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Winter course experience: Towards a wider understanding of a dramaturgy approach

Jakub Svoboda[1,*], Adéla Dvořáčková[1], Miroslava Jirásková[2], Michaela Bolcková[3], and Petra Majewská[3]

[1]Faculty of Physical Culture, Palacký University Olomouc, Olomouc, Czech Republic; [2]Faculty of Education, Palacký University Olomouc, Olomouc, Czech Republic; and [3]Faculty of Arts, Palacký University Olomouc, Olomouc, Czech Republic

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Background: Dramaturgy is a specific method of course design and conduct used in experiential education in the Czech Republic. However, little is known about how the application of dramaturgy affects participants in experiential education. This paper explores dramaturgy in a winter expeditionary course organized by Vacation School Lipnice and participants' experience. **Objective:** Firstly, to explicate how the dramaturgy was used to design and conduct a winter expeditionary course by Vacation School Lipnice. Secondly, to explore the participants' experience. **Methods:** Content analysis was employed, using data from twelve unstructured interviews made with the course participants. **Results:** Four main themes representing participants' experience emerged from the interviews: a) inner self-experience, reflecting on life; b) relationships with others; c) nature; and d) embodiment and physical demands. These four underlying aspects have turned out to be relevant to the course dramaturgy in a number of ways. Considering the dramaturgy of the course, the main theme of the course was a pilgrimage not only to certain goal, but also to oneself. This theme was transformed into a practical programme of a long winter journey on snowshoes. **Conclusions:** The dramaturgy approach was found useful in the design of the experiential education course, positively contributing to the participants' experience.

Keywords: experiential education, winter course, dramaturgy, qualitative approach

Introduction

The object of inquiry in this study is the winter outdoor course of Vacation School Lipnice (VSL) called *Život je gotickej pes*[1] (*Life is a Gothic Dog*), and, more specifically, its last two years (2011 and 2012), the main content of which was a journey on snowshoes. The paper examines the dramaturgy approach used in the course and the experiences of participants. The concept of dramaturgy in a wider context is introduced.

Experiential education in the Czech Republic

The use of the term *experiential education* is justified because, in the Czech context, this term has a specific meaning due to its historical development, which significantly differs from the meaning used by the Association for Experiential Education (AEE) or from the meaning used in wider international contexts. Nevertheless, the term is a literal translation of the Czech term *zážitková pedagogika*, the concept of which implies that outdoors is not the only viable environment and that adventure education is not the only means of personal development. Czech experiential education is unique with its use of dramaturgy (described later) and its purposeful use of games (R. Hanuš & Chytilová, 2009). Every course typically has its unique dramaturgy, so there are never two courses conducted with an identical course design.

The historical perspective of the Czech method of experiential education has been described at various occasions (Kudláček, Bocarro, Jirásek, & R. Hanuš, 2009; Martin, 2001b; Martin, 2011; Martin, Franc, & Zounková, 2004; Martin, Turčová, & Neuman, 2007;

* Address for correspondence: Jakub Svoboda, Department of Recreology, Faculty of Physical Culture, Palacký University Olomouc, třída Míru 117, 771 11 Olomouc, Czech Republic. E-mail: jakub.svoboda01@upol.cz

[1]The name *Život je gotickej pes* can be literally translated as *Life is a Gothic Dog*. The name is a somewhat Dadaist expression, which does not make much sense, even in Czech. In any case, participants of the course identify themselves as *Gothic Dogs* and seem to be proud to belong to the pack.

Turčová, Martin, & Neuman, 2005). The origin of the recent concept of experiential education in the Czech Republic is represented by the non-profit organisation Vacation School Lipnice, a Czech member of Outward Bound International. In the last 20 years, experiential education in the Czech Republic has been a developing field in both educational practice and academia (R. Hanuš, 2008). A specialised journal for experiential education exists, *Gymnasion*, which generally focuses on the theory and practice of experiential education and to certain extent empirical research as well.

Previous research related to the Czech approach towards experiential education

Thomas, Allison, and Potter (2009) note that between the years 1998 and 2007, there was a limited number of articles from non-English speaking countries in significant journals of related fields of experiential education, outdoor education and adventure education (AJOE, JAEOL, and JEE). A few articles concerning the Czech approach towards experiential education are available. Turčová et al. (2005) focused on terminology in experiential education, and Kudláček et al. (2009) discussed inclusive approaches in the framework of Czech experiential education. Neuman, Turčová, and Martin (2013) summarized Czech research in outdoor experiential education.

Andrew Martin was involved in VSL's international course *Intertouch* as a both participant and instructor. His experience resulted in a mixed-methods dissertation research (Martin, 2001b) and in several papers dealing with the dramaturgy approach in course design (Martin, 2001a, 2011; Martin, Leberman, & Neill, 2002). Finally, the first English language book concerning the Czech approach was published (Martin et al., 2004). It was greatly appreciated by the Czech community and awarded the "act of the year" by VSL. The book contributed to the slow process of acceptance of the Czech approach at the international level that began with VSL's affiliation with Outward Bound International in 1991. The book was reviewed in AJOE (Lugg, 2005) and JEE (Maher, 2006) and seemingly well received as "excellent and inspiring in itself" (Maher, 2006, p. 298). Unfortunately, the reviewers seemed to have misunderstood the concept when commenting on the "'unreal', fantasy setting of the dramaturgy programme" (Lugg, 2005, p. 61); when associating the dramaturgy arch solely with the "ebb and flow" of the dramaturgy wave (Lugg, 2005, p. 60); or when quoting that the aim of the dramaturgy approach is "to produce a programme which will stimulate self-development, rather than one that will fulfil a prescribed course objective" (Martin et al., 2004, p. 18) without any further explanations of the context in which the statement might be valid. Andrew Martin, regardless of all the misconceptions and misunderstandings concerning his work, satisfactorily introduced the models of the five stages of dramaturgy and the dramaturgy wave (Martin, 2001a) and identified the key elements of the experiential education process, such as the course objectives, course design, learning environment, and participants & instructors (Martin, 2001b). Andrew Martin's contribution created a background for further discussion concerning the Czech approach and its possible research. However, his understanding of dramaturgy is limited due to his participation in a single type of courses (summer international course that uses mainly games). Andrew Martin emphasises the concept of the dramaturgy wave (Martin, 2001a), used to balance the physical, creative, social, and reflective aspects of the course. However, this is a rather limited view of the dramaturgy approach. We argue that current understanding of dramaturgy based on the work of Andrew Martin is not sufficient. In the following chapter the concept of dramaturgy is introduced in its wider context and stressing the thematic and conceptual side of dramaturgy. Also the description of the dramaturgy used at the winter course is helpful to understand dramaturgy in wider context.

The concept of dramaturgy in its wider context

The term dramaturgy originated in theatre and it is understood as the art or technique of dramatic composition and theatrical representation (Shantz, 1998). When considering a role of a dramaturg in a theatre Rossiter et al. (2008, p. 280) stated: "In conventional theatrical terms, a dramaturg can be categorized as an intellectual designer, or a member of the production team who is concerned with the manner in which the ideas, themes and concepts of a play are represented." In this light dramaturgy can be seen as a work with ideas, themes and concepts of a play.

In the context of experiential education, dramaturgy is a holistic method of course design (Martin et al., 2002) used in the Czech approach towards experiential education. Allan Gintel, the founder and first director of VSL, introduced the term when reflecting on the way the courses were designed and organised. He understood dramaturgy in an extremely practical way:

> First of all the dramaturgy is a practical creative activity, which penetrates through all the areas, which in the ultimate way constitutes the program and the atmosphere of the event. Dramaturgy is also the key and decisive function, a kind of defence of leading ideas, ability to sensitively and carefully listen to needs, interests and ideas of future participants (Gintel, 1982, p. 7).

Similarly to Gintel, Paulusová (2004, p. 85) understood dramaturgy in terms of "searching for themes and working with them". When considering dramaturgy as penetrating all the activities related to the programme design Paulusová (2004) stated that dramaturgy:

> Significantly influences the form and the quality of the whole course even though it is dispersed in the scenario and in the course itself. We can feel it everywhere, in the whole form. And at the same time it is ungraspable (p. 86).

In conclusion, dramaturgy is based on working with ideas and themes and penetrates the whole programme design of a course.

Ota Holec, the second director of VSL following after Gintel, created a classical definition of dramaturgy, which was included in a book for the internal training of VSL instructors and became a cornerstone for any further considerations. He stated: "Dramaturgy is a method used to plan, select and then order the individual activities and other events with the goal of maximising the final course effects" (Holec, 1994, p. 37). Dramaturgy can be further understood as "a characteristic of a certain course - it reflects the course time schedule and programme conception, proportions and preferences of particular programme areas, and last but not least, the choice of specific programmes" (Holec, 1994, p. 37).

In conclusion, our understanding of dramaturgy is based on the work of authors as Gintel (1982), Paulusová (2004) and Holec (1994). We understand dramaturgy as both a method of course design and a characteristic of a certain course. Dramaturgy is both theoretical and practical work with ideas, themes and concepts that penetrates all activities connected with program design. It is an organic part of the whole course; it can not be separated from the final form of the course.

Research aims and research questions

According to the review of literature introduced above there are missing some accounts dealing with the dramaturgy of winter courses together with the experiences of participants. In order to fill the existing research gap following research aims and research questions were formulated.

There are two main aims of our research: the first aim is to explicate how the dramaturgy approach was used to design and conduct the course *Život je gotickej pes* in 2011 and in 2012. The second aim is to explore participants' experience. Two research questions emerge in this context: How exactly was the dramaturgy approach used at the course *Život je gotickej pes*? What did the participants experience during the course? The first aim is fulfilled in the next chapter concerning the dramaturgy of the project *Život je gotickej pes*. The second aim is fulfilled in the "Results" section.

Project *Život je gotickej pes* and its dramaturgy

Project *Život je gotickej pes* (*Life is a Gothic Dog*) is one of twenty winter courses that were organised by VSL, and having been conducted eight times, it is the course with the highest number of repetitions (M. Hanuš, 2011). Since the first year in 2000 the course has gone through several dramaturgical changes. It began as a winter residential course located in a mountain cabin and, transformed into a course including a short period of sleeping outdoors in the winter wilderness. Its most recent iterations (2011 and in 2012) have taken the form of expeditions taking place entirely in the natural environment.

The 2011 and 2012 courses that maintained similar dramaturgical frames are in the focus of this study. The main objective of the courses was described in the final report from one of the courses: "The goal was to enable the participants, by means of undertaking the winter pilgrimage, to think about their values, to reflect upon their lives. The goal was to experience the winter pilgrimage as a life turning point after which 'nothing will be as it was before', and to experience this change as an opportunity" (M. Hanuš, 2011, p. 5). In both years, the course was divided into three parts: Starter, Main Course, and Dessert. These took place over four months.

The Starter was a three-day weekend event organised at the beginning of November and its purpose was to perform pre-participation physical exams, to initiate the rituals of the course, inform the participants, and motivate them for the two-month period of preparation before the Main Course.

The Main Course was a twelve-day journey on snowshoes, during which the participants and instructors walked for 113 kilometres (70 miles), carrying all the equipment for camping, including food, on their backs. A typical day started at 6:30 am, and after making breakfast, packing, and doing the morning warm-up exercises, the journey started around 9 am. A daily trek on snowshoes usually covered the distance of 10-12 kilometres and ended approximately at 3 pm. The path was planned by instructors. During the journey both instructors and participants led the way; the navigation was easy due to fact that the journey followed the state borders between Slovakia and Poland. Then tents were erected, dinner was cooked, wood was collected, and the camp fire prepared. The evening programme by the fire included reciting poems, singing songs, and playing guitars, as well as collective discussions on philosophical themes such as tourism versus pilgrimage, the

horizons of paths, the elements, love, death and others (in 2011) and the seven Christian virtues (in 2012). A day and a half was spent in a cabin in Osadné in the middle of the Main Course in order to recover.

The course ended with the Dessert, a four-day weekend event organised six weeks after the Main Course. A part of the Dessert was a day of community service for the elderly and infirm (in 2011) and for the physically handicapped (in 2012). Another part of the programme was also a night solo vigil for deeper reflection of the entire course and its meaning in one's life. The solo was put on the programme during the last night of the course to give participants the opportunity to be by themselves and reflect upon the course and the meaning of it for their lives.

The main theme of the *Život je gotickej pes* project was the winter journey as a biodromal project (bios - life, dromos - way), seeking an authentic experience. The nature of the winter journey was described by the chief instructor in the final report from the course as follows:

> A significant dramaturgical challenge was represented by the aim of framing the winter journey to be understood and experienced not as a winter survival or physical education mountain trek, but as a pilgrimage. A pilgrimage towards a certain aim, but mostly toward oneself (M. Hanuš, 2011, p. 7).

The notion that the journey can be understood and experienced in different ways according to the course dramaturgy leads us to an understanding of the experience obtained during the course in a Heideggerian sense as a way of being, as suggested by Quay (2013):

> This insight reveals the importance of understanding outdoor education programme design and conduct in aesthetic terms via ways of being or occupations. For it is the various ways of being, created through programme design and conduct, which form the basis for any reflective analysis that occurs during an outdoor education programme (p. 152)

Based on that we can understand the experience of the course as a way of being and dramaturgy as a method of offering specific ways of being.

Methodology

To capture the experience of participants we used a qualitative approach, which is suitable for exploring experiences of people with certain phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Sample

Participants in this study were participants in the two courses of the project conducted in 2011 and in 2012. Out of the total sample (60), 12 participants voluntarily agreed to be interviewed during the research weekend. In total, 3 out of 6 interviewed participants from the year 2011 (Sarah, Mary and Patrick) were also in the team of instructors in 2012. This empirical research took place during a three-day research weekend, which was organised in September 2012. The sample consisted of 12 participants (2 women; the mean age of the whole group was 31.6 years). More detailed information about the participants is presented in Table 1. All the participants of the course participated voluntarily

Table 1
Interview participants

No.	Gender	Age at the time of the course	Status at the time of the course	Completion of the course	Altered name
1	female	23	student	whole course	Sarah
2	male	25	student	whole course	James
3	female	26	student	whole course	Mary
4	male	27	teacher	withdrew after a week	Jordan
5	male	36	teacher	whole course	Patrick
6	male	25	student	withdrew after a week	John
7	male	32	programmer	whole course	Frank
8	male	32	technical worker	whole course	George
9	male	33	economist	whole course	Simon
10	male	51	construction engineer	whole course	Paul
11	male	44	personal manager	whole course	None
12	male	25	student	whole course	None

at the course and most of them were highly motivated to accept the challenge of the winter journey. Some participants had certain prior experiences with mountains during the winter, but none of them had experienced such a long and such demanding winter journey.

Procedure

A phenomenological approach (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) for understanding social reality, in which respondents identify what is significant for them and how they understand their experience was used as a background for the data collection in the form of individual unstructured interviews. At the beginning of the interview, the participants were asked the following question: *"What touched you most during the course?"* The following interview questions were based on the reactions and answers of the participants. The interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was conducted by trained interviewers (one of the interviewers was an instructor in 2011).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Informed consent was obtained from the participants who confirmed their voluntary and anonymous participation in the research. Data were analysed using open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). No analytical software was used, date were analysed using pen and paper. Obtained codes (over 300) were divided into more than 20 subcategories. After further analytical work and discussion by the research team, the subcategories were merged into four main categories, which constituted the four main aspects of the participants' experience from the course. The participants' names used below in the "Results" are pseudonyms, and since the interviews were made in Czech, the presented quotes were translated by the authors.

Results

The results can be summarised in four dimensions of participants' experience, namely: a) inner self-experience, reflecting on life; b) relationships with others; c) nature; and d) embodiment and physical demands.

Inner self-experience, reflecting on life

This aspect of experience contains themes related to the search for one's identity, to self-awareness, awareness of the inner world, reflections on life and its direction, and the quest for the meaning of life. These themes seem to be consistent with the above-mentioned primary theme and main objective of the course, and are also reflected in the experience of Sarah: "It resulted in settling down, reflecting on where I am, why I am here, why I want to be here, whether my school is meaningful for me." Even the reality of trekking on snowshoes supported her reflection:

> Thanks to the fact that we walked on snowshoes in a row, in between the trees, completely bound by the environment, where I cannot see anything except the tracks done by those before me, at most, I can see the backpack in front of me, but nobody personally, specifically, it was a space when I looked inside myself (Sarah).

The dramaturgy of the course created conditions that allowed the participants to perceive their feelings, to be aware of what is going inside because of the exclusion of disturbing elements of daily life, and to be open to other means of dramaturgy. The evening philosophical talks and the use of personal diaries were good examples of such means. The participants gained the opportunity to reflect on their lives and to find a time for themselves, as stated by Patrick:

> I realised there is a possibility to reflect on the flow of life. I worked out many things and had time to think and to be by myself and to talk with others and to be with my thoughts, it was a space for reflection, settling down. And this is very rare in my hectic life.

Yet another type of inner self-experience emerged during the course. The winter journey made the participants focus on their inner dialogues, providing opportunity to be with their thoughts and feelings, and producing awareness of their own inner world. The depth of such perception during the trek could open a path to encounters with the inner self, to genuine listening to oneself and feelings of joy, as in the case of James:

> The real self is speaking instead of you. And when you listen to that voice and stop thinking about who is looking at you, whether I can do that, whether I am ashamed, all of a sudden, when I throw this all away, open myself up to the depths, it is such a release, joy.

There remains a question regarding whether it is possible to use a rather shaky interpretation of this experience using Jungian terms, such as the self and individuation.

The reflection and the search for the meaning was meant to be stimulated by the course dramaturgy in the prolonged periods of quietude during trekking, in the evening lectures and discussions, in the use of diaries and in writing the feedback essays. The instructors of the course purposively used such tools to enhance reflection of the participants.

Relationships with others

Perceived depth of the individual experience corresponds with the sense of being united in a community. The group starts to serve as social support in moments of joy and exhaustion. The community of people becomes a pack with archetypal patterns, which arise from our animality and which are usually not so acknowledged because of our cultural and social conditioning. Paul describes this sense of community: "People from different corners come together, they fit in, they do not know each other, after several days there it makes a pack out of them." Experiencing demanding situations forces the participants to focus only on elementary things, to learn to accept anything that comes, and to manage critical situations that would be beyond the border of manageability without the support of the group. This support results in a sense of togetherness, including the feelings of acceptance and belonging, as expressed by John in words:

> Really those experiences of community, this was very strong emotionally. Later there was the acceptance without words. Just by sitting around the fire and being with others, there was strong acceptance. Acceptance in being there, by belonging there. Because one has his place by the fire.

The dramaturgy of the course supported purposeful expression of closeness to others in the form of physically touching during the morning ritual, with hugging in the end or in the form of a foot massage by the evening fire. The effect of these programmes on the group dynamics is expressed by James:

> Those morning warm-ups were incredible, when we hugged each other, it really brightens up the day... You feel huge feeling of togetherness with the group, everybody smiles at each other, hugs each other, together they go to those woods, to those mountains, you feel good in your soul...

Some participants mention overcoming barriers by forming relationships with others. In the moments of trust and acceptance, the group forms a mirror for understanding how an individual gives an impression of the group, what he/she can offer, what he/she is good at, and where their reserves are. In such an environment a person lets down barriers in front of others. One can open up to others, as mentioned by James:

> Because all of a sudden you do not have the energy for the constant protection of yourself. The bubble suddenly bursts... That I can much more easily talk to others and that those people are accepting me and that if I open up to them with a pure heart and there is nothing else behind it, I do it for them, it is so pure that they open up to me also and then it is qualitatively absolutely somewhere else than when I am protecting myself before others because I am afraid of what will happen.

Despite the closeness and togetherness among participants of the course, and the necessary requirement for being included in the group, the impossibility of escape from the group could be perceived as stifling and unpleasant, as stated by Simon: "The social atmosphere was sometimes bothersome, I needed some time for myself, but it was impossible to go somewhere else." In the combination with the natural environment, the social aspect strengthens the feelings of one person for another, raises the ability of empathy and the feeling of togetherness within the group, creating an atmosphere of cohesion, acceptance, and a feeling of attunement with the group.

Nature

Participants experienced nature in different ways. The return to the simplicity of life contrasted with living in the city is discussed by George:

> I like the forest and nature, and I like to walk in the woods, this is a return for me, I do not say to the roots, but to simplicity, because these days times are very fast and hectic, and in a natural setting the cycle is given, there one knows what to expect, it is more predictable, one knows what to count on, the world is more legible for me than it is in the city.

The winter landscape forces an individual to act naturally. The course participants had to make great effort to survive, to learn to be in harmony with their bodies. Due to the established sense of harmony with their bodies, their animality awakened and helped them to perceive themselves in an extremely natural way. One participant said: "That is me after seven days, with a lack of sleep, hungry, but I know that I have to make a fire because otherwise I would freeze to death" (Mary). Making a camp fire in the severe winter conditions when dry wood was collected from under the snow makes people able to warm themselves and spend the evening time together around the fire. This is perceived by one participant as a necessity: "Surely the fire is something of a necessity here, as existential element, it also had an atmosphere, we felt good, we felt the energy" (Sarah). However in contrast, the fire also structures the space: "The centre is in the fire, the heat, where we all look, because it makes sense, behind our backs we have the darkness, chaos, which we are not afraid of because we are there together" (John). The gathering of community around the fire can be viewed as an archetypal experience, shared throughout the history of humankind. John's above-mentioned

experience of the structure of space reflects his sensitivity in this regard. This is also documented in his perception of the vertical shapes of trees appearing in the fog as a temple of sorts: "I was outside in the landscape, the beech forests, like a temple, it was amazing for me. It looked religious, but still I experienced it through myself" (John). A similar type of experience was expressed by Paul:

> Without the course, I would never see how a silver spruce looks in the mist, it shines. It was something amazing, it was an experience. On the night trek, I was really touched when the snow gleamed as if scattered with shiny coins.

These experiences share a common feature and that is awe of nature's beauty. Such things can be experienced only through full concentration on the present.

Embodiment and physical demands

Embodiment as perceived by the course participants is the fourth dimension of experience, which, because of the overall physical demands of the course, gave the participants clear feedback about their physical borders as well as the importance of the body and taking good care of it. This topic is particularly related to the knowledge regarding how our bodies react in demanding conditions marked with considerable physical exertion, exhaustion, lack of sleep, and the necessity to adapt to the cold, along with constant wetness and other adverse natural factors. Such demanding conditions required long and thorough physical preparations including taking cold showers in the morning to improve resistance to cold, doing physically demanding exercises to enhance endurance and fitness, sleeping outdoors in a sleeping bag in order to get used to breathing cold air. In Frank's case, these preparations were also intensified by comparing with other participants: "It was a part of the preparation, I saw the difference between me and others, they were physically better, so I said to myself, that I will devote more to preparations" (Frank). The experience from the course was later transferred into Frank's daily life: "I try to change myself now and work on myself, to lose weight and do more sports." Some participants viewed the physical demands of the course in a positive way, as a type of challenge, as in Mary's case: "For me it was about assessing my physical abilities, whether I can do it or not, whether I will find the power or not." In Sarah's case, the physical demands of the course even seemed to uplift her spirit:

> When I was making tracks in the snow, which was immaculate and shining, we went uphill, I did not perceive the group behind me, I marched and marched, treading the one-metre deep snow, it was physically demanding, but mentally so purifying (Sarah).

In contrast, there were participants in both years of the course who did not manage the physical demands and withdrew after several days of trekking. This was the case for Jordan, who described his fight:

> I was broken by that rucksack, which weighed approximately 30 kg, that was really good and maybe I kept things in myself and did not use the group as some type of stimulus. As a type of support, because everyone suffered, but nobody was talking about that, I could not understand it, all suffered, but I thought that I was the only one who was suffering.

Jordan's feelings of isolation in the solitude of his suffering, regardless of the company of more than twenty other participants and instructors, demonstrate the destructivity of negative thinking in such a demanding natural environment. On the other hand, there were also examples of successful dealing with the inner conflict caused by the physically demanding conditions:

> Somebody called out to me that we are leaving and I just stood there with purple hands, I could not even move my fingers, and I did not have the tent packed, so I started to cry and then all of a sudden the desolate feeling left me... so later I was more aware about the satisfaction that my body works and I have fingers on my hands (John).

John's painful experience of freezing hands resulted in a stronger awareness of his own body and feelings of gratitude for functioning limbs. Similarly, James went through the painful experience of torn blisters on toes and heels due to completely wet shoes:

> Later it grew into a continuous fight, your feet hurt, your shoulders, your heels are scraped, taping everything up, keeping comfortable takes lot of effort and overcoming that battle with oneself, you have to keep yourself on all different levels to manage it as a whole on the course (James).

James managed to overcome the difficulties due to his determination to finish the course and his understanding that suffering is an integral part of the entirety of the course.

Discussion

In discussion we relate the results with relevant literature and we link the participants' experience with the

dramaturgy of the course, specifically with the theme of pilgrimage.

Experiences as inner self-experience and reflection of life have already gained attention of some researchers, particularly in the context of solo experiences (Bobilya, McAvoy, & Kalisch, 2005; Williams, 2012). The experience from the winter journey on snowshoes is similar to the solo experience in prolonged periods of quietude, but is intensified by the demanding physical activity. Both aspects of such "me-time" reflection (Williams, 2012), that is, considering future life directions and freedom from responsibilities, appeared in the experience of the winter journey participants. It is assumed that such deep reflection of one's life and such a search for meaning in life are also integral parts of the pilgrimage experience (Jirásek, 2011a). Structured post-course reflection enhances the transfer of learning (Leberman & Martin, 2004) and such reflection occurred in the dramaturgy of the course when participants wrote feedback essays and poems between the Main Course and the Dessert. Additional reflection occurred as a part of the research process that is supposed to significantly influence the transfer of learning and thus the results of the research as well (Rea, 2006).

Considering the category of relationships with others positive effects of the course on group cohesion appear to be consistent, in the context of adventure education, with general findings of Barret and Greenaway (1995). Also camaraderie and the unusually close bonds between people were identified by Stinger and McAvoy (1992) as factors contributing to spiritual experience in the context of outdoor adventure.

Considering the category of nature there appeared experiences that can be understood according to Uhlik's (2006) terms as a transition from a predator to a partner relationship with nature. One participant experienced the forest as a temple and such experience can be understood as an experience of sacred nature (Uhlik, 2009). Some participants experienced the awe of nature's beauty, which enhances the possibility of a spiritual experience according to Stinger and McAvoy (1992). Such experience with nature can be viewed as similar to the pilgrimage experience that is characterised by attuning, openness, and concentration (Jirásek, 2011b). The focus on the present moment, which is common in the experience of both pilgrims and winter course participants, is pivotal to such experience.

Considering the category of embodiment and physical demands there appeared certain overcoming of difficulties and suffering which can be viewed as a purposeful use of coping strategies (Yoshino, 2008) or as an act of stepping out to the growth zone (Brown, 2008); nevertheless, this kind of experience can be associated with the necessity of self-denial and surmounting of pain, which are considered an inherent part of a pilgrim's way of being (Jirásek, 2011b). This way of being is further described by Jirásek (2011b):

> Such a journey requires sufficient physical fitness and resilience, self-denial and surmounting of pain and suffering. It often involves certain dangers associated with every long-time journey. Every endeavour to a certain established aim becomes such a pilgrimage. Every journey which includes concentration and during which I sacrifice myself (for example my exhaustion, pain and discomfort), when I concentrate on the place ahead of me, when I look forward and prepare for it, is such a pilgrimage. When I intensively think about that place and I am able to attune myself. Because only after such preparation I can see and perceive, only during such journey I can really understand and deeply experience (p. 12).

The theme of pilgrimage was an integral part of the course dramaturgy, and some aspects of this theme were manifested in the experiences of participants. Especially the following aspects are common in the experience of both pilgrims and participants of such a winter course - the focus on the present moment, deep reflection of one's life, search for the meaning of life, and surmounting of pain and suffering. On the basis of the commonness of these aspects, it may be assumed that some respondents were closer to the pilgrim's side in the tourist-pilgrim continuum (Jirásek, 2011a).

Limitations of the study, issues of bias, credibility, dependability, and transferability

Limitations of the study consider biases that can occur during the research process (Oluwatayo, 2012). Considering conceptual bias, there is a threat of loose interpretations when linking the dramaturgy of the course and the participants' experiences; there might not be a simple cause and effect relationship between the two. There is a possible solution in introducing the concept of the ways of being through the dramaturgy; however, without further study of the works of Martin Heidegger, such a conceptualisation of the ways of being would not be sufficiently consistent according to Quay (2013). In terms of design bias, there is low consistency between the collected data and the analytical process. The research process began as a phenomenological study (Smith et al., 2009) during which data was collected. The potential of the interpretative side of phenomenological study (Smith et al., 2009) or the precise conceptual work of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were not used in the analytical process. However, it resulted in a descriptive content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This fact makes all

interpretations less trustworthy. Considering sampling bias, there is a risk in voluntary participation in the research because it seems that mainly the participants with positive experiences from the course decided to participate in the research. This might have influenced the results.

Standards of validity and reliability for qualitative studies in terms of credibility, transferability and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were attempted to be achieved. Credibility of the research was supported by the long-term engagement of several researchers in the project *Život je gotickej pes* - one member of the research team was involved in the project as an instructor since 2003, while two others were involved in the years 2011 and 2012 as both participants and instructors. This involvement of the research team in the project allowed persistent observation of the theoretical part of the dramaturgy process during the course design as well as the practical part of the dramaturgy process at the course itself. This involvement resulted in the triangulation of both the data and the analysts. A "thick" description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of both the dramaturgy of the course and the experiences of participants supports transferability of the study. Dependability of the study is supported by the fact that no members of the research team have any vested (financial or otherwise) interest in positively reporting the results.

Conclusions

In this part we give brief statements concerning the fulfilment of research aims and answering the research questions. The first aim was fulfilled and the first question answered in the chapter dealing with the dramaturgy of the project *Život je gotickej pes*. The dramaturgy of the course was described in detail. The main theme of the project was pilgrimage and some expressions of this theme were found also in the participants' experience.

The second aim was fulfilled and the second research question was answered in the Results section. Four main aspects of the participants' experience were identified as follows: a) inner self-experience, reflecting on life; b) relationships with others; c) nature; and d) embodiment and physical demands. In the discussion we connected some aspects of participants' experience with the pilgrimage experience. The dramaturgy approach was found useful in the design of the experiential education course, positively contributing to the participants' experience.

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