taught the same subject twice.

Unlike the existing Mountain Climbing School that analytically divides the study into different subjects (the character of a climber, a climber's equipment...), we have opted for a more integrated approach or intertwining of subjects that will enable better interconnection and more closely relate to the actual alpine circumstances. According to participants' age and stage of development the subjects and goals are adequately divided into separate units, differently in each stage of development. At the initial stages the subjects are more or less interconnected and divided into fewer units. The subjects and goals pursued in different stages interact and complement each other.

We have also taken into account the changes in the schooling system that now stresses the active role of the student who is to broaden his knowledge

already during the process of discovering and gaining experience. The mountain climbing activity has since time immemorial emphasized the importance of observation, experience and active participation through which knowledge can accumulate better. The Mountain Climbing Organisation has exercised an increased complexity of the roles of a trip leader, mountain climbing group and the guided, a course participant. The guides do not only impart knowledge but also stimulate and encourage students, and in combination with the outdoor challenges help in creating an encouraging learning environment. The Mountain Climbing Organisation has considered knowledge a lot more than merely a mechanical mastery of different subjects. Experience has shown that apart from accumulation of knowledge one needs to understand and master different skills, gain experience, and ability to solve problems, consequently these have been given a special place in this programme.

While implementing the programme one needs to bear in mind the division of knowledge into groups (taxonomies). The taxonomies help us highlight different aspects of knowledge, skills and dexterities of learning process. We have selected the taxonomy that classifies knowledge into (Rutar Ilc, 2003, pg.16):

- declarative,
- procedural and
- conditional or strategic knowledge.

The declarative knowledge includes data, facts, beliefs, opinions and more complex content knowledge such as explanation, theory, interpretation (Rutar Ilc 2003, 16). Examples of such knowledge included in the mountain climbing programme are the enumeration of different parts of personal equipment, knowledge of vegetation zones and animals that inhabit a certain zone or persons and events that have shaped the mountain climbing history.

The procedural knowledge encompasses procedures employed in the utilization of knowledge in different processes or routines and is demonstrated through corresponding practical activities (Rutar Ilc 2003, 16). Mountain climbing embraces such knowledge in close correlation with the outdoor movement and orientation, the planning of chosen route and awareness of the changes in the weather.

The strategic (conditional) knowledge enables determination when and where to use the procedural and declarative knowledge. It among others includes planning and combining of strategies in order to solve problems (Rutar Ilc 2003, 16). In mountain climbing the strategic knowledge is embraced by the topic such as Trip Preparation, Implementation and Analysis. It is a combination of different subjects that ensure a safe return back home.

The transmission approach is not appropriate for the obtainment of mountain climbing knowledge (a guide or a mentor who merely imparts knowledge, acts as lecturer), but an integral approach that guides the young throughout the entire process of gaining knowledge, skills and experience. We are dealing with a process approach closely connected to the active role of the young in the training process. In this process the leader of a mountain climbing group or mountain climbing education mentor sees to it that the young accumulate their knowledge by means of different activities (trip, hike, tour, climbing, ridge ski tours, orientation competition, camping) and experience. It is important that here new knowledge takes its base in the previous experience and prior knowledge. The role of qualified adults is indispensable in the professional mountain climbing work with the young, but one must not forget that the adults are in the organisation for the sake of the young and not vice versa (Peršolja 2001, 20).

The Age-adjusted Programme (e.g.: Appendix 1) encompasses operative goals and subjects, in greater detail defined by concepts. The active involvement of participants is demonstrated partly through set goals, and partly through activities, necessary for the command of a certain subject or the attainment of a goal. Thus the theoretical subjects continually intertwine with methods of direct observation and practical implementation of subjects. The latter is especially prominent in the topics such as mountain movement and orientation, and to lesser extent in other subjects. Different analyses of training results (the Young and the Mountains state competition, testing of knowledge at the AAS courses) have corroborated the necessity of the subjects, named activities for the purposes of the programme. The training results also show that the participants have done extremely well in classical mountain climbing subjects (mountain climbing history, familiarisation with and protection of alpine environment ...), and less well in the subjects crucial for the safety of a mountain climber (movement in the mountains, orientation, meteorology...) (Peršolja 1995, 41). Activities afford the

young an opportunity to actively acquire mountain climbing knowledge and skills. They also provide the feeling of usefulness of training and its connection with real life, as well as establish a direct contact with nature, the mountains and mountain climbing and enable the young to arrive at certain realisations with their own detection and discovery. The young in different age groups are encouraged to advance their knowledge by exploring and experiencing (Rutar Ilc, 2003, 31).

The following activities suit the first and second level:

- exploration of different materials and objects using all senses (e.g. looking for different rocks found along the path),
- trying out and attempting (e.g. different techniques of movement on different surfaces – scree, rocky ground, forest soil covered by leaves),
- observation of natural forms, features, phenomena and processes (e.g. formation of rock walls, Karst springs, dissolving of rocks),
- touching, constructing, making (e.g. making mills from natural materials, making figurines from rocks or horse chestnut),
- planning (e.g. a trip and filling in the application form and writing a personal diary),
- dismantling and putting together (e.g. folding a backpack, fastening knots),
- talking and writing about as well as drawing the things they experienced, and giving their interpretations, comments in ideas (e.g. going through the experience of the trip and taking down their impressions, interviewing older mountain climbers, taking photographs of mountain fauna and flora).

On the third level:

- searching for their own answers to their own questions (e.g. asking questions on trips, visits to the library and surfing the mountaineering web sites),
- exploration of materials and objects (e.g. systematic familiarisation with different mountain ranges – by means of literature and actual crossing of a mountain pass),
- testing ideas by studying and experimenting, beginning of control over variables (e.g. measuring of meteorological data and studying the weather report),
- observation of events and their course (e.g. learning more demanding techniques of movement by means of filming and video analysis),

- looking for patterns and generalisations (e.g. ascertainment of findings through analysis of mountain accidents)
- looking for simple explanations for daily phenomena (e.g. the influence of regular sports activity on good somatic health).

On the fourth level:

- development of exploratory and problem-solving skills in relation to children's ideas and questions (e.g. helper on the trip – active help provided to the guide in planning and trip implementation),
- planning of research and critical evaluation of plans prior to their execution (e.g. making sketches and an overview of the route),
- discussing different issues, ideas, explanations and problems (e.g. discussion on the burning ecological issues with reference to trips to the mountains),
- critical reflection of their work and search for alternative ideas and procedures (e.g. research assignments and papers, guiding a group and organising clubs under mentorship),
- use of different sources of information (e.g. collecting information about the proposed tour, weather – the Internet, TV, newspapers, magazines).

3 The Importance of Subject Interconnection

From experience the young grasp the essence of the studied subjects, compare and critically receive as well as estimate data and information, learn to analyse, make logical or causal connections and generalize. This is especially important during trips, hikes, tours, camps, winter holidays spent in huts and in other instances when the interconnection of various subjects is highlighted. This will provide the young with an in-depth understanding of different subjects. Knowledge acquired in such manner is not superficial since it doesn't base on memorization of isolated data and proves to be useful in numerous new cases.

Outdoor activities in nature provide an ideal environment for linking different subjects. It would have been unreasonable to divide and separate various subjects when already on a trip they present themselves comprehensively. It is worth seizing the opportunity and embracing such type of teaching and learning. Therefore the age-adjusted programme of mountain climbing is based on the principles of making progress from the known to the unknown, the familiar to

unfamiliar, from surrounding to remote and from concrete to abstract notions. A child in the first age group is learning about his/her surrounding environment, the world he is familiar with. Gradually the circle of familiarisation widens from the surrounding hills to the more remote medium-height mountains and highlands. Accompanied by a qualified adult, at the final level the young mountaineer is able to climb the mountains of entire Slovenia.

4 Examinations

At each level and at the end of the programme a child's progress needs to be monitored and his/her knowledge tested. It would have been unreasonable to adopt the knowledge testing techniques that encourage competitiveness, rivalry external motivation, and would sooner hinder than foster the appreciation of socializing and mountaineering. Nonetheless, the entire process needs to encompass activities and goals designed to monitor the progress of children and the young. As far as feasible, we utilize the informal forms of testing (talk among the children, between a mentor and a child, carrying out of a task, observation on a trip, hike, tour or other forms of mountaineering, concluding (examination) tour...) and avoid classical, school-adopted testing and examination techniques (tests). The so-called competent knowledge is acquired when a child, an adolescent, or a young person whom we know and trust, and whom we have monitored throughout the entire process, has attained the set goals and demonstrated the mastered skills in different ways.

5 Conclusion

To conclude with, I would like to quote Pinter (1994): "The longest and safest way of mountain climbing is found when we embrace mountains as a way of living. For this reason a person needs to receive a proper education. The mountaineering education has to be conducted alongside other forms of education, and, most of all has to be introduced early enough. The goal to be pursued is: Mountains for a Lifetime, naturally only for the interested parties. It can be achieved only through all levels of education."

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Appendix 1: A section from the age-adjusted mountain climbing programme designed for the 2nd age group Mountaineering Bonds topic.

<i>OPERATIVE GOALS</i>	<i>SUBJECTS</i>	<i>TERMS AND NOTIONS</i>	<i>ACTIVITIES</i>
Child:	MOUNTAIN CLIMBING BONDING IN GROUPS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> listens to stories and fables; writes a summary of the read stories and answers questions; 	History of mountain climbing.	First mountain visitors/settlers: shepherds, herbalists, poachers and the story of Zlatorog/Goldenhorn, lumberjacks, charcoal pilers, digging for ore, the ascent of four courageous men of the Triglav Mountain (book), botanic exploration, first mountain lovers, setting up the Aljaž tower on Triglav, Drenovci, Turistovski klub Skala/Skala Tourist Club.	Reading stories of the Zlatorog/Goldenhorn and discussion. Making a poster about the history of mountain climbing. History of mountain climbing quiz. Devising, composing and narrating new mountain stories.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notes down impressions in his Tiddler Climber (Under 6 yrs) 	Mountain Climbing Organisation.	Mountain climbing group, youth section, mountain climbing society, Tiddler Climber and Young	Entering trips and noting down impressions from trips in diary. Attending club and

<p>years) or Young Climber diary;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> attends mountain climbing group or club; 		<p>Climber diaries and membership in mountain climbing society, mountain climbing society orientation competition.</p>	<p>other meetings, going on trips, taking part in gatherings, going on camps, participating in youth section competitions.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On trips honours the previously made agreements; Greets people he meets during climbing; Helps weaker trip participants; During trip does not shout, destroy nature, set off falling rocks; Reacts reasonably in the event of separation from the group; Follows the 	<p>My mountain climbing experience.</p>	<p>Greeting fellow mountain climber, mutual help (help and appropriate respect of the weaker), well-mannered comportment on trip (no shouting, destruction of nature, setting off rocks, jostling, appropriate disposal of litter), separation from the group, rests and stops, walking with the AAS guides.</p>	<p>Encouraging children to greet fellow mountain climbers we meet on trip. Before the trip we discuss the appropriate behaviour on trip and make a poster with rules of behaviour and put it up. Violation of the rules is appropriately punished.</p>

instructions of the trip guide; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes litter with him and disposes it in the dustbin. 			
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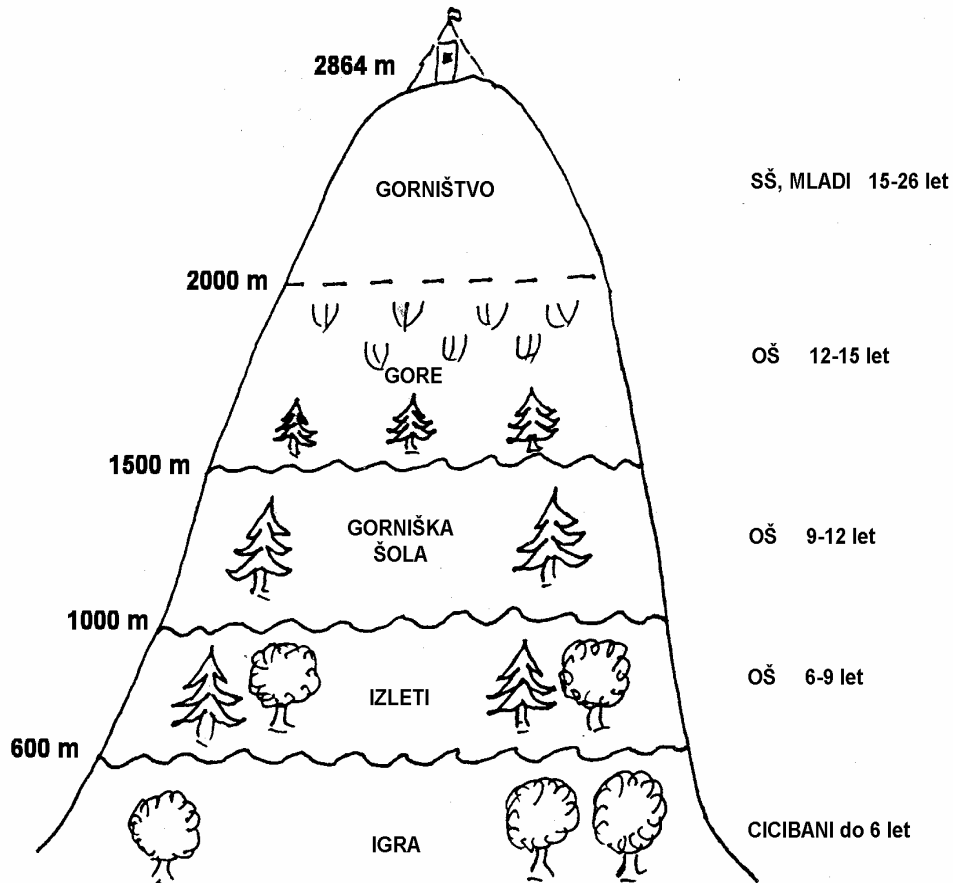
RECOMMENDATIONS

A mountain climbing group mentor should:

- impart to children the knowledge and notions about mountains and highlands and mountain life as it was and as it is today;
- encourage children to narrate stories relating to mountains that they have read with their parents;
- examine pictures and watch slides of mountains with the children;
- strengthen the children's knowledge by introducing concrete experience – a trip;
- help children take down impressions from a trip;
- organise and conduct mountain climbing groups and clubs at schools;
- organise a quiz or other type of competition to test the knowledge of the above topics.

Appendix 2:

Sketch: Age Groups and Programme, Borut Peršolja



Mountaineering, secondary school, young aged 15-26

Mountains, primary school children aged 12 – 15

Mountain climbing school, primary school children aged 9 – 12

Trips, primary school children aged 6 – 9

Play, toddlers until 6 years of age