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Promoting youth development around the world: the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award

Eva van Baren · Marieke Meelen · Lucas Meijs

Intro

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award is a youth achievement Award program that aims to engage young people in purposeful activities focused on gaining knowledge, broadening horizons and accumulating a diversity of experiences.

The program promotes positive youth development through an experience based non-formal learning approach and is known to play a vital role in providing opportunities for young people to develop essential life skills, complementing their formal education. Comprised of three levels (Bronze, Silver and Gold) and four sections (Service, Skills, Physical Recreation and Adventurous Journey) the Award is designed to provide a balanced program of personal development. The Award operates worldwide in over 140 countries and territories, through the International Award Association. This article will discuss The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award program and its non-formal educational framework. Participants reported that it has enabled them to grow in confidence and in their ability to contribute positively to their communities.

Introduction

The Duke of Edinburgh's (DofE) International Award, hereafter referred to as the Award, is a youth achievement Award program developed around bringing

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together practical experiences and life skills with the aim to equip young people for life (DofE 2012a). The main guiding principle underlying the Award program is the individual challenge for the participants to develop personal skills, undertaking activities to reach new goals, work in a team and enhance community spirit. The Award is achievable by any young person between the age of 14 and 24, regardless of their background and circumstances. The latter is based on the notion that all young people should get the chance to develop life skills and enjoy the practical experiences they require in order to embrace any future challenges and opportunities.

The program consists of three levels: Bronze, Silver and Gold. At each level, participants set their own personal goals in each section: Service, Skills, Physical Recreation and an Adventurous Journey. There is also an additional requirement to complete a Residential Project for the Gold level. The four sections are designed to provide a balanced program of personal development (DofE 2012b). They are primarily aimed at engaging young people in purposeful activities with a focus on gaining knowledge, broadening horizons and accumulating a diversity of experiences and perspectives. The structure of the program falls within the scope of non-formal education, enabling participants to *learn by doing* which should provide them with the tools they need to develop essential life skills, complementing their formal education (DofE 2012c).

Background

The Award was established in 1956. The original idea came from Kurt Hahn, a German philosopher and educationalist. Hahn believed that practical involvement and a holistic approach was the key to learning, which is why he advocated experiential education. Based on this philosophy, the Award was originally designed around four sections: Rescue and Public Service Training, the Expedition, Pursuits and Projects, and Fitness. Moreover, the program had to be available to all who wanted to participate, regardless of their race or socio-economic background (Hahn 1936).

The Award worldwide

Over the last 50 years, the Award has developed and grown, reaching more and more young people around the world. As a result, over 140 countries and territories are currently delivering the Award, targeting all youth, including those who have not previously had opportunities for personal development. Recent Award projects around the world have focused on involving young offenders, those with disabilities, street kids and aboriginal communities. Having been able to adapt to the changing demands and needs of youth around the world, the Award claims to be 'recognized as the world's leading achievement Award for young people' (DofE 2012b, p. 11).

Activities

The Award activities are part of three progressive levels leading to a Bronze, Silver or Gold Award when successfully completed. At each level, participants are required to set their own personal goals in four different sections:

- 1 Service;
- 2 Skills;
- 3 Physical Recreation;
- 4 Adventurous Journey.

Achievement is based on personal improvement and development within each of the three levels and is recorded using a record book acquired on enrollment. After completing each level of the Award, participants receive a certificate and a pin during a recognition ceremony.

The minimum timescale for each section at Bronze level is three months. In addition, all participants must do an extra three months in Physical Recreation, Skills or Service. The Adventurous Journey lasts two days and one night. Once participants have reached the Silver level, the duration of each section becomes six months. Non-Bronze Award holders must also do an extra 6 months in Physical Recreation, Skills or Service. At this level, the Adventurous Journey lasts three days and two nights. Finally, at the Gold level each section will take 12 months to complete and the Adventurous Journey will take four days and three nights. Non-Silver Award holders must do an extra 6 months in either Physical Recreation, Skills or Service at this stage plus the additional requirement of a five-day Residential Project (DofE 2012b). An overview can be found in Table 1 below.

Purpose and results

Based on the idea that every young person is different, the personal challenges to achieve an Award are therefore also different for each participant. As such, 'each young person should be encouraged to examine *themselves*, their interests, abilities, and ambitions, then set themselves challenges in the four different sections of the Award' (DofE 2012b, p. 12). In other words, young people do not need to compete with others to achieve an Award: it is about personal challenge.

The fundamental principles

The latest Award handbook (DofE 2012b, p. 13) describes the program's principles and what is considered to be beneficial to participants. Personal and social developments, although not specifically defined by the Award, lie at the heart of the program. The fundamental principles refer mostly to a personal challenge and highlight individual improvement through persistence and achievement based on one's initial capabilities ('non-competitive'), one's own choice to become involved ('volun-

Table 1 Minimum timescale for each level by section. (Source: DofE handbook 6th edition 2012b, p. 32)

	Physical recreation	Skills	Service	Plus...	Adventurous journey
<i>Bronze</i>	3 months	3 months	3 months	All participants must do an extra 3 months in either Physical Recreation or Skills or Service	2 days+1 night
<i>Silver</i>	6 months	6 months	6 months	Non Bronze holders must do an extra 6 months in either Physical Recreation or Skills or Service	3 days+2 nights
<i>Gold^a</i>	12 months	12 months	12 months	Non Silver holders must do an extra 6 months in either Physical Recreation or Skills or Service	4 days+3 nights

^aPlus additional requirement of 5 days and 4 night Residential Project

tary') and one's personal selection of activities within the four sections ('flexible'). The social aspect is highlighted mostly through the value of teamwork through the interaction with, and the commitment and responsibility to others, and to oneself (Maccariello 2006). The Award also has a particularly strict policy of no discrimination when it comes to gender, race, religion, political affiliation or any other personal circumstances ('available to all').

Benefits to young people

The Award handbook lists twelve benefits to participants, including behaviors, attitudes and highly transferable skills (DofE 2012b, p. 21). First, 'self-belief' and 'self-confidence' are considered central to participants' personal development. The Award aims to have a positive impact on young people's self-image and personal ability. Helping participants know and accept their own strengths and weaknesses may lead to greater awareness of their own potential. Second, this process requires an 'independent and self-motivating attitude', although a 'sense of responsibility to others' is considered equally important. Consequently, this may lead to 'a connection to their broader society' as they learn to value social development and a sense of inter-dependence. Third, young people can benefit from 'new or improved interests, skills, and abilities'. Participants can develop 'life skills' including health, negotiation, research, communication, as well as problem solving and presentation skills, as listed by The Award. Throughout the participatory process participants can learn to manage their time and work out the best way to operate their Award program. In doing so, a further potential benefit may be 'the ability to make a plan and then make their plan happen'. Finally, The Award scheme stresses the importance of acquiring 'team skills', which in turn may lead to 'new friendships' and 'a willingness to try new things'.

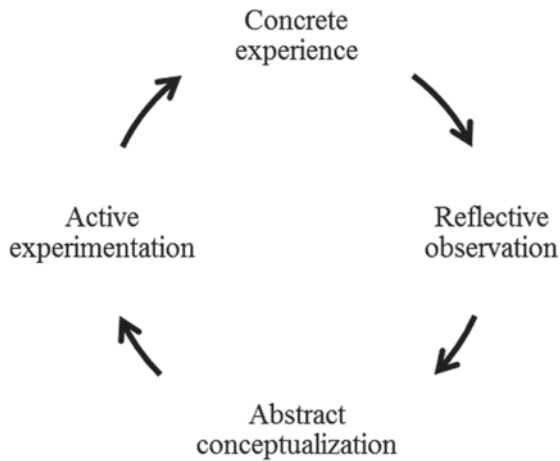


Fig. 1 The four-stage experiential learning cycle (Kolb 1976)

Experiential education

The four-section program of the Award is based on the philosophy of experiential education (Kolb 1976, 1984) where concrete experiences form the foundation of learning (Ferguson 1992). Hahn (2004) believed that practical involvement was the key to learning:

The aim of education is to impel people into value forming experiences (...) to ensure the survival of these qualities: an enterprising curiosity, an undefeatable spirit, tenacity in pursuit (...) and above all, compassion (...). It is culpable neglect not to impel young people into experiences (p. 2).

In experiential education, experiences are less abstract than those in traditional learning situations. Experiences show social issues in relation to theoretical concepts and motivate learning by making use of concrete examples (Conrad & Hedin 1991; Markus et al. 1993). Experiential education is based on a four-step cycle of learning developed by Kolb (1976) where experiences connect to more effective action (active experimentation) through reflective observations and abstract conceptualizations. Learning is considered most effective when a participant goes through all stages of the learning cycle. That is, when experiences are followed by rigorous reflection activities (See Fig. 1). The Award promotes its non-formal educational value by highlighting that the review and reflection of young participant's activities are especially important in order to ensure that 'they benefit from the impact that the Award hopes to provide' (DofE 2012b, p. 42).

Four sections

The handbook describes (DofE 2012b) each of the four sections in detail (p. 28).

The *Service section* is aimed at understanding the value of giving service to others and the community. By undertaking service regularly over a period of time, rather than in a short concentrated time period, the Award program aims to contribute to the development of 'a lifelong commitment to voluntary service and community involvement' (p. 47).

The focus of the *Skills section* is on stimulating new interests or improving existing ones. As with all activities undertaken within the program, the list of possible activities depends on the individual interest of the participants and may therefore vary widely. Examples of skills can be found in sports, games, music, arts and crafts, nature and the environment, communication, technology and so on. According to the Award handbook, a level of commitment over time to progress in a skill leads to a 'sense of achievement', 'well-being' and possibly to 'improved employability' (p. 57).

Physical Recreation encourages participation in sport and other physical recreation with the aim to improve health, performance and fitness. The Award also believes that taking part in physical activity has many other benefits such as the improvement of team skills, self-esteem and participants' confidence as well as the enhancement of self-discipline, perseverance and self-motivation. The handbook states that the requirements within this section apply equally to all young people, regardless of their physical ability (p. 68). The key outcomes should be participation, persistence and improvement of general fitness.

The *Adventurous Journey section* seeks to provide participants with 'a unique, challenging and memorable experience' (p. 77). Here, the aim is to encourage a spirit of adventure and discovery while undertaking a journey in a (small) group. This particular section requires an unfamiliar and challenging environment, physically challenging activities and co-operation within a team. All journeys must have a clearly defined purpose and are supervised and assessed by experienced adults. There are three types of journeys: exploration, expedition or other adventurous journey. Whereas an exploration is 'a purpose with a journey', an expedition is defined as 'a journey with a purpose' (p. 83). In an exploration, more time and effort is spent on observing and collecting information relevant to the purpose and less on getting from one place to another. In other words, less time is spent on 'journeying'. In an expedition, the primary focus is on the journey itself and less on research and gathering information.

For the completion of the Gold level, there is an additional requirement of doing a Residential Project. The aim is to broaden a participant's experience 'through involvement with others in a residential setting' (p. 88). The Award scheme states that during the Residential Project participants must share experience with those who are not their usual companions, by working towards a common goal. Ideally, the experience broadens the participant's outlook and horizons. Residential Projects can be activity based (e.g. sports coaching) or serve the purpose of helping others and communities (e.g. working with overseas aid charities) or the environment (volun-

teer work at a national park) and other young people (e.g. leadership training, youth camps). The idea is that, no matter the experience, it should have a lasting impact on the participant and those they have come in contact with, which is considered the 'pinnacle' (p. 92) of the journey through their Award.

Audience

The Award is delivered internationally through Award Units such as educational institutions, employers, social clubs, youth organizations, young offenders institutions, religious organizations, sports clubs and civil organizations. However, in principle, the program is also open to young people who are not members of such formal organizations. International support, guidance and quality assurance of the Award is entrusted to International Award Foundation and subsidiary (and where possible) to National Award Authorities.

Concluding remarks

The Award is a unique program using a well-structured intervention resulting in a comprehensive non-formal experience-based learning scheme. The four different sections and three levels make it both extensive and well-balanced, covering all areas of personal development for young people: increase their skills and talents, improve their fitness, work in a team and contribute to society in the form of voluntary service. The National Award authorities delivering the program are part of a large global network. The program has the potential to extend its reach in even more than the 140 countries and territories already taking part because it is flexible enough to meet the objectives of local and national youth policies. Although the significant and measurable impact on the lives of young people seems to be apparent, future research will have to show which of the sections contribute the most and, furthermore, if the Award program as it is, proves to have a larger impact than other youth development programs. The Award has recently committed to an evidence-based approach to evaluate their scheme, stating that 'it is not enough for us to believe that what we do makes a difference – we must prove that it does, and become accountable to everyone we serve' (DofE 2012c, p. 4). Increased knowledge and credibility of the program's worth could be supported by more in-depth study on its potential benefits and impacts carried out by those who are not directly connected to the Award organization.

Other suggestions for future research include the relation between the different sections and how they interact. Questions concerning the possible increased effect over time (participants going through all three levels) need to be researched, just like the differences in impact in various countries or target groups from different backgrounds.

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