Introduction

Skiing is an increasingly popular sport in the adventure tourism sector. With influxes of new people to the sport there is a growing number of beginner skiers on the slopes (Frank, 2011). Often stressed, before they even make it onto the slopes, the skiers first ski lessons can be extremely nerve racking, with anxiety rendering their ability to learn and develop new techniques (Murphy, 2005). This poster will look at how ski instructors and ski schools can focus on minimizing the negative effects of anxiety in their ski lessons and consider the benefits and drawbacks of implementing measures to reduce anxiety.

Literature Review

Anxiety refers to an unpleasant state consisting of apprehension, tension, worry and nervousness (Morris & Summers, 2004). There are two types of anxiety. State anxiety, this refers to temporal and transitory feelings of anxiety associated with a specific situation. The other is Trait, this is a predisposition of experiencing anxiety in a range of situations (Cattell & Scheier, 1961). Anxiety can effect the body in two ways, somatic anxiety is when the body is effected physically, this could be an increased heart rate, increased breathing rate or as Murphy (2005) describes it a lack of timing, poor flow and slowed reaction time. Cognitive anxiety is the mental effects that anxiety has on the body, this is uncontrollable worry, apprehension, difficulty concentrating and difficulty making decisions.

In order to establish strategies for combating and reducing anxiety, the causes of anxiety must be identified. Morris & Summers (2004) explain that anxiety can be bought on in a number of ways. These are, pressure internally, for example where the participant puts pressure on themselves to succeed. Secondly external pressure, this could be pressure from others in the ski lesson, pressure from family or friends to do well or even pressure from the ski instructor to perform. Loudis et al (1986) suggests that physical harm and rejection are also likely sources of anxiety, this could be the thought of falling and injuring oneself or somebody else, or the fear of failing in front of a group who may think that you are not very good. General life stressors can also contribute as a trigger to anxiety (Murphy, 2005), daily hassles and life events can negatively influence a participants preparation and hence represent a potential source of anxiety.

There are several coping strategies for anxiety; these need to be used correctly in order to be effective. Goal setting is a useful tool to divert a participant’s attention purposefully while they learn and practice physical skills, focusing their attention to the skill rather than the source of anxiety. Simple goals and achievable goals should be used if they are to affect the participant positively (Andersen, 2005). Self confidence is probably one of the most commonly found psychological performance issues. Failure to believe in ones ability can result in poor performance (Andersen, 2005), improving self confidence can massively improve performance.

It has already been established that anxiety can negatively affect skiing performance. Participants often over estimate the risks and under estimate their own ability (Miles & Priest, 1999). As covered previously anxiety can be bought on in several ways, in order to increase learning, ski schools need to develop strategies to minimise anxiety and the causes of anxiety. Working on a one to one basis with clients can allow the instructor to ease the pressure, as they do not feel they are holding the rest of the group back. Another common problem in ski lessons is the variation of abilities in groups, often leading to catastrophic anxiety, this inevitably leads to the weaker members of the group being on a slope which is too demanding for their abilities. The author feels that this relates to the catastrophe theory where participants often become over aroused or “freeze” on the slope. In most instances the cause is fear, fear of failing and injuring oneself. Goal setting can be used in these situations, focusing the participants attention away from the fear of failing, for example setting a goal to hold a snow plough all the way down a run. Perhaps a more effective solution though is having somebody ski alongside giving constant feedback, encouragement and most importantly reassurance. This links in with improving self-confidence to reduce anxiety, positive feedback, encouragement and reassurance instantly given to participants keeps self-confidence high and minimises anxiety.

In order to enhance the experience for clients the ski school needs to develop methods for minimising anxiety, smaller groups and slower progression are both effective. Unfortunately there are issues with both of these, smaller groups may ease the pressure however this reduces potential profits to the ski school and is an unlikely solution in the current economic climate.

Discussion

Skiing is, however, a risk sport with many of the basic skills requiring the participant to overcome intuitive behaviour (Kunzell & Muller, 2008), as a result anxiety is understandable in beginners. Anxiety, however, should not have a defining part in the client’s lesson. Ski schools need to develop strategies to minimise the negative effects of anxiety in order to improve the clients experience and increase learning. If instructors are able to minimise anxiety it will create a safer and more effective learning environment for the whole group and provide a more enjoyable experience for both the clients and the instructor.

Slower progression is also unlikely to suit all scenarios, as the lessons cannot be focused around just one of the clients. From the authors experiences it has been found that a particularly effective asset to clients struggling with anxiety is the use of trainee instructors to assist with the lessons. The trainee instructors can offer an extra pair of hands to the leader of the group, give additional feedback to clients and give additional attention to the very anxious members of the group.

Conclusion

During my placement experience, I worked with all manner of people learning to ski. This gave me a substantial insight into the issues during a typical ski lesson that have been discussed in this poster. Working as an assistant ski instructor it was often my job to work on more of a one to one basis with the more anxious members of the group. This allowed me to investigate the source of anxiety and develop strategies for minimising its effects, as well as witnessing the benefits to be had from minimising anxiety.

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References


