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Critical Elements of an Expedition Experience

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Abstract

Much of the research in outdoor education has focused on participant outcomes rather than the aspects of the experience that elicited those outcomes. This study explores the key elements of a 10–week expedition to Ghana with Raleigh International. Data collection involved five rounds of interviews with 14 British participants over a one–year period, using categorical aggregation to determine five principal themes critical to the experience. The findings highlight the importance of diverse groups living in isolated environments. Changing groups and moving to a new physical setting after four weeks and again at seven weeks was regarded as a challenging but necessary feature of the programme. Finally, there is little evidence linking specific programme activities with specific participant outcomes. It is more important that the experience should emphasise self-sufficient living conditions and physically demanding activities.

Rationale and Aim

Commentary on the state of research in outdoor education has highlighted the dominance of studies focusing on participant outcomes (Barret & Greenaway, 1995; Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; McKenzie, 2000). More attention has been paid to the summative results at the expense of understanding the formative processes (Hattie et al., 1997). Similarly, Conrad and Hedin (1981) explain how "...little effort has been made to systematically test the assumptions underlying the endorsements or to investigate empirically which specific forms of experiential programs may be the most effective in realizing the hypothesized benefits" (p. 6). McKenzie (2000) supports this view, claiming that "the available literature indicates that the current understanding of how adventure education program outcomes are achieved is based largely on theory, rather than on empirical research" (p. 25). These comments provide rationale for the aim of this study, which is to learn about the elements of overseas youth expeditions with Raleigh International that influence participant outcomes.

Addressing the fact that a disproportionately high number of studies in outdoor education have concentrated on participant outcomes, Ewert (1983) likened the elements and processes involved in outdoor education to a "black box", where "we know something works, but we don't know how or why" (p. 27). Part of my curiosity in expedition–based outdoor education lies in gaining a greater understanding of the key elements of an experience; in other words, finding out what is inside the black box. Expedition providers who have a deeper understanding of how the elements of the experience influence the outcomes may be better positioned to enhance the educational effectiveness of their programme.

Raleigh International

The research focuses on Raleigh International, a youth development charity based in London that exists "to inspire people from all backgrounds and nationalities to discover their full potential

by working together on challenging community and environmental projects around the world" (Raleigh, 2003, para. 1). It is one of many organisations offering a variety of structured overseas experiences, which include working in hotels in the Canadian Rockies, teaching English in a Nepalese village, volunteering at an African Game Park, and building schools in Honduras (Year Out Group, 2004).

Structured experiences offered by this sector of providers can be considered in four main categories: courses and cultural exchanges, expeditions, volunteering, and work placements (Year Out Group, 2004). These experiences are distinct from travelling independently, as they involve using the services of an organisation to co-ordinate the young people and the infrastructure they interact in, both before leaving the UK and in the host country. The majority of these organisations are registered charities where participants raise a set amount of money for the organisation. This money then goes toward administrative fees, in–country living expenses, and project materials.

Raleigh International (abbreviated to Raleigh) operates two expeditions per year to each of the following countries: Chile, Ghana, Namibia, Costa Rica/Nicaragua, and Malaysia. Once the young people (known as venturers) meet in the host country they are split into nine or ten groups of 10 to 12 people. Each group has two or three volunteer staff members. After a week of induction training on camping and local customs, venturers spend the remainder of the expedition taking part in three different projects — community service, environmental conservation, and adventure—each for three weeks.

On a Raleigh expedition there are four categories of venturers, all of whom are between the ages of 17 and 25. The first 20% are from Raleigh's Youth Development Programme (YDP) and have all experienced some form of social exclusion, such as long term homelessness, long term unemployment, substance abuse, and dropping out of school early. Although the YDP is subsidised through charitable donations and grants from bodies such as the European Social Fund and the National Charities Board, venturers raise £800 to cover spending money, personal expedition equipment, and inoculations. The next 40% of venturers are called self-funders, as they raise £3500 for the charity in order to come on the expedition. Both self-funder and YDP venturers come from the UK. The third group of venturers come from the host country itself, and usually make up a further 20% of the expedition participants. The final 20% of the venturers are a mixture of young people from countries all over the world, besides the UK and the host country.

Review of Literature

Curiosity surrounding the structural make–up of an expedition is not new. More than 30 years ago Drasdo (1998) asked, "Might it be possible, for the purposes of outdoor education, to separate out the elements essential to a satisfying expedition?" (p. 41). Although several papers have examined how outcomes are achieved in outdoor education programmes of all kinds (Conrad & Hedin, 1981; McKenzie, 2000), and specifically with Outward Bound (McKenzie, 2003; Walsh & Golins, 1976), no empirical research could be found that examines the specific elements of overseas youth expeditions that elicit participant outcomes. As Spradley (1980) considers all social situations to be defined by a "stream of behavior (activities) carried out by people (actors) in a particular location (place)" (p. 86), the review of literature considers the many elements of an expedition in three categories: physical setting, social environment, and activities.

Physical Setting

Placing participants in a novel setting is central to the theoretical foundations of outdoor education (Nadler & Luckner, 1992; Priest & Gass, 1997; Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe, 1988; Walsh & Golins, 1976). Walsh and Golins (1976) claim that "the learner's entry into a contrasting environment is the first step towards reorganising the meaning and direction of his [sic] experience" (p. 4). Being in a novel environment adds to participants' feelings of disequilibrium as they experience a heightened sense of arousal (Nadler & Luckner, 1992), much like an experience having an uncertain outcome. Similarly, once removed from familiar surroundings one is forced to adapt and function in this alternative environment (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983).

The power and beauty of wild places may have a profound effect on young people and their sense of vulnerability, while they may take little notice of the natural environment when they are at home (Kennedy, 1992). This element is further enhanced by people's entire existence (working, trekking, eating, sleeping) being outdoors and may be experienced differently under various weather conditions. Seen this way, the outdoors provides natural consequences for participants' actions or non–actions. As Walsh and Golins (1976) state about the outdoor environment, "arbitrary and consequential rules are in existence which are not man–made [sic]" (p. 4). As such, participants may find these natural consequences more tolerable and reasonable (Kimball & Bacon, 1993).

The effect of course length on participant outcomes has seen little research. Some evidence indicates that participants on courses longer than 20 days may benefit more than those people in shorter courses, in terms of amount of perceived change in themselves over time (Neill & Richards, 1998).

Social Environment

The small community of people on an expedition may provide participants with greater stability than they are accustomed to (Kennedy, 1992). Within this social setting there are opportunities for young people to reassess their role in their community, as they have more direct responsibilities to the group (Kennedy, 1992). This might happen as the group shares camp chores such as cooking, setting up tents, and cleaning up after the meal. Kimball and Bacon (1993) have similar views regarding the influence of the group on personal development, stating that "because personality is formed and shaped largely through our contact with others, it can be reshaped through this same intimate contact" (p. 21). Recent work by Brookes (2003) argues that although personality can be shaped during an outdoor adventure programme, an individual's behaviour after the course cannot be predicted.

Interactionist sociology is useful in exploring ways in which the expedition's social environment influences individuals. Cooley's (1962) concept of the primary group suggests that families, friends, and colleagues are "fundamental in forming the social nature and ideals of the individuals" (p. 23). The primary group differs from other people in society, as personal benefit or gain from relationships with other members of the group is not expected. The members of a group project a collective set of attitudes which then influence individuals' behaviours (Mead, 1934).

The ideal size for a group of young people in outdoor programmes has been suggested as between 7 and 15 (Walsh & Golins, 1976, p. 5). The benefit of a group this size is that it is small enough for conflicts to be resolved but large enough for individuality, diversity, and conflict to exist. Walsh and Golins refer to this social environment as an interdependent group with a common objective.

The goal of this group is to promote "individual decision–making which at the same time has the support of a peer group and which takes into consideration the wishes and welfare of the group" (Walsh & Golins, 1976, p. 6). The *friluftsliv* approach to "outdoor nature life" in Norway suggests smaller groups of five to eight people are desirable, as they provide opportunities for "close and good communication" between participants (Tellnes, 1993, p. 15).

There is little research that examines the mix of individuals in a group and how this influences participant outcomes. Smith (1983) theorised that "there is much value in the adventure group being 'heterogeneous'" (p. 41). His experiences working as an outdoor leader and guide are typical of many outdoor programmes that operate courses for homogeneous populations such as youth at risk, over 60s, and college students. Smith's writing was influenced by social psychology theory which proposes that individuals' attitudes are shaped and formed by group membership (Kretch, Crutchfield, & Ballachey, 1962). The degree to which a group is heterogeneous is of particular relevance to the Raleigh experience, as there is a mix of four groups of venturers within each project group.

Activities

Walsh and Golins (1976) describe the activities on Outward Bound courses as "characteristic problem–solving tasks" (p. 6). The most common activities on overseas youth expeditions focus on adventure, service, scientific research, and environmental conservation (Year Out Group, 2004). Rather than reviewing the different activities that have been employed on youth expeditions, such as climbing, trekking, school building, and trail clearing, it is more useful to examine the nature of these activities, as they share common concepts.

The first common concept of expedition activities is that participants are fascinated and interested in what they are doing (Dewey, 1973; Kaplan & Talbot, 1983). Related to this is the widely accepted tenet of outdoor education programmes that participants should have the right to participate or not (Schoel et al., 1988). This suggests that individuals who have been told what a Raleigh expedition encompasses, and have decided to participate based on this knowledge, will be more invested in the experience than someone who had not been informed of what the expedition entailed or was coerced into participating. Greenaway (1995) found that an important antecedent to learning was that people must be open to learning in the first place.

A second concept shared by the different activities offered on expeditions is a strengthened relationship between effort and rewards (Kennedy, 1992). In urban life this relationship between rewards and effort may be more complex and, in some instances, disheartening. Take the example of a student who spends hours studying hard but still receives low grades; the student is not rewarded for his/her hard work. On a school–building project in Africa, the relationship between effort and rewards is clearer. If participants work hard at using a shovel and wheelbarrow to move earth at a building site, their objective will be reached sooner. Although the academic example is cognitive and the construction example is physical, this illustrates the less complicated relationship between effort and reward that may be found on expeditions.

A final point regarding the activity elements of an expedition is the planning of these elements. Participants playing an active role in planning the expedition (Gair, 1988) is consistent with commonly held principles in outdoor education of participants feeling in control (Weiner, 1979) and taking ownership of the experience (Dyson, 1995). This point illustrates how, on effectively run

educational expeditions, staff need to provide room for participants to take charge of their experience. To this end, Allison (2002) highlights the importance of expedition groups being self-sufficient by carrying all their equipment and supplies, sleeping in tents, and cooking for themselves. Conrad and Hedin (1981) claim that autonomy is the most powerful predictor of personal development through experiential education programmes.

Methodology

A case study methodology was employed to understand the expedition phenomenon. The strength of the case study research design lies in its "flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms first, to strategies of inquiry and second, to methods for collecting empirical material" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 22).

This study employed purposive sampling in order to hand–pick 16 willing informants who represented a wide variety of personal backgrounds. While recognising that this method of choosing participants is "deliberately and unashamedly selective and biased" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 104) it was the most suitable. Purposive sampling permitted a high degree of participant diversity without a large sample size, which might have precluded a deep and rigorous data analysis. The plan was to have half male/half female, half YDP/half self-funder, but when the first interviews were conducted only 15 informants were in place, as there was one less male self-funder than anticipated. After the first round of interviews, one male YDP did not come on expedition because he and his social workers deemed he was not ready. Therefore, at the start of the expedition there were eight female and six male participants.

Primary data collection was in the form of five sets of formal, open–ended, recorded interviews. The decision to rely heavily on interviews was supported by Barret and Greenaway's (1995) report that few research studies centre on hearing the personal stories from the participants living, or who have lived, the experience in question. The first interview took place two months before leaving the UK. The second, third and fourth interviews took place once during each three-week phase of the expedition. When in Ghana, the 14 participants were spread out among five of the nine project groups. During each of the three phases I travelled around the country interviewing and spending time with participants at their project sites. The final interviews were conducted at various locations in the UK in June 2003, six months after the expedition. These took place in cafés and parks—always a quiet comfortable place of the participant's choosing. Each interview was fully transcribed into a notebook and then on to a computer file.

Apart from the data collected from the interviews, I tried to gain a deeper understanding of the expedition by immersing myself in the experience (Spradley, 1980; Stake, 1995). Secondary data collection involved observation and informal dialogue with Raleigh head office staff, volunteer expedition staff, and other venturers that were not part of the group of 14 informants.

The data were interpreted using an approach based on phenomenological analysis. Each interview was read through several times. During this process, meaningful phrases were highlighted, which would later be clustered together in themes (Colaizzi, 1978; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). Stake (1995) refers to this process as categorical aggregation, "the aggregation of instances until something can be said about them as a class" (p. 74). This rigorous analysis followed a

hermeneutic approach, whereby the themes were continually examined and developed until the interpreted text adequately served the aims of the investigation (Patterson, Watson, Williams, & Roggenbuck, 1998).

In an effort to increase the credibility of my interpretations three methods of data verification were employed: Member checks, investigator triangulation, and peer review (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1988). Member checks involved discussing my interpretation of each interview with the interviewee (Merriam, 1988; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989; Stake, 1995; Van Manen, 1990). This offered participants opportunities to comment on, and amend, my interpretation of our conversation. The second method used was investigator triangulation, which involved a colleague interpreting a transcribed interview and comparing notes on the main issues we found (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). This helped to ensure that I did not bring too much personal bias to the investigation. A third method was peer review, which involved discussing my overall findings with colleagues (Merriam, 1988). I met with two different senior staff members from Raleigh: one throughout the expedition and the other one, before and after. We discussed the overall findings, how they compared with other parts of the expedition we were observing, and the issues I might probe during the following round of interviews.

All three of these data verification methods were employed after each of the five rounds of interviews. Together, these processes helped to consolidate my understanding of the findings and establish my next course of action.

Findings

The data yielded a large number of themes that could be considered elements of the experiences. Rigorous interpretation and data verification helped to distil the critical elements of the expedition to five dominant themes. All of the names are pseudonyms.

Group Isolation

Several participants made it clear that a critical element of the experience was spending the majority of their time in the company of their project group. Although they may have been in a rural village inhabited by local Ghanaians, participants had to constantly interact with the other ten group members in order to work, eat, drink, plan, and even sleep. Since there was little escape from the group, venturers had to cope with the constant company of group members they may have had negative or unpleasant interactions with.

Rufus felt that "living in a tight community where there's no escape" was an important aspect of the experience. He explained to me that unlike the UK, where "if you don't like someone you can just walk away or not phone them again or stay out of their way", the circumstances of the physical setting demanded that people get along with each other. Rufus expanded on this point by saying "you have to get along with people, you have to compromise, you have to resolve conflicts". Sylvio also felt that the physical setting affected the social interactions, where "the whole pressure there of being forced to get on with people who seem to be unreasonable", was a difficult, but important part of the expedition as "it really puts you in a strong position for the future, because you learn how to cope with it". Gordo's observation about how the physical setting affects social interactions stayed with me: "It's not just about speaking to people you get on with the best. It's

about learning to speak with people that you want to avoid!". In her matter-of-fact manner, Tracy summed up this point by stating that "the fact that we're miles from anywhere and thrown together in this situation is important".

These findings are consistent with Potter's (1998) examination of the human dimensions of expeditions, in which he states that "during expeditions people live in close quarters 24 hours a day and generally lose their taken for granted privacies...options to check out from the group, sometimes even briefly, are greatly reduced and frequently impossible" (p. 256). The data demonstrate how participants recognised that although it may not be fun to be in a group with people they had not chosen, it is an element of the experience that may yield interpersonal growth. It is important to highlight that the groups were not isolated from other humans, as they often camped on the outskirts of the villages they were helping. As most of the venturers and local people did not share a common language, it is possible that feelings of isolation may have come from being highly dependent on the project group for deeper social interaction.

Changing Groups

The changing groups theme refers to the importance of changing groups at least once during a multi–week expedition. As with the previous theme, venturers recognised that although this was not always fun or pleasant, changing groups was a vital part of the experience. Tracy decided that changing the project groups helped venturers "learn to meet new people and get on with people quicker and have the confidence to build up new relationships". She admitted that despite it being hard, she understood "why they do it", though as she said "it's not a part I enjoy". Nonnie echoed Tracy's comment that "it's not nice when it's happening, cause you feel unsettled—but it's so good for you I think".

What I had not foreseen was the difficulty that people would have leaving their first phase group after being together for the first week of induction and the first phase. Eating, sleeping, and working in such close proximity for four weeks was probably more intense than any set of social relationships they had ever had.

During the middle of the expedition Lily spoke fondly of her first group, as if they were family: "I absolutely loved my first group and I still miss them...I'm still trying to get used to it". Nonnie found changing groups "really unsettling", as they "had all bonded as a group". Roni had no idea that being separated from her first phase group would prove to be so difficult. She stated that it "was a shock", as she "didn't expect to miss them so much". During the second phase Roni said she was amused by how weird it was to be "getting more letters from your first phase group than from home". Tracy remembers how she felt when she started the second phase: "It just threw me completely. I was really upset to leave the people I'd been with for four weeks. It was really difficult." Rufus, too, found it "quite emotional, changing over". He didn't think anyone in his group wanted to change groups. Leaving the familiar world of living with the group was akin to being separated from one's original social pattern and entering a novel, liminal phase of the experience (Beames, 2004).

My observations and informal discussions with venturers throughout the 10–week expedition indicated that individuals had a much stronger affinity to their first phase group than with their other two groups. Apart from the extra week they spent together, these people had helped each

other to adapt to the dissonance elicited by the unfamiliar circumstances of suddenly being in rural West Africa without any family or close friends. These people had rapidly assumed the role of a supportive primary group for each other. Leaving the comfort and familiarity of their first group and adjusting to the novelty of their second group was a process that appeared to yield further interpersonal gains.

Cooley (1962) claims that primary groups are crucial to forming the nature and ideals of individuals, and that members of this group do not expect gain or reward from their relationships with each other. The findings suggest that participants should not be separated from their project group until the individual members have become a more stable primary group. This implies that on shorter expeditions participants should not change groups, since these observations suggest that developing primary group–like relationships takes at least two weeks.

Diverse Group

Group diversity may be a plausible contributor to personal growth, but it has not been empirically investigated in the field of youth expeditions. Most often, expeditions and outdoor programmes cater to homogenous groups, where participants share similar backgrounds and attitudes, such as highly privileged or adjudicated youth. The typical make-up of a Raleigh project group comprises five or six self-funders, two to three YDPs, one international, and three host country venturers. These groups are formed by the expedition leader, apparently with the principal goal of evenly distributing the four different categories of venturers.

Friio's Raleigh experience presented opportunities to mix with people with whom he normally did not. His social pattern was quite confined, which made him feel "stuck in a circle" because he was always interacting with "the same people". Others felt that the diverse groups were a unique feature of their learning experience, as well. Tracy explains how "it was the mix of people from all different backgrounds...and being thrown together where nobody knows anyone else", that stood out as a feature of the expedition. Stuart had "never met people from such diverse backgrounds" and appeared to revel in the unique nature of a Raleigh expedition, where "different people—different backgrounds are thrown together on a project". Simone remarked on this point as well, as she observed: "We are so different. We're from all parts." Although these differences were generally regarded as a positive element of the experience, it was evident that since a lot of the venturers were "not the same" there was "clashing a lot of the time". Simone's words suggest that the diverse group elicited conflict. This viewpoint is supported by outdoor education theory outlining how group development involves conflict–rich stages where members are unclear on the purpose of the activity and individuals are searching for their role within the group (Nadler & Luckner, 1992; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). While excessive conflict may be emotionally and physically dangerous, a constructive level of conflict may be useful. Sylvio's comments connect with the outcome of being more comfortable working with strangers:

> The biggest challenge was adjusting to the environment with a group of strangers and working well with those strangers...it's cool to mix with people from different backgrounds—cause there are people here from incredibly different backgrounds. (Sylvio)

Rufus remarked that "everyone's got something to offer, everyone's got something unique and individual about them". From this perspective, a diverse group will offer a greater range of human interactions, with different attitudes and beliefs. This is illustrated in Gordo's comment:

> I do think the Ghanaians in the group is such a good thing...cause you learn so much—they've got such a different outlook on life. We've had so many conversations like those where he says his beliefs and we say ours—it's incredible. (Gordo)

For Sylvio, an unexpected outcome from the diverse group meant getting to know people from parts of the UK to which he had not been:

> It's quite good to find out that everyone's from an extremely different background...It probably wouldn't be as good as hanging around with people who are exactly the same as me—cause I'll be able to do that the rest of my life! I thought I'd be finding out about people from all over the world, but I've been finding out about people from all over England more than anything...and Scotland and Wales. (Sylvio)

Natasha explained to me how an important part of her expedition were the discussions she had with her fellow venturers. Her statement that "Raleigh's a good place to form your own opinions out of other people's opinions" suggests that interacting with a diverse group of individuals played a significant role in shaping her identity.

The data suggest that there is a strong link between being part of a diverse group and interpersonal growth. This builds upon further studies on the "prescribed social environment" (McKenzie, 2003; Walsh & Golins, 1976), which, while emphasising that groups of between 7 and 15 people are large enough to "accommodate diversified behaviour types" (Walsh & Golins, 1976, p. 5), make no direct reference to the benefits of having a group of participants from a wide variety of cultural and social backgrounds. Recent work on the same data as the current paper argues that an individual's self is considerably influenced by the novel, broadened socio-cultural interactions inherent in overseas expeditions (Beames, in press).

Physically Demanding

The first three of the five elements are connected to the expedition's social environment. The remaining two elements refer to the nature of the expedition's activities, the first of which is that they are physically demanding. Participants felt their rest breaks were well-earned after many arduous hours of mixing cement, paddling on Lake Volta, or repairing a road under the hot African sun. Towards the end of the expedition, Simone told me how she "found it really hard out here". She went on to say "I really enjoyed it...I didn't expect it to be this hard". Friio remembered how the "canoeing was hard—very, very hard—especially when at midday it's getting hot, you gotta sit on the plastic seat". Lily stated "we're up really, really early and we're physically working".

There were some venturers who seemed to revel in the sheer physicality of the activities, proud of the hard work they were doing. Mildred explained how she was "absolutely loving being completely knackered at the end of the day". Sylvio has the similar opinion: "you do feel better at the end of the day, when you walked back to your camp and you were tired—it does something". These quotes demonstrate how the expedition would not have held the same meanings for the venturers if it had not been physically challenging.

Some people found they could not separate the physical challenges from the mental, as for them, anything physically testing ultimately tests one's mental resolve. Nonnie described it this way: "I think you need to test yourself physically. If you push yourself physically it crosses round to your head. So you're pushing yourself emotionally as well". Sylvio recounted how the community

service project was "really testing my determination" and how it was "the most challenging thing I've ever done", as it drew on his "courage and reserves". Rufus had similar thoughts, explaining to me how the physical and mental challenge was crucial to the experience: "Working so hard—and challenging yourself physically...and mentally it's tough as well". The physically demanding theme is consistent with McKenzie's (2003) research on Outward Bound, which found that the overall course being challenging was one of the major elements of the experience that led to the outcomes.

Self-Sufficient Living

A fifth critical element of the expedition experience is that the project groups are self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency primarily revolves around independence in cooking, sleeping, and cleaning. Feelings of self-reliance and satisfaction in working with a team come from the actions demanded by the self-sufficient living conditions. For Tracy, an important feature of expedition life was "all sleeping in one tent, so you have to get on with them, or you have to try to make some community out of it, like cooking together and working together all day". Nonnie highlighted the importance of going "back to basics", where "you're just looking after yourself, cause you don't have your mum fussing over you".

For others, the important part of this self-sufficiency was the basic, rudimentary nature of their existence. Gordo's observation highlights this point: "I slept on the floor. I ate pasta and rice for three months and that was the happiest I've ever been in my life". Rufus was convinced that "the learning comes from everything we know, everything I'm comfortable with or I enjoy, all being taken away and being put somewhere that these things don't exist". Much as Walsh and Golins (1976) suggested, Rufus stated that learning on expeditions "comes from having to adapt".

The theme of self-sufficient living is indirectly supported by several researchers. First, this independent group living may involve the mastery of new skills (Walsh & Golins, 1976), such as cooking for a group over a fire or setting up shelters. Similarly, the expedition conditions demand that participants learn to function in an alternative environment (Kaplan & Talbot, 1983). Self-sufficient living is also consistent with Kaplan and Talbot's concept of the wilderness experience offering compatibility and resonance between what is necessary to do and what is desirable to do. This is consistent with Walsh and Golin's (1976) suggestion that "the outdoors is an excellent lab for conditioning one to refine the senses in the solution of problems in satisfying one's hierarchy of needs" (p. 4). Both Walsh and Golins and Kaplan and Talbot draw from Maslow's (1968) claim that people need to fulfil primitive needs of food, shelter and warmth before addressing higher level needs of self-actualisation.

Raleigh's Three Phases

Raleigh expeditions comprise three phases with three different focuses of environmental conservation, adventure and community service, apparently leading to one all encompassing outcome of discovering one's full potential (Raleigh, 2003). When I asked participants if they thought that people learned different things from different projects, the responses were conflicting. During the expedition, but not after the expedition, there was an overwhelming number of people who felt that the community and environmental projects were about other people benefiting and the adventure phase was for their own personal growth.

Tracy suspected that the adventure phase of one week of canoeing and two weeks of trekking would be the most challenging for her. She felt that in "terms of personal development" this phase was

"going to be the one that's most beneficial". Gordo told me "as long as we're progressing with the school—that's my number one aim". He felt that community service projects were different "from trekking, where the group comes first". Similarly, Mildred commented that "the adventure phase of Raleigh is about us getting something out of it...no one pretends this bit gives anything back to Ghana". Rufus felt the same way, remarking that the adventure phase was "for ourselves". He went on to state how the adventure phase is "not outright doing something for a community or outright doing something for the environment. It's only for ourselves, enjoying ourselves, pushing ourselves". These feelings were shared by Roni, who perceived the community and environmental projects as "doing something for other people" and Lily who claimed that the "trekking's just for your benefit".

It is unclear how these venturers came to the conclusion that the community and environmental projects focused on the other people benefiting and the adventure project focused more on the venturers benefiting. The feelings expressed by the venturers may be problematic for Raleigh and the young people themselves, as the data suggest that a large number of the study participants did not regard the community and environmental projects as effective opportunities for personal growth. Furthermore, the venturers may not have taken as many opportunities to engage with, and contribute to, the local communities they encountered through their trekking and canoeing journeys. If venturers understand that all three phases offer opportunities to learn about themselves, their relationships with each other, and about the culture they are living in, they may grow more from the experience.

There were other venturers who considered all phases of the expedition as capable of yielding some form of personal growth. For most people, this realisation came once they were back in the UK. Tracy was one of these people, as illustrated by her comment that the service projects are not "just a task to do to help other people, but to benefit us". Besides the conflicting opinions found in the interviews, both my informal discussions with participants and my observations of a Raleigh expedition in action lead me to agree with Simone's statement: "The projects are different but I don't think they bring out a different effect on you".

Despite the conflicting data, I suggest that rather than the three different phases yielding three different types of outcomes, they all elicit personal growth in some form. In other words, there is no algorithmic formula ensuring that the adventure phase yields a, b and c outcomes and the community phase yields x, y and z outcomes. The strength in having three different and distinct episodes lies in providing variety for the venturers. This variety means that the three phases on a Raleigh expedition translate into three novel settings, three new social environments and three new activity focuses. Ultimately, participants have more opportunities to adapt to the disequilibrium elicited by unfamiliar physical settings, social environments and tasks, and it would seem, more opportunities for personal growth.

Conclusions

The findings suggest that there are five elements critical to the expedition experience at Raleigh International. The first key feature is a social environment where individuals are in virtually constant contact with the members of their group. These conditions demand that individuals confront and address interpersonal differences. A diverse group of people from the host country, international, YDP, and self-funding venturers is also of critical importance. Diversity and the element of

changing groups after four and seven weeks provide participants with increased opportunities to interact with, and learn from, a wide range of attitudes and behaviours. Finally, there is little evidence suggesting that particular expedition activities yield specific outcomes. Regardless of the project emphasis, crucial common factors are that the activities are physically demanding and that groups are self-sufficient in their living arrangements. An area for further study is to investigate the degree to which the five critical elements of a Raleigh expedition are applicable to other outdoor education programmes.

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