

Allison P.

Research from the Grand Up
(2000)

PART II

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Introduction

This part of the paper offers an example of research which I am currently undertaking. It emerges from an expedition to South West Greenland but equally importantly emerges from my interest in values, philosophy and human potential. In 1988 I went to North East Greenland on an expedition with the British Schools Exploring Society. The influence of this expedition on my personal development was, in my view, purely positive. In 1997 I had the chance to be a leader on a very similar expedition: same organisation, similar destination and similar people to those I had gone with previously. I jumped at the opportunity. This time I wanted to explore what happened to those people, what they experienced – not what I wanted them to experience or thought they should experience but what happened *as they saw it*. This is what Silverman (1993) refers to as emic research.

In this part of the paper I will give a brief description of the expedition setting, a 'thick description' as was briefly discussed earlier, then describe techniques for information collection and information analysis. Finally, I will discuss one of the themes (post-expedition adjustment) that has emerged from the information collected. While this information was collected after a six week expedition experience it may be that the phenomena could be present following shorter expeditions. In this respect it may be that there is a post-residential adjustment experienced by many people who partake in experiential learning programmes and other forms of residential experience. This is discussed further in the summary and implications.

Setting the Scene

The British Schools Exploring Society (BSES) is based at the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG) in London and has been running expeditions for over 65 years to remote areas of the world. In their promotional literature (1998) they describe themselves as follows:

BSES Expeditions, a UK based charity, was founded in 1932 by the late Surgeon Commander G Murray Levick, a member of Scott's Antarctic Expedition of 1910, and as such is one of the longest running organisations of its type. For over 65 years it has provided opportunities for young people from schools and many other walks of life to take part in exploratory projects in remote regions, led by experts drawn from universities, teaching and medical professions, industry and the services. The Society's expeditions aim to help in the development of young people through the challenge of living and working in remote and challenging areas of the world.

(BSES, 1998)

The charity was initially known as the Public Schools Exploring Society (PSES) and has a rich and varied history. Until 1980 the expeditions were for males only. The society now encourages more balanced participation in terms of gender, social background and race. However, the tendency is still towards white upper-middle class males.

Currently, BSES organises three expeditions every year, each consisting of approximately 80 members and 15 leaders with various responsibilities. Typical expedition destinations include the Himalayas, Africa, Canadian Arctic, Svalbard, Norway and Greenland. In order to take part in these expeditions, prospective members must initially fill in application forms and solicit references. If successful at this stage they will then be interviewed and offered a place on an expedition. If candidates accept this place they are then required to raise funds in the region of £2,800. However, all candidates are informed "... no-one who shows the appropriate commitment and effort to raise the contribution, but is unable to meet it in full prior to the expedition, will be denied a place." (BSESE, 1998, p.2).

In 1997 one of the expeditions was to South West Greenland. This wilderness area had been identified during previous expeditions (1992) and also on a reconnaissance in September of 1996. Originally planned for a fjord further north the expedition had to be moved in to Tasermuit Fjord due to ice conditions. Prior to the arrival of the whole party, and during the entire expedition, plans changed. This, as may be expected, led to an exciting but sometimes frustrating experience for many. As Arthur notes "The trouble is that on REAL expeditions the unexpected is always happening" (in Hunt, 1990, p.62) [emphasis as original].

During the expedition, participants did not encounter any other people other than those on the expedition. The region is mountainous and of astounding natural beauty. Swaney attempts to describe Greenland:

It's a challenge to describe this country. One can only repeat the words 'beautiful', 'spectacular', 'magnificent' so many times before they begin to sound flat and meaningless... As one Greenlandic poet put it, 'I get dizzy of all the beauty and shiver with happiness'.

(Swaney, 1997, p.354)

More specifically, Swaney describes Tasermuit Fjord:

Another wonder of far southern Greenland is 75km Tasermuit Fjord. This lovely waterway winds its way Northeast from Nanortalik and ends at the face of the tidewater glacier Tasermuit, which spills steeply down from the inland ice.

(Swaney, 1997, p.436)

BSES expeditions are typically broken in to two phases – science and adventure. During the six week period groups typically spend around two or three weeks doing some type of science work (such as biology, ornithology, geology, glaciology or archaeology). In the remaining time groups spend some time undertaking various types of adventure (trekking, mountaineering, kayaking or skiing) depending on the environment. During this expedition groups studied archaeology and botany. Additionally, some groups engaged in rubbish clearance which provided a useful opportunity to discuss environmental ethics. The adventure phase of this expedition involved trekking and journeys on the ice cap.

Information Collection and Analysis

Following the expedition all participants received letters asking them to write about the influence the expedition had had on them. The first letter was sent six months after return (Appendix 1), the second letter 12 months after return (Appendix 2) and the third letter 18 months after return (Appendix 3).

Responses to these letters were received via electronic mail, letters (hand written and on computer disk) and by fax. All responses were transcribed into computer files for ease of storage, access and management.

Following receipt of responses from the first letter, information was analysed using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). This means that the information was clustered around common themes. Brief summaries of these themes were then sent with the second letter 12 months after return, requesting comments and feedback on the initial analysis. This process was repeated again 18 months after return. This process of collecting information, analysing the information and feeding the evolving themes back to the original source for comment is known as 'hermeneutics'. While hermeneutics is a complex term often used in multiple ways, a definition offered by Maunier is useful at this stage,

The hermeneutic circle consists of the fact that in the search for meaning of a text, of an action, of a set of ideas, etc, the interpretation of a part requires a prior understanding of the whole to which the part belongs, and the interpretation of a whole requires a prior understanding of its parts.

(Maunier, 1997, p.247)

The metaphor of a camera's zoom lens is useful. Hermeneutics involves examining parts (zooming in) and understanding the whole (wide angle lens setting) in order to find the meaning of the text. A summary of the information collection, analysis and feedback process is summarised below:

Researcher	Expedition member
Correspondence	correspondence
6.1.98 Letter is sent to expedition members requesting their comments on 'the ways in which the expedition has impacted on them'.	Replies to initial question are sent via post and e-mail.
31.8.98 Letter is sent to participants requesting their continued participation. The letter includes the researcher's summary of emerging themes (e.g. environmental values, friendship, post-residential syndrome).	Feedback on emerging themes is sent via post, e-mail and facsimile.
26.2.99 Letter is sent to all participants who have responded to either of the previous two letters. The letter includes a summary of research themes, as they have evolved since the last correspondence, for comment (e.g. self – self – other, self – environment). The correspondence also includes copies of the participant's correspondence thus far so participants can comment on the ways in which their thinking has changed or remained the same during this period as well as the way in which their writing has been coded by the researcher.	Feedback on the developing themes and researcher coding is sent via post, e-mail and facsimile.

If you are not familiar with research of this type, it might be useful to review the material in the Appendices before reading further. Taken collectively, these Appendices 'map out' the process of information collection by providing copies of the text that was sent to the participants in the study over an 18 month period.

During and following the collection of information some decisions regarding the treatment of the information were required. In taking a hermeneutic approach to the information collection, reading and re-reading the text replies proved to be an effective way of understanding what the participants were saying about *their* experiences. This enabled emerging themes to be identified, such as the 'self – self' relationship and the 'self – environment' relationship. During this reading process, information was treated in a horizontal manner (Creswell, 1998, p.55). That is to say each sentence was treated as having equal value during the development of the themes.

Themes emerging from the information were noted using the techniques recommended by Boyatzis (1998). These theme descriptions were then returned to the participants, thus entering the hermeneutic cycle. This proved to be fruitful and responses illuminated that themes were either accurate or, in most cases, needed some adjustments. These responses were also considered to be new information and so added to the computerised information management system (QSR NUD*IST 4.0). Adding responses to the information management system made it possible to see changes in the narratives of individuals over time as they constructed and reconstructed their experiences into their own paradigms and reflected on their expedition experiences.

This second stage of information collection led to changes in the structure of themes and the specific content of the themes. Once these changes had been made they were written up and sent out to the participants again for feedback and changes. The new themes proved to be more accurate according to participants.

The third stage of information collection involved sending out brief descriptions of each of the themes and sub-themes to each of the participants in the study (20 in total). These were accompanied by copies of the writing they had completed so far, along with the code assigned to each sentence, and a letter requesting their thoughts and comments on these themes. Once

again, copies of all the correspondence sent to participants can be found in the Appendices.

Generalising from the Research

This research is concerned with petite and naturalistic generalisations (Stake, 1995, p.20). I believe that there are too many variables associated with expeditions to make many meaningful grand generalisations, but it seems appropriate to make petite and naturalistic generalisations of the understandings of these findings. Once again, petite generalisation are made from like case to like case. In this instance, the research here can be generalised to other organised expeditions in which young people take part. Naturalistic generalisation refers to the generalisations that are made by readers as they interpret the findings and relate these findings to their own experiences. It is through naturalistic generalisation that this research can impact other experiential learning programmes. Some of the variables to take into account in this research in considering its generalisability are:

- The age of the participants and the demographic make-up of each group on the expedition, the demographics of the entire expedition members and the demographics of the leader team.
- Participants who responded could not be considered a random representation of the population of young people. The individuals all apply to the expedition, then go through an application and interview process further filtering the participants. Those who actually participate in the expedition then, are representative only of that group.
- The geographical area for the expedition, the climatic conditions there during the time of the expedition and the perceptions of that environment by each of the participants.
- The promotional information both for the organisation and for the specific expedition, the image that it has created for each of the participants and the claims that it has made about what the expedition aims to do, the emphasis that it puts implicitly and explicitly on various aspects of the expedition.

- The events on every expedition vary greatly making the characteristics of every expedition unique. Certain characteristics, which are simply not replicable and cannot be planned for, are a part of the 'nature of the beast'.
- The leadership of the expedition inevitably has a vast influence on the experience that individuals have and invariably changes on different expeditions. Different environments, responsibilities, contexts and times lead to these expedition dynamics constantly changing and fluctuating.

Post-expedition Adjustment

One of the particularly interesting themes which has emerged from this research is that, on return from the expedition, it takes people some time to adjust back to 'everyday life'. 'Post-expedition adjustment' is a term coined here to represent one aspect of the participants' described experience. This adjustment phase has been described by many (e.g. Spencer Chapman, 1953, pp.14-15) but explained by few. Gair (1997, pp.184-204) has likened this to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which is unfortunate as this term has almost exclusively negative connotations.

Another explanation likens the return to a form of grieving. This has typically been understood as the grieving of the deceased. Kubler-Ross (1970) wrote on this topic and explored the grieving process in her best known work, *On Death and Dying*. Complementing this work, Scippa (1997) and Scott (1997) propose that humans are in a constant state of grieving but that this grieving does not have to relate to death *per se*. Scippa argues that from an early age humans grieve the womb, the mother, school friends that move away, places that they have been to and numerous experiences. This is also supported by Scott:

A loss is perceived, a loss of something familiar in the past that seemed to work or was integral to the constellation of that life. This loss compels humans to react in several ways. To facilitate transformation from a rational perspective, we talk to someone and use dialogue as a way to sort out the meaning of our loss. To facilitate transformation from a depth perspective, we explicate internal and subjective experience, rather than external, objective experience... the images require us to descend into a kind of darkness... It is going deeper

into the Self... breaking through the shell of the rational ego structure... it permits suffering through to gestate a new solution in its own way and its own time. Healing occurs then not only because the process of life is given attention and empathetic presence and a mirroring that touches it wherever it is... grieving never ceases; it becomes a permanent aspect of life.

(Scott, 1997, p.411)

If this explanation is accepted then it would be reasonable to understand post-expedition adjustment as a grieving process, perhaps the grieving of the environment, of the people and the community, of time alone or most likely a combination of these and other aspects of the expedition experience. Rather than being negative it appears that it is actually an indication of personal growth and adjustment, even though it can be difficult. If there were no signs of some type of post-expedition adjustment then one could question if there had been any changes or examination of values during the expedition experience.

The following sub-sections describe the various aspects of post-expedition adjustment that have emerged from this research. These themes take a similar structure to those previously suggested by Drasdo (1998) and Morlock (1984). Following each quotation I have used a pseudonym to identify the participant. The name is consistent with the actual writer's gender but maintains anonymity. The number following the name refers to the number of months after the expedition's return when the quotation was written. In the following sections I describe post-expedition adjustment using four types of 'relationships' as a framework: self-self, self-other, self-natural environment, and self-education/career.

Self – Self

While it seems that for some there is a degree of grieving various aspects of the expedition experience, on initial return many seem to go through a period of adjusting their perspective. This appears to be in two primary themes. The first relates to tangible perspectives on objects while the second is more concerned with social adjustments and values. On immediate return some people recount stories of reflections on their belongings and on consumer culture:

When I returned from Greenland and had the nice warm bath I had been longing for I immediately wanted to go back. I looked at all the junk in my room and wondered what I used to do with it all, after all everything I needed for the last 6 weeks had fitted in to 65 litres. (Elizabeth: 6 months)

The second theme was considerably more common in the journals but broader in content and concerned with an adjustment of perspective on society. For some individuals it involved them adjusting their values and priorities, as is exemplified by this comment:

Life seemed boring and full of (although it sounds terrible) young people who had done nothing with their lives and valued Eastenders and alcohol as important in their lives. (Frances: 6 months)

This comment demonstrates how Frances developed a new perspective while away on the expedition but is cautious to judge the lives and values of others on return. The time on the expedition has led Frances to reassess her own values in light of others and changed somewhat during the expedition, hence the difficult readjustment. This is in line with findings by Kaplan and Talbot (1983, p.184) who reported 'increased ability to distinguish the significant from the trivial' as one aspect of the post-wilderness experience. Another individual clearly struggled with the adjustment and indicates that the expedition raised some 'meaning-of-life' questions:

I thought at one point maybe after Greenland I had actually lost the plot somewhere along the line – because a lot of normal teenage things lost importance. I finally figured I'm either crazy or the rest of the world is. Maybe that's a bit extreme but you get the gist. (Amanda: 12 months)

Clearly the expedition experience for Amanda was profound and perhaps a pivotal time in terms of personal and spiritual development. The timing of experiences in relation to personal and / or spiritual development is difficult if not impossible to 'measure'. MacIntyre (1981) would probably explain this adjustment of perspective as a loss of narrative. In this instance, narrative can be considered to be individual life story and the context within which that story is couched. In the comment above, Amanda is re-scripting

her interpretation of her past narrative and also 'willing' her future narrative. In other words she is reconsidering what her life is, and will be, about.

This readjustment phase on return may also be connected to authenticity. Taylor (1991) identified at least two senses of authenticity, the first of which was concerned with 'being true to one's essence of being'. It appears that during the expedition experience individuals may be exploring their essence of being and becoming more true to this. I am not suggesting that individuals would describe the expedition in these terms or that they would be aware that these changes were occurring during, and possibly some time after, the expedition. If individuals are coming to an awareness of their essence of being (the first sense of authenticity) during the expedition then on return it would seem reasonable that they must adjust. I say adjust something or some things because individuals can either adjust the environment in which they live in order to accommodate this authentic self or they can adjust the new authentic self in order to live in the home environment. It would be naïve to consider these as mutually exclusive options, rather they are two complementary approaches to explain the readjustment described by expedition members.

It seems that on returning to the home environment many expedition participants and explorers experience a struggle with the complexity of everyday life, the lack of clear purpose and cause and effect relationships which are so evident in the expedition environment (physical and social). This has been observed by many, but is particularly well articulated by Spencer Chapman in his account of *Watkin's Last Journey*, in 1931:

Many explorers have written of the intolerable period of reaction between expeditions. In our case we returned to civilisation full of enthusiasm and optimism, after a year of glorious life, to find a cynical, damping world, peopled mainly with business men, whose outlook was entirely different from our own. There were other difficulties too. Out in Greenland we had led a life of complete freedom, hunting, and contriving with all the joy of a Robinson Crusoe, and at the same time feeling that our work was of real value. Everything we did had some tangible object: if we shot a seal or seagull, we had it boiled for supper; a short sledge journey might disclose new mountain ranges; a captured insect might be new to science. But in England, after the joy of the first long-looked-forward-to bath and the reunion with old friends, everything tended to fall flat... Personally, I find the greatest difficulty in

getting any sleep for the first week after returning to England; after living so long for one object, more or less, life suddenly becomes so terribly complicated.

(Spencer Chapman, 1953, pp.14-15)

Self – Other

Friends from the expedition

Many participants reported that they missed the people on returning from the expedition but did so in different ways and suggested different reasons for missing them. For some participants this was the only aspect of post-expedition adjustment that they reported:

It wasn't really a struggle to adapt after the expedition, but I did miss the constant company of like minded people. (Edward: 12 months)

For others this was just one aspect of post-expedition adjustment, but one which was particularly difficult:

On a friendship level, the first four weeks back were very difficult, friends made in Greenland now seemed miles away and no amount of phone calls seemed to make them any nearer. (David: 6 months)

This comment is in the same vein as those that were articulated by a majority of participants who expressed difficulties in adjusting to the lack of company. The emotive nature of these difficulties can be seen in the next comment.

Since returning from the expedition I have found I am unable to read my diary because of the emotion and reflection it would bring, it may sound stupid but talking to other fire [group] members I'm not alone. Instead I prefer to talk to others and reflect from my memories. (Ian: 6 months)

This comment explains how Ian is proving the company of the two (group) and wants to be back with them within the emotionally safe environment. As a coping strategy for this he is choosing to reflect without the aid of prompts which are, at that time, too distressing. While Ian found

the absence of others to be a struggle at a very emotional level he also highlighted the physical absence of people that he had adjusted to being with all of the time:

Most of all you miss the company, you have been living in very close quarters with 15 people for so long and suddenly they are gone. (Jan: 6 months)

Many researchers have studied groups with an objective of creating models to articulate various stages of group development. The majority take a similar approach to Tuckman and Jensen (1977) who identified five stages known as forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. One way of interpreting the texts above (friends from the expedition) is within this framework. This would suggest the adjourning stage of group process, which is the time when group members acknowledge that they are returning to their home environment and some miss the deep level of connections and friendships which have been made. This is more difficult for those individuals for whom the group held emotional significance (Priest & Gass, 1997, p.64). The emotional significance is undoubtedly a contributory factor to the 'friends from the expedition' sub-theme and there are aspects of the individual texts which articulate the adjourning stage of group process. However, the adjourning stage in the Tuckman and Jensen model occurs towards the end of group experiences, as opposed to post-group experiences. Post-expedition adjustment, as the name suggests, refers to the time post expedition. Seen within this context the adjourning stage of group process is an important aspect of the expedition during which time leaders can prepare participants (and themselves) for the transition to the home environment and the features of post-expedition adjustment which may accompany this transition.

Friends at home

One aspect of adjustment on return is the adjustment of perspective in relation to friendships which are from the school and / or home environment.

After we all got back from Greenland it was strange being back with other people. (Helen: 6 months)

This 'strange' adjustment is described in more detail by others who report a difficulty in relating to their friends when they get back:

It took me a while to get to know my school friends again and I feel a little bit more distant from them than before except for June who was also on the expedition and another friend who applied but failed to get a place to Greenland. (Elizabeth: 6 months)

My friends have gradually become more interested in what I've been doing and now even applied to BSES this year. I remember that it took a while to adjust back to them but things are all back to normal now. (Elizabeth: 18 months)

It appears that people take a while to adjust back to their friends and to reconnect with them back in the home environment. This may be seen as a change or a need to develop further shared experiences and narrative together. Kaplan & Talbot (1983, p.184) describe this as the seeing of the 'superficiality in their friendships'. This realisation may be an important part of developing deeper relationships.

These comments demonstrate a benefit of the expedition in relation to friendships and the home community which could not be anticipated. The friendship has moved to another depth previously not experienced. It is possible to make a naturalistic generalisation regarding people experiencing difficulties in relating and adjusting to friendships on return to the home community. These friendships grow and are helped by the experience rather than 'damaged' or changed in ways which are negatively perceived by those involved.

Self – Natural Environment

The first aspect of this theme relates to grieving the natural environment, the intimate contact with the natural environment, and their relationship with that environment. The first, and not surprising, aspect of this is the grieving for the beauty of the environment. This is usually manifested in comments about 'awe and wonder' often only noticed on return to the UK:

I missed everyone a lot in the first few days back, it felt as if we were finally really getting to know each other after six weeks and then it was suddenly all finished.

I would have really liked to spend another six weeks there as there was so much to see and do that I felt we barely touched upon the surface of what has to be the most spectacular and beautiful area that I have ever been to. (Brian: 6 months)

While this theme appears in many people's comments it appears to be closely linked with comments describing the geographical space on the expedition and the comparison of this with the home community, so comments such as this are common:

Returning to Luton – a large and industrial town near London – was a bit of a shock. I noticed the distinct lack of air quality and the dreadful taste of water. I don't think that I quite appreciated the freshness of everything in Greenland (apart from the stale fruit & nut!). I do miss not being able to drink anywhere and having those absolutely mad baths. (Frances: 6 months)

This comment incorporates several different themes. At the beginning Frances refers to the natural environment and the change of this but this appears to be related to her own well-being, the 'dreadful taste of water' and the 'freshness of everything'. This is something that recurs in several individuals' writings – the relating of individual well-being to the natural environment. For Brian these adjustments were more concerned with physical adjustments which took time but were relatively painless:

I managed to get used to sleeping in a bed OK as soon as I got back, the comfort was so amazing that I fell straight to sleep without any problem though it was a little weird not having to crawl out of a tent. The main thing that took a little getting used to was the lack of space around and having to go to the bathroom instead of a boulder!! (Brian: 6 months)

For Elizabeth, the adjustment was more difficult and took longer:

I also noticed how still and quiet I was inside. For at least two weeks I slept with all my windows open. It took until October for me to stop waking up and thinking how odd it was that I wasn't at ground level! (Elizabeth: 6 months)

From this comment it appears not only that the adjustment has physical manifestations such as sleeping with the window open, but also that some of

the adjustment was related to the calming, perhaps spiritual, aspect of the environment of the expedition which leads to the 'still and quiet inside'.

It appears that there are at least two aspects to the grieving of the natural environment. First, the aesthetic aspects and second, the influence of the natural environment on the overall well being of the individual, whether this involves geographical space or, more simply, fresh air.

Self – Education / Career

Some people reported difficulties in adjusting back to the home environment which primarily related to school or university. For the majority this involved some difficulties in getting back into the habit of studying again and remaining motivated to study. Frances illustrates an example of this.

I was a little distracted in lessons remembering things we used to do. I also decided on taking a gap year and so couldn't be bothered with university predictions. It was a little worrying as I am normally over-conscientious. This lack of work continued until just before Christmas and then I thankfully snapped out of it. I worked hard in the holidays. Meeting everyone at the AGM somehow unmotivated me again but I feel that now I'm doing better than I ever have before. (Frances: 6 months)

In this comment it can be seen how Frances appears to have struggled to remain interested in school work. Once interest has been regained the AGM (when all of the expedition participants get together) has triggered the distraction and lack of motivation again. Frances offers some leads to explain why she was distracted:

I had to go to school three days after getting back. Almost immediately I was thrown into a uniform, a routine, small classrooms and lots of people who had no clue what I had experienced. I can honestly say that for the first few days I totally resented being put back in England. (Frances: 6 months)

For Frances it appears to have been difficult to adjust because of the change of routine and the structure which she had to fit into. There are several possible elements to consider; the first is the behavioural expectations. These include the uniform, the requirement to conform with

others and a routine which perhaps did not acknowledge her individuality and offer opportunity for self expression. Second, the 'small classroom' perhaps served to highlight the large amount of geographical space in the expedition environment. Finally, the lack of understanding of the people around her was a part of the difficulty in adjusting. That no one had a 'clue' may have led to a feeling of isolation and loneliness despite the relatively large number of people within that community.

Post-Expedition Adjustment: Summary and Implications

This paper has outlined four main categories that have emerged from the information regarding post-expedition adjustment. These categories are the self – self relationship, the self – other relationship (which has two sub-categories: *friends from the expedition* and *friends from home*), self – natural environment and, finally, self – education / career.

One final quotation helps to illustrate how various aspects of post-expedition adjustment 'fit' together and offers some insight into the complex multi-dimensional nature of adjustment:

It took me quite a long time to fully readjust. My parents had gone on holiday the day before I got back so I was 'home alone' for a week. Mum had stocked up all the cupboards before she had left, I remember standing for nearly an hour in the kitchen the following day trying to decide what to have for dinner. I also remember sleeping with the windows wide open all week. Being in the house on my own helped me readjust probably quicker than if my parents had been there. I lived away from home at University the year before, I find going back to my parents' home for any more than a week is quite difficult. I met most of my friends the day after I got back, I went into the pub brimming with confidence 'I've just got back from a major expedition' feeling. Nobody asked me how it was, nobody was really interested when I told them where I'd been. The big news was all about who 'got off' with who the night before. That's when I really landed, from the high of the expedition. When my parents returned I spent several days with them, then I got itchy feet and set off on my bike to cycle around Wales. I visited a couple of people from the expedition, I needed to talk. I returned to university a week or so later, I had to concentrate on work etc. For the first six weeks of term I felt that I didn't belong back in Bristol. I think that I had lost something to focus on, before the expedition I had got two things in my life to concentrate on, Uni, work and preparing for 'expedition. When the expedition had finished I had a huge

I still can not think what has filled it. I went to visit people from the expedition, luckily one of our fire doesn't live too far away, and several people live within a short train ride. We have had some really good reunions; I have spoken to someone from the expedition every week and seen someone virtually every other week. I think that we all needed to talk to each other because it is so difficult to talk to people, who didn't go, about the expedition. I think that I am now fully 'returned to 'normality' and I am focusing on new challenges ahead instead of dwelling on those in the past. Lots of new and exciting opportunities have come up since the expedition, ones that I might have ignored before. (Frank: 6)

In the initial stages of this comment it is clear to see the grieving for the natural environment and the adjustment which led to 'sleeping with the windows wide open all week'. Frank is then concerned with the adjustment to the friends at home, to the reintegration into the home community which was difficult (perhaps as a readjustment of perspective) and consideration of meaning of life questions, reflection on the values that have changed or been considered while on the expedition: 'The big news was all about who got off with who the night before. That's when I really landed, from the high of the expedition'. Following this it becomes clearer that some social grieving was taking place and he was missing the social environment of the group on the expedition, hence the cycling trip around Wales. Underlying some of this was the sense that 'they needed to talk'. This could be related to the second sense of authenticity which Taylor (1991) identified, as affirming ties to others and the development of self through dialogical relationships. Perhaps more negatively it can be interpreted as difficulty in adjusting to study on return which might be explained by the lack of an endeavour to complement study, hence the 'huge gap'. Frank appears to be grieving the preparation for the expedition as a reason for being and on return making a comparison to the time prior to the expedition when preparation complemented study. Underlying the entire quotation it is clear that the social aspects of the expedition were attributed great importance and that the absence of an immediate social network has been difficult to adjust to, hence he has 'spoken to someone from the expedition every week and seen someone virtually every other week'.

I have suggested that there are four primary arenas that post-expedition

career) and that these influences can be related to the philosophical term authenticity and issues of narrative suggested by Taylor and MacIntyre respectively. Through all of these themes it is also possible to see an element of grieving whether that be of the environment, of relationships with other people or time alone. This grieving process has been likened to post traumatic stress disorder (Gair, 1997) which has resulted in a negative conceptualisation of what is actually a positive aspect of the expedition experience.

While this research was based on an expedition it is likely that participants in residential in a number of different contexts could report similar experiences. It is possible to draw a number of conclusions from this which make suggestions for future practice. For example, provision of reunions post-experience may help participants to articulate their experiences with others in similar situations, help to enhance transfer of learning, and create a support network. It may also be beneficial to offer career guidance to those who have re-thought their career/education plans as a result of the expedition.

While some may associate post-expedition adjustment with negative experiences, there is an alternative interpretation of this phenomenon. That is, that post-expedition adjustment is an important developmental phase in the experiential learning process. Imagine the implications for individuals not reporting these 'symptoms'. In a sense, if there was no post-expedition adjustment we might question the level at which the experience has impacted on the individual. If experiential learning claims to impact on cognitive, emotional and behavioural levels ('head, heart and habit'), then surely there would be a period of transition after the experience that would cause some degree of turbulence. Post-expedition adjustment should be seen as a positive aspect of experiences as it is evidence of change and the stage during which individuals are working to accommodate those changes into their everyday lives.

The findings from this research are clearly linked to the methods used. By asking an open question seeking explanation and by employing participants as co-researchers, a rich, illuminative account of the young people's experiences was provided. Underpinning these findings and this method is an alternative way of constructing knowledge (a different epistemology) guided by an understanding of reality as a social construct (a different ontology).

By reconsidering epistemology and ontology thus we ask different kinds of questions about our work. Such questions can help us to understand the nature of experiential learning rather than simply prove 'it' works.