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A 20-year retrospective study of the impact of expeditions on Japanese participants

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While ‘lasting effects’ of outdoor experiences have been suggested, few empirical studies have traced influences more than one year after the experiences. This study examines the written responses of 67 Japanese expedition participants who took part in a British-organized overseas youth expedition 20–23 years ago, to investigate their perception of the influences of the experiences through a retrospective approach. The findings show that the vast majority of respondents (99%) considered their expedition experience to be significant in their lives, and 96% answered that this experience had influenced their present selves. The study also identified perceived key elements of the expeditions that generated the influences, such as a diverse group of people, age of participation, and the natural environment. The findings yielded two implications for practice. Organizers of overseas youth expeditions should carefully consider the social and cultural dimensions of the hosting nations as well as those of the participants. Reflection and sharing after the experiences seem to help the learning to grow, and it is worthwhile for practitioners to encourage networking and sharing among participants after programmes are completed.

1. Introduction

What constitutes ‘outdoor education’ has been constantly negotiated (Nicol, 2002; Parkin, 1998). In the UK, for example, where there has been a long tradition of adventure and exploration, the outdoor industry, both the commercial and non-profit sectors, has expanded since the 1950s (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993; Loynes, 1999; Nicol, 2002). Through their meta-analysis of studies to understand the impact of outdoor experiences on young people, Rickinson et al. (2004) cautiously report predominantly positive outcomes. How long the effects stay with the participants and whether these can be transferable to their future lives is, however, a matter of interest that has seen little attention (Gass, 1990; Kaplan & Talbot, 1983; Stott & Hall, 2003).

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Some projects such as those of Kennedy (1992) and Beames (2004a) were designed to assess the 'long-term' effects of the experiences. With a few exceptions, such as Daniel's (2005, 2006) study which provides a 25-year retrospective study of the significance of an American 20-day outdoor expedition programme, few other studies follow participants for more than one year after their experiences take place. However, 227 people who co-operated in Daniel's study went on an expedition at some point between 1976 and 2000, and while all the years of the programme were claimed to be represented in the study, it is not clear how many respondents actually looked back from 20–25 years. Hattie, Marsh, Neill and Richards (1997) highlight 'lasting influences' of adventure programmes with their meta-analysis of 96 studies, but their follow-up was over a mean of 5.5 months. Kaplan and Talbot (1984) also investigated the effects of outdoor adventure programmes on personal and social development such as self-concept and psychological benefits, and mention lasting benefits of wilderness experiences, but the time length they looked at was not specified and the extent of the durability was not scrutinized. Grey's (1984) work focuses on his questionnaires, given to Arctic Norway and Iceland expeditioners five and eight years, respectively, after their experiences. While the survey participants' accounts looking back on their own experiences were valuable, the author claims that the survey was 'originally done to satisfy my curiosity and was not particularly scientific in its approach' (p. 17).

The longitudinal perspectives from programme participants represent an obvious gap in the literature surrounding how outdoor education experiences are experienced and understood. To take a step towards filling the void, this study looks at a group of Japanese young people who participated in an Operation Raleigh (a London-based youth development charity) overseas youth expedition between 1984 and 1987, and asked the participants to reflect on their experiences dating back 20–23 years. The purpose of this work was to investigate the possible long-term effects of outdoor experiences through the participants' own words, focusing on their motivation to participate, their perceived influence of the experiences, and what elements they considered had led to the outcomes.

2. Overseas youth expeditions—Operation Raleigh

Some authors point out that British tradition and history, such as crusades, pilgrimages, apprenticeships and seafaring, have laid the foundation of and contributed to the modern concepts of outdoor education (Loynes, 1999; Williams, Higgins, Humberstone, & Loynes, 1998). Travel and exploration became a strong national tradition (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993; Williams et al., 1998). The first British overseas youth expedition organization to identify the educational values of exploration was the Public Schools Exploring Society founded in 1932, which later changed name and is known today as the British Schools Exploring Society (BSES) Expeditions. Operation Raleigh (OR), on the other hand, started their programmes in 1984. In 1992 OR changed its name to Raleigh International, along with a revision of the organizational structure, programme locations and contents, but the overall

goals and approach concerning youth expeditions seem unchanged (Institute for Public Policy Research [IPPR], 2009; Raleigh International, 2008). While much research was conducted in the field of outdoor education programmes in general, a handful of studies which specifically dealt with the British youth overseas expeditions include Kennedy (1992); Allison (2000, 2002); Stott & Hall (2003); Beames (2004a); Beames and Stott (2008); and Institute for Public Policy Research [IPPR] (2009). Allison's work involves a longitudinal perspective of two years after the expedition, with BSES writing letters and emails every six months for two years. Beames (2004a) observed and interviewed 14 British Raleigh International participants before and after the expeditions to Ghana as well as on site and 6 months later, and his work provided guidance for this study. Beames and Stott (2008) and IPPR (2009) also examine the impact of Raleigh International, and IPPR (2009) looks specifically at British ex-participants with disadvantaged backgrounds. The IPPR work is retrospective over 25 years, but like Daniel's (2006) study, the accounts are mixed from different years up to 2007 (IPPR, 2009) and the number of participants before 1992 is low.

During the time over which this project is focused, young people aged between 18 and 24 years from more than 10 nations gathered in certain locations to participate in OR programmes to engage in adventure, science, and community service for about 3 months. In addition to expeditions on a tall ship and a boat, a number of land-based expeditions were organized. These expeditions to different places in the world were called phases, and the youth applied for each phase to become 'venturers'. Under the patronage of Prince Charles, British forces were involved in staffing and organizing the project, including logistics and exploratory activities, and the military of the hosting nations supported the scheme. The young participants lived and worked in rural areas, going through three different projects during the expedition, each of which lasted for about three weeks. Each primary group comprised eight venturers, and two to four groups worked together on each project. The activities included studying saltwater crocodiles in Papua New Guinea, making a trekking path in Pakistan, investigating traces of ancient wall paintings in Australia and so on.

The scheme was international, but this study focuses on Japanese members and its society. When OR was introduced to Japan in 1984, the concept of outdoor education and youth development was not yet popular (Council for Outdoor & Nature Experiences, 2006). No organizations existed in Japan which dealt with youth overseas expeditions systematically, and while camping and western modes of outdoor activities had begun by mid-20th century as sports (National Camping Association Japan Leader Training Committee, 2006), the governmental document used the term 'outdoor education' for the first time only in 1996 (National Camping Association Japan Editorial Committee, 1998). According to the Ministry of Justice, the number of young people aged 20 to 24 years who went abroad for various reasons in 1984 was only 41% of those in 2005. One US dollar was worth 230 yen then, whereas it was around 105 yen in 2005. With the weaker yen, Japanese young people going abroad was not as common then as it is now, and the leaflet of OR in 1984 to call for applications emphasizes the international dimensions of the project.

3. Methodology and study participants

In order to further my understanding of how experiences from more than 20 years prior had influenced participants' lives, I drew from the Significant Life Experience (SLE) literature. SLE employs qualitative research methods to investigate personal history, as a means of determining how significant experiences may have influenced a person's self (Chawla, 1998; Sward, 1999; Tanner, 1998). SLE has begun asking environmental activists to recall what might have led them environmentally active. A number of authors question SLE researchers' conceptualization of a cause and effect relationship in terms of the experiences and being environmentalists (A. Gough, 1999; S. Gough, 1999; Payne, 1999), and Gough (N. Gough, 1999, p. 408) does not see SLE as 'a body of work' and prefers to locate them as individual studies.

This study does not intend to isolate specific instances of cause and effect, but rather is interested in more deeply understanding participants' own views of how their lives have been influenced by their expedition experience. It takes a standpoint that the respondents' accounts are based on their perceptions and how they construct their world. Nevertheless, this work has a common nature with SLE for the participants to review the impact of the long-past experiences on their present selves. SLE includes narrative inquiry, which is increasingly used in studies of educational experiences, not only environmental education. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state that 'the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world' (p. 2).

While SLE typically uses self-administered essay writing and interviews, this study chose a combination of multiple choice questions and a free writing section. This decision was influenced by the large number of possible study participants (around 100) and the hope that the questions might serve as prompts for recalling long-past experiences (Chawla, 1998), while at the same time providing opportunities for them to express themselves freely, without the constraints of a rigid questionnaire. This combined approach was also intended to encourage participation by those who were under time pressure in their work and private life.

Questions were built on the previous outdoor learning research outcomes with special attention to Beames' (2004a) work with the prospect of comparison between short and long-term effects, although different interpretations and nuances due to different languages cannot be avoided. On the other hand, the questions, accounts and analysis were all done by the same language (Japanese), which reduces a risk of misinterpretation by reason of language differences. The challenge is, of course, how to convey the work to wider audiences in English, which is a foreign language to the author, or outside Japanese society as this involves not only language translation but cultural/social aspects. The data collection and analysis was piloted and modified through the input of four former OR participants.

From 1984 to 1987, a total of 110 Japanese youth participated in the programme sponsored by an automotive technology supply company in Japan. They were chosen through three selection stages which included essays, physical examinations, and personal traits as well as their command of English, through an adventure camping

setting. Usually the participation was competitive: for example, 30 members were selected out of 1049 applicants in 1985. It should be noted that among the 110 Japanese participants, 20 were 'local venturers' during the Japan phase in 1987 and they did not go overseas.

Operation Raleigh organized 6 to 10 phases (expeditions at different sites in the world) every year, and several Japanese venturers participated in each one. However, usually each project on site had only one Japanese, with an exception of the Japan phase; and the majority of the participants came from the UK. The Japanese and non-Japanese ratio varied depending on phases; three Japanese among 20 venturers in Tonga/Fiji/Solomon Islands phase in 1986, and six Japanese in 200 venturers in Indonesian phase in 1987. A Japanese committee was dissolved in 1987 after the Japan phase was completed, and ex-participants formed a group (now called Earth Trek) to continue sending participants from Japan.

Earth Trek assisted with obtaining contact details for 98 of the 110 Japanese ex-participants. The questionnaires were sent by post, email and fax; they included overseas addresses, and repeated attempts were made to search for those with incorrect addresses and contact numbers. While the proportion of the 98 who actually received the questionnaires in some form was unknown, 67 (39 men, 28 women) replied (68%). Several follow-up sessions were conducted by telephone, emails and face-to-face interviews to confirm their writings or to explore their meanings. Data collection was carried out between December 2006 and February 2007. As the questionnaires consisted of multiple choices and open-ended questions, the analysis was mixed with both quantitative and qualitative aspects, and the computer-assisted qualitative analysis programme called 'TAMS Analyzer', the only option available to work with Japanese language on a Mac computer, was utilized to help to categorize data.

In terms of qualitative analysis, I followed the principle of 'constant comparative method' suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and reinforced by other researchers such as Burns (2000) and Silverman (2000). Qualitative analysis helped to identify themes outside the multiple choice questions as well as understanding the respondents' meanings at deeper levels. In order to conduct the member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I sent out the initial findings to the study participants for comments and verification.

The 67 respondents were 18 to 24 years old when they participated in OR 20 to 23 years ago, and had become 38 to 47 years old at the time of the data collection. The questionnaires had three sections. Section 1 asked personal details as well as acceptance of follow-up questions from the researcher. Section 2 was about present jobs and other activities in life, and section 3 consisted of the main questions about their motivation for participation, and its perceived influence. Those questions in section 3 had multiple answers to choose from, and at the same time, the respondents were encouraged to freely express any linked thoughts by writing. The questions in section 3 are inserted as an Appendix to this paper. The quotes are originally in Japanese and translated into English for this paper by the author, and pseudonyms were used in the text.

Naturally, there are weaknesses and limitations associated with the research design. First, the respondents were self-selected and may have had strong feelings towards their experiences. This may influence their accounts in order to make their experiences seem impressive. Second, the OR participants were chosen through highly competitive selection procedures, as opposed to random youth samples in Japan. Social and cultural influences are embedded in the data, and an attempt has been made to interpret and explain these subtle but crucial influences wherever possible.

4. Findings

4.1. Motivation of participation

When participants were asked what made them want to take part in the expedition, the response ‘expectation of their own growth’ (78%) was on top of the list from the multiple selection of statements, followed by ‘attracted by the themes of adventure, science and service’ (69%), ‘wanted to go abroad’ (60%), ‘interested in living and working with non-Japanese’ (46%) and ‘it would be helpful to find a job or what I want to do in life’ (19%). In the particular statement ‘helpful to find a job or what I want to do in life’, four people who chose it intentionally crossed out ‘a job’ from the sentence.

Some 43 of 67 respondents elaborated their reasons in writing. About 32% of those who described details said they had unspecified expectations as it ‘looked interesting’. About 28% of those who elaborated presented another reason which was not in the selection list; ‘to reflect on self and think about life ahead’. Several respondents wrote that OR participation actually worked against finding a job in a company.

The analysis of the written accounts suggests that ‘own personal growth’ includes an expectation of challenges of experiences abroad—unknown places, the natural environment and life with other international youth. While not many chose ‘helpful to find a job or what I want to do in life’ among the statement selection, it became clear that quite a few had motivation linked to finding a direction for life centred in their future work. Four respondents said that they were attracted by a catchphrase on the OR leaflet, developed by an advertising agency, and this implies that these phrases have contributed to the amorphous expectation to feel ‘this looks interesting’.

In summary, the principal motivation of participation for OR is personal growth and exploration of potential through challenges and working with foreign young people in natural or unfamiliar environments. While not necessarily linked to ‘finding a job’, quite a few suggested that they expected to clarify life direction with an idea of the career fields and nature of future work. Many also answered that it looked interesting without specifying reasons. The written accounts show that each participant decided to participate for multiple reasons of their own, which corresponds clearly with Beames’s (2004a) findings.

4.2. Learning and influences

4.2.1. Learning centred around diverse community. Concerning the perceived influence of the participation, they were asked 'What do you consider you have learnt, gained and got influenced through OR participation?'. From the multiple choice selection, 81% of the respondents chose 'international understanding/cultural diversity/global perspectives', and 70% chose 'influence on values and worldviews', followed by 'friends, network of people' for 63%. The following were chosen by nearly 50% of the respondents; 'understanding of surroundings of self and society that one is part of', 'ability to take action', 'teamwork', 'willingness to challenge something new or difficult', 'way of looking at oneself', and 'confidence'.

The lowest score was 9% for 'advantage of finding a job', corresponding with their non-expectation prior to the expedition mentioned in section 4.1. The respondents explained that going away during the period when they were supposed to look for a job did not help, as Japanese society places those who take longer than four years at university at a distinct disadvantage compared to those graduates who have not taken additional time to embark on non-academic learning experiences. They also suggested from their job interview experiences that companies did not put value on such experiences as OR. In the UK, the participants tend to think that OR or Raleigh International participation added a value to their profile and raised their prospects of finding a job (Beames, 2004a). This clearly demonstrates a cultural or customary difference between the UK and Japan.

More than one-half of the respondents elaborated on what they learnt, gained and how they were influenced by the experiences. These accounts showed that the respondents interpreted the multiple choice statements in many different ways, and that they weighed selected elements differently among themselves as explained in the following. The free writing section provided an opportunity to explain what they meant by what they chose in the multiple choice section.

The main learning themes which emerged from the written accounts were: self, humanity and behavioural guidelines in life; culture and society; communication (relationship with others beyond differences); human-nature relationships and values. Some of the themes such as 'self': and 'relationship with others' match with the previous works on impact of overseas youth expeditions (Allison, 2000, 2002; Beames, 2004a). The new category offered from this study is 'humanity and behavioural guidelines in life', which includes observations concerning the nature of humans, and principles such as 'We have many things fundamentally in common as humans beyond the differences in languages and birth environments' (Junko).

In this study many respondents described their findings concerning human-nature relationships such as 'The biggest change in my heart was the feeling that humans are let to live by the earth' (Futa), and 'I recognised that death was waiting for me if I made one step out of this ship. I felt that human existence was trivial, and at the same time I felt the preciousness of life' (Hitomi). Kaplan and Talbot (1983) assert that central to the wilderness experience is 'a sense of awe and wonder' (p. 194). When these Japanese went on OR in the 1980s, the world highlighted environmental

issues such as climate change far less than at present. Few accounts were found that suggested that the respondents were concerned about environmental issues before they participated. This study suggests that the OR experience brought environmental awareness to many of the respondents or in some cases broadened their environmental understanding. As one participant reported:

While working in the protected area of tropical forest in Indonesia, the overwhelming power of nature and local people's wisdom and genuine traits made me think of human-nature relationships as well as influence of civilization and development to the natural environment (Mina).

Allison's (1998) findings among British young people who experienced Greenland through BSES include environmental awareness and appreciation. Other researchers support environmental concern and awareness as possible effects of outdoor learning depending on the programme design and approach (Haluza-Delay, 1999; Higgins, 1996; Martin, 1999; McIntyre & Roggenbuck, 1998). However Beames (2005) finds 'no evidence of an altered appreciation or awareness of environmental issues' (p. 19) among 14 British young people who went to Ghana through Raleigh International. Environmental outcomes were not found to be significant in the more recent reports on Raleigh's impact either (Beames & Stott, 2008; IPPR, 2009). Possible explanations would be that the young people had a high level of awareness concerning the environment prior to the participation, or that their wilderness experiences, including the condition of the expedition location, were not sufficient to influence their environmental views. Alternatively, the environmental dimensions were not sufficiently emphasized or built into the purposes of the expedition.

Outdoor education programmes vary among themselves in terms of main purpose, duration, approach, contents, physical setting of activity sites and living place; and findings of research into their impact differ greatly, based on the main focus, research design and methods taken. Although the five pieces of research above all look at British youth overseas expeditions (Allison, 2000; Beames, 2004a; Beames & Stott, 2008; IPPR, 2009; Stott & Hall, 2003), one should not discuss the results without caution. None the less, closer attention to what brought the different outcomes in terms of environmental awareness among these studies and this investigation may generate suggestions to overall programme designs depending on their purposes.

What stands out in this study concerning learning is a dimension linked to cultural and language differences among peers. Based on the symbolic interaction perspective Beames (2005, p. 18) suggests that interactions with the different attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of their fellow group members provide opportunities to learn about one's self. Along this line, being in a minority without much English language command seems to have played a significant role in their experiences. The following are some of numerous accounts generated from such conditions.

I learnt about 'a white society', especially discriminations and class consciousness among them (Jin).

I painfully recognised how necessary the command of English is, and how important it is to state one's opinion. Also I realised Europeans (particularly British) think differently and carry different value systems from Asians (Leo).

I gained confidence that I could contribute to a team using necessary skills such as mountaineering and tree climbing even if I could not take the leadership in language (Moto).

(OR provided learning experience) because I was a minority, and I engaged in activities which were foreign to me both in language and in their way of life (Lika).

One participant provided a long account of what he had learnt, and some comments included being a non-English speaker. According to him, at the beginning of the expedition held in Chile, some items were issued by English announcements and done on a first come, first served basis. He wrote:

Therefore while English and Americans acquired proper goods, non-English speakers only received so-called 'plastic', thin materials just like garbage bags in Japan. During the first half of the phase, non-English speakers including myself lay on the ground, trying to avoid rain and dew using the plastic. There were many occasions like this, and though I did not want this to happen, we naturally tended to do things in separate racial groups, with some exceptions, of course, and a Euro-American group, a local Spanish language group, and an Asian group lived separate lives (Yuji).

Yuji added that he regretted failing to 'build relationships beyond nationalities', but this experience was helpful when he was shifted to work abroad by his company later in his life. He also commented that many other Japanese venturers in his year reported their struggles with English, and he was not an exception. He offered an instance that he could not utilize his expertise of civil engineering in one project because of his language barrier. Despite his frequent claims on problematic engineering of the proposed design, in the end he only contributed as a mere labourer, to carry out woods from the site, because he could not make himself understood properly. He expressed this as 'a bitter experience', but claimed that this case inspired him to continue reflecting on what leadership is.

The respondents have lived and worked in an unfamiliar environment as an ethnic minority, together with British nationals and other cultures, in a group using a non-native language. This situation seemed to offer the Japanese venturers an opportunity to develop mutual understanding beyond differences, acquire international perspectives and communication skills beyond languages, and to question their values and world views.

4.2.2. Learning from difficult experiences. In addition to learning through living in diverse groups, their learning also came from physically and mentally difficult experiences. Their accounts show that their learning went beyond just an experience: 'It was like living in a different dimensional world in an abnormal environment. I realised that ultimately what matters in life is mental and physical strength' (Kei), 'I nearly died from malaria' (Yae).

However, the respondents added that they gained and learnt from these difficulties. For example, one person wrote, 'We needed to continue living and working often in

tremendously poor surroundings' and said 'such experiences with hardship have expanded my capacity to bear difficulties, and I believe they have broadened my activities as a result. For instance, by thinking this is much better than at that time of OR, I often overcome poor environments at work without much stress' (Ryuji). Even a person who claimed to have nearly died from malaria wrote that this experience allowed him to learn to distinguish what is trivial and what is not in life. Another respondent said OR provided 'experiences I would not dare to do of my volition, therefore it was very beneficial. It was so profound that it took time for me to digest and truly appreciate' (Ryutaro). Yuji expressed these 'negative experiences' with learning outcome as follows.

The OR to me is well beyond 'good experiences, thank you'. It provided me a significant opportunity to think about life much more deeply. The both positive and negative experiences through this project made my life after that very positive and motivated with richness (Yuji).

Throughout the period, Yuji said he had questioned 'Isn't this whole thing an exploration game by developed nations?'. He claimed that this thought led him to have critical perspectives and deepened his own learning and awareness. As mentioned in 4.2.1., he regretted the situation whereby they flocked to each other in different ethnic groups, but that experience was very useful when he worked abroad later in his life. He also mentioned a lack of food during the first half period, and that he literally did eat anything possible, with certain concerns about diseases. He asserted that his experience of near starvation and an awe of nature have helped him overcome almost anything that happened in his private or work life afterwards.

The principle of personal development through exposure to an unfamiliar and hostile environment and physically demanding programme has gained a wide acceptance in the UK (Loynes, 1999; Parker & Meldrum, 1973). While Brookes (2003) offers critical views, writing that adventure education does not necessarily develop personal traits and it is a fallacy to believe some dispositions remain consistent in diverse situations, some respondents in this study positioned difficulties as learning sources. However, considering that learning naturally occurs from hardship could be problematic, because this may leave learners with the sole responsibility of learning, setting the programme design aside.

The relationship between learning and difficult experiences, as well as critical insights on the expedition, will be revisited later in the paper.

4.2.3. Significance of experiences and linkage with current self. To reflect on what happened 20–23 years ago is difficult. It is even more difficult to identify how those experiences a long time ago are linked with one's present self, not only because of the time that has passed but also because a person's growth and development is not linear, and it is problematic to attribute their progression to one thing. Learning and growth involve various external factors which interact with inner factors over time. Therefore, as noted earlier, this study does not claim the stated linkage by respondents as 'truth'. The nature of self-reporting of the study participants also poses limitations.

The respondents described in their own words what sort of experiences generated what kind of awareness, and to what part of the present they perceive these influences are connected. This work focuses on an individual's understanding about self and experiences; as Bruner (1987) states, a life is 'how it is interpreted and reinterpreted' (p. 131).

When asked to rate a level of significance of OR with respect to their lives, 98.5% respondents (all except one) said the participation in OR was significant. The breakdown was: 'very significant (73.1%)'; 'rather significant (25.4%)'; 'rather non-significant (1.5%)'; 'non-significant (0%)'.

In response to the question 'Do the OR experiences have something to do with your current job, other activities, attitudes to life, way of thinking and so on?', 95.5% said 'yes', 3% (two people) said 'no', and 1.5% (one person) said 'hard to decide'. (There was no option 'hard to decide', but the respondent created it.) Everyone who answered 'yes' to this question elaborated from one line to several pages on how the experiences some 20 years ago connected to the present. Twenty-seven accounts described the linkage with respective current work and other activities, and while some suggested a direct link, more respondents said that the experiences influenced attitudes towards work and their way of working. For example:

I currently work for a foreign capital corporation and when I need to solve problems based on different habits among different nationalities, I can take action believing that people *can* understand each other no matter what sort of situations they are in (Jiro).

As during the time of OR, current work requires me to take the initiative to organize things, which naturally leads me to think about responsibility for work and the other people involved. I sometimes think that it is the influence of the OR experiences that enables me to maintain my work independently in many ways. When I think of it, applying for OR was my first decision in life under my own 100% responsibility (Midori).

Fifty-one respondents elaborated on how their experiences in the past influenced a way of life and values. Some accounts are philosophical, such as, 'One would survive and continue to stay alive once one is prepared for the worst. This confidence has remained in my mind since my experiences, and influenced my decision-making on various occasions in life' (Shinichi). Comments concerning values included 'I began to question a tendency to judge a person by one's societal title, income and job. I continue to believe so as I realised the meaninglessness of monetary values in that jungle' (Haru), 'I strongly feel that "working" is not only gaining bread but also "contribution or paying back" to a society and people who nurtured myself' (Mina). These comments also reveal what they considered the OR experiences were about.

The accounts shown in this section are examples that the participants became aware of differences and accepted diversities. In addition, they also seem to have explored commonalities as humans free from constraints of nationality or language. The analysis shows that while hardly any respondents considered that participation in OR would help them find a job, in the end many were influenced by the values and attitudes to life which impacted their direction of work and of life.

Two people said that the OR experiences have no link to their present, but they answered a question about learning and influences from OR as well as the reason for the influences in a later section. In addition they also answered the impact of OR to be 'relatively significant'. As they both did not accept additional clarifying questions, further analysis was not possible. One can only speculate that they considered that the experiences provided certain learning and influences and it was rather a big event in life, but the experiences did not have perceived direct links to a current job or a way of life. The other respondent who said it was 'hard to decide' whether the OR experiences have any link to the current self, did not reply to a further question from the researcher to elaborate on this.

One person said 'yes' to the link between the past experiences and current life with the proviso that OR *per se* was not the sole influence to his present self, but every experience would count, and that one gets nurtured internally over time and OR was part of this process. This respondent said that the influence from OR did not change her way of life because she had had outdoor and repeated overseas experiences previously. This respondent added that OR's projects were poorly organised and there was insufficient consideration of the social aspects of the hosting country and population. The ethical aspect of overseas youth expeditions has been flagged by some researchers as an issue of serious consideration (Allison & Higgins, 2002), and this study has shown that there were some participants who felt uncomfortable from a social and ethical perspective and that some aspects of the projects may have been unjustified.

4.3. *Critical elements which caused the perceived influences*

As already seen, a large percentage of the respondents considered that OR experiences offered learning and generated certain lasting influences on their life for at least 20 years and more. The respondents provided their views on which particular elements of the experience had elicited these influences.

From the multiple choice questions, the top three are 'living and working together with people from different backgrounds' (94%), 'age in participating' (81%) and 'the living and activity in the wild environment' (70%), followed by 'challenging experiences' (57%), 'activity contents' (52%), 'new or unique experiences' (46%), 'integration with later experiences in life' (39%), and 'staff and instructors' (28%). Some wrote that all or several of these combined generated an influence.

In the written section of the same question, 34 respondents elaborated their thoughts, and the newly emerged themes were; 'organisation of the programme' and 'reflection and sharing after returning home'. 'Organisation of the programme' includes the period of three months of the expedition, which, according to the accounts provided, was not too long or too short in order to get serious about the projects (rather than feel like a tourist) and to engage in activities to cause holistic influence. Moreover, two respondents mentioned that daily schedule and activities were not rigidly structured and afforded the participants a certain freedom to make plans on their own. They said that the flexible operation required them to think, judge and act by themselves in a changing situation. Some respondents pointed out

that the full sponsorship of Japanese participation was critical for OR to influence their lives. As a comment below suggests, they might have appreciated anything because these experiences were 'given free' to them rather than their raising the funds required to participate in the programme.

The environment which allowed personal challenge was naturally plotted. I mean the system was set up so that if the project did not go as planned or was unsatisfactory, that in itself became a 'text' of lessons. Moreover unlike participants from other nations, Japanese were given an opportunity to participate without cost. Personally I took it as a 'scholarship', and this may be a big reason that I do have strong feeling to pay back to society in some way or another. If I paid by myself, I might have been very dissatisfied with things that did not go as I hoped or some poorly operated activities (Kazu).

These accounts offer interesting discussion regarding the programme design and learning. Would Kazu's comment above imply that the expedition could be very poor but still educational and offer a learning experience? As shown in section 4.2.2., the study participants seem to take hardship positively, after all, and some commented that negative experiences were a source of their learning. However it is not known whether the organisers offered these conditions and experiences from an educational intention based on the purposefully structured learning framework. The fine line between adventure and misadventure, educational and 'non-educational' has been discussed (Gilbertson, Bates, McLaughlin, & Ewert, 2006; Mortlock, 1984), but to what degree can educators determine where this line falls? Is the line universal and therefore applicable to anyone from anywhere? There is no set of rules defining how individuals interpret certain experiences, and how far the expedition can go in order to be labelled 'educational'.

This discussion would not exempt programme providers from a responsibility to do their best to deliver learning if a person's development is their aim. While most study participants seem to appreciate their OR experiences as shown in section 4.2, some provided critical views of the expeditions. One respondent thought it was a shame that the project was supported by the hosting nation's military government, commenting that 'I feel very sorry for having done half-play activities while local people were having a hard life' (Jumi). Other comments similar to this in nature were also presented, such as a question of 'isn't this exploration game for developed nations?' shown in an earlier section. These comments urge further inquiry to look at overseas expeditions and any other programmes abroad from the perspective of the host countries, as well as that of participants from other nations.

As for the critical factors for influences, the study outcome showed that the element of human or diverse community is by far the most crucial, which resonates with previous work of Beames (2004b) and Beames & Stott (2008), but what seems to be unique to this study is the element of 'time'. Retrospectively 80% of the respondents agreed that it was the particular stage of their lives which made the experience more influential; their accounts suggest that the influence became more meaningful and lasting upon reflection and sharing with others after returning home, as well as by connecting to later life experiences. The analysis also shows that not all the respondents were aware of the influences and learning at the time of participation.

Some studies seem to imply that effects from outdoor learning could increase on the participants returning to their home environments (Hattie et al., 1997); and Daniel (2006) states in his study that for one-third of all study participants the significance of the experience had increased over time (p. 2). While on-going effects after the experiences requires more research (Neill & Richards (1998), resonating with Daniel's (2006), this study identifies that two key factors bringing about experiential learning, and enhancing its significance, are the timing of the event in participants' lives, the opportunity for reflection, including later connection with other life experiences, and sharing the experiences with others afterwards. Cognitive psychology offers a supportive framework for learning processes which stress that learning requires interaction with prior experience in order to make sense (Bruner, 1966). Other experiential education literature support the idea that learning is a process rather than an end-product, and that learning from experience should lead to further learning (Dewey, 1973; Kolb, 1984).

A number of researchers (Gair, 1997; Hopkins & Putnam, 1993; Huckle & Sterling, 2001; Kolb, 1984; Surtees, 2000) have suggested that reviewing and reflection are important aspects of experiential learning and influence future actions. On the other hand, as Beames's (2004a) work suggests, even if the programme does not accommodate a structural reflection or sharing sessions, personal interaction during and after the programme among participants and staff, in addition to sharing with others outside the expeditions.

To reinforce this argument, in returning to the feedback of this study, several respondents included extra notes saying 'this questionnaire helped me reconsider the meanings and importance of the OR experiences'. Such comments suggest that this study itself may have encouraged them to reflect on past experiences, which they would not usually think about, and led them to explore how they became who they are. Personal significant experiences may deepen their values whenever one takes time to reflect on them, and this study reaffirmed the importance of reflection and sharing of the experiences for learning to become conscious.

The one paragraph summary of the reported critical elements which caused the perceived influences is this: living and working together with diverse people for 3 months in their young age, away from their usual environment. The respondents considered that the life and activities under a physically and socially difficult environment led to a deep level of understanding and learning. Several participants stated that the flexible way of operating on site, and the fully sponsored participation helped learning. Moreover, some reaffirmed that reflection or sharing after coming back home contributed to enhanced significance and improved awareness of the learning which had taken place.

5. Summary and conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of OR experiences in the long term, and to investigate from the participants' own voices what they felt they had learnt and its impact on their lives 20 years later. The study employed a methodology

based on the Significant Life Experience literature to investigate personal history, and to determine significant experiences which have influenced the current self. A combination of multiple choice questions and free writing questionnaires from 67 expedition participants from between 1984–1987 was examined.

The vast majority of the study respondents seem to perceive that their participation in OR was a major event in life. They have learnt from their experiences, which have influenced their current self in both values and attitudes towards work. The perceived critical elements which generated the lasting influences seem to be a combination of various aspects, but living and working with diverse people seems to have played an important role to the study participants.

The findings imply that organizers of youth overseas expeditions should carefully consider the social and cultural dimensions of the hosting nations as well as those of the participants. As reflection and sharing after the experiences seems to help the learning grow, it is worthwhile for practitioners to encourage networking and sharing among participants after programmes. While this study revealed that many respondents positioned the difficult experiences as a learning source, finding out the mechanisms for experiences to be ‘educational’ in the long-term requires further research. Moreover, the social situation in Japan at that time clearly had an influence on the study findings, and this study reaffirms the importance of cultural and social perspectives on the long-term influences of research.

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Appendix

Questionnaire: Section 3 [Questions regarding your Operation Raleigh experiences]

1. What were your motivations to participate in Operation Raleigh?
2. What do you consider you have learnt, gained and been influenced by through OR participation?
3. Do you consider that the OR experiences have something to do with your current job, other activities, attitudes to life, way of thinking and so on?
4. What elements do you think may have generated such influences in questions 2 and 3?
5. How significant in your life do you consider your participation in OR?
6. Do you want present-day youth to experience similar educational programmes?