

# **Abstracts**

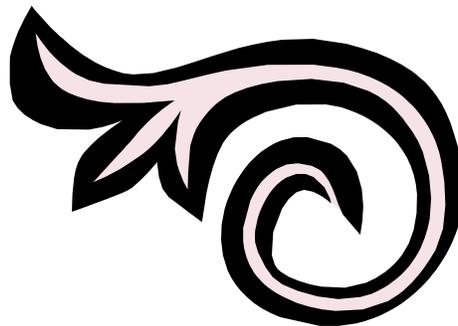
*from the*

## **2008 Symposium on Experiential Education Research (SEER)**

*presented at the*

### **36<sup>th</sup> Annual International AEE Conference**

*Vancouver, WA, U.S.A.  
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## Welcome to SEER

Welcome to the Sixth Annual Symposium on Experiential Education Research (SEER). The purpose of this Symposium is to provide you with a formal setting for the reporting of research findings in the fields of Experiential Education. Toward that end, all the research presentations were blind reviewed by a panel of referees. There were over 30 submissions for the 12 available presentation slots. Whether accepted or not, the authors who submitted material should be congratulated for their efforts. In many cases, their works were not selected because of the strict time constraints and not because of any deficiencies in the quality of their work.

Along with the researchers who submitted their work for review, a number of other entities and people deserve a note of thanks for their efforts in making this idea a reality. First, the AEE and its various staff members including Evan Narotsky, Natalie Kurylko and AEE Chief Executive Officer, Paul Limoges and the 2008 conference host committee for their support and coordination of SEER.

Much appreciation goes to the many scholars and academicians who graciously served as reviewers of the submitted abstracts: Aram Attarian, Brent Bell, Scott Bandoroff, Deb Bialeschki, Alan Ewert, Jeff Jacobs, Michael Gass, Ken Gilbertson, Lee Gillis, and Jayson Seaman.

We would also like to thank Katherine Pinch and Jim Sibthorp for providing the opening and closing comments to the Symposium and Jayson Seaman and Jacquie Medina for providing summaries and reactions to the sessions.

And finally, a special thank you is given to the attendees of the Symposium, as it is on you and the other members of the experiential education community that this Symposium is focused. For without you and the various educational endeavors you provide within the experiential education rubric, all of our efforts would be for naught.

Thanks to all of you for being a part of SEER.

Keith C. Russell, Co-Chair (2006-2008 term)  
Cheryl A. Stevens, Co-Chair (2007-2009 term)

SEER 2008

# BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

## 2008 SYMPOSIUM ON EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION RESEARCH

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## 2008 Symposium on Experiential Education Research (SEER)

<b>Time</b> <b>Fri.</b> <b>11/9</b> <b>8:45-</b> <b>10:15</b>	<b>Session 1</b> <b>Issues in leadership and</b> <b>program administration</b>	<b>Time</b> <b>Fri.</b> <b>11/9</b> <b>1:30-</b> <b>3:00</b>	<b>Session 2</b> <b>Experiential education and</b> <b>youth development in</b> <b>diverse settings</b>	<b>Time</b> <b>Fri.</b> <b>11/9</b> <b>3:15-</b> <b>4:45</b>	<b>Session 3</b> <b>Program outcomes and the</b> <b>factors that affect them</b>	<b>Time</b> <b>Sat.</b> <b>11/10</b> <b>8:45-</b> <b>10:15</b>	<b>Session 4</b> <b>Current insights into</b> <b>wilderness and adventure</b> <b>therapy</b>
20 min	<b>Keynote</b> Kath Pinch, Cal State University, Sacramento <i>The Importance of Evaluation Research</i>	10 min	<b>Introduction and Overview</b> Keith Russell, Western Washington University	10 min	<b>Introduction and Overview</b> Cheryl Stevens, East Carolina University	5 min	<b>Introduction and Overview</b> Cheryl Stevens, East Carolina University
20 min	Paper 1: Wynn Shooter, University of Utah <i>The effect of leader attributes, situational context, and participant optimism on trust in outdoor leaders</i>	20 min	Paper 4: Paul Shirilla, University of Wisconsin- River Falls <i>Adventure-based programming and social skill development in the lives of diverse youth: Perspectives from two research projects</i>	20 min	Paper 7: Cass Morgan, University of Utah <i>Sensation seeking: A potential factor influencing perceived risk and perceived competence in adventure experiences</i>	20 min	Paper 10: Matthew Liddle, Pressley Ridge Hungary <i>The effects of short-term therapeutic wilderness camping on the therapeutic alliance of counselors and youth-in- treatment</i>
20 min	Paper 2: Jackson Wilson, Indiana University <i>Role of pay satisfaction in instructor satisfaction</i>	20 min	Paper 5: Kevin O'Connor, McGill University <i>Northern exposures: Models of experiential learning in indigenous education</i>	20 min	Paper 8: Mathew Austin, Ohio University <i>Outdoor orientation program effects: Sense of place and social benefits</i>	20 min	Paper 11: Nevin Harper, University of Victoria <i>Family crisis and the enrollment of children in wilderness treatment</i>
20 min	Paper 3: Brent Bell, University of New Hampshire <i>The challenges of building social capital: Conference attendance patterns of outdoor orientation program staff at four-year colleges in the United States.</i>	20 min	Paper 6: Jesse Beightol, Eagle Rock School <i>The effect of an experiential, adventure based "anti- bullying initiative" on levels of resilience: a mixed methods study</i>	20 min	Paper 9: Andrew Bobilya, Montreat College <i>Outcomes of a spiritually- focused wilderness orientation program</i>	20 min	Paper 12. Leila Durr, University of Florida <i>Optimal challenge: The impact of adventure experiences on subjective well-being</i>
10 min	<b>Questions and Answers</b>	20 min	<b>Discussant</b> Jayson Seaman, University of New Hampshire	20 min	<b>Discussant</b> Jacquie Medina, Cal State University, Chico	25 min	<b>Closing Remarks</b> Jim Sibthorp, University of Utah <i>Making a Difference With Experiential Education Research</i>

## SEER 2008 KEYNOTE ADDRESS

### The Importance of Evaluation Research

*Katherine J. Pinch*

#### Introduction

The purpose of this opening session is to outline the need for greater interest in conducting and disseminating evaluation research and in using varied methods for doing so. Two models of evaluation are discussed in light of current practice and in light of suggestions for future practice. An evaluation study conducted at a camp for people with disabilities will be used to highlight the use of one of these models.

Patton (2002, p. 10) described evaluation, when it is “conducted systematically and empirically through careful data collection and thoughtful analysis” as evaluation *research*. He has also described it as a form of applied research used to “inform action, enhance decision making, and apply knowledge to solve human and societal problems” (Patton, 1990, p. 12). Evaluation and research are typically presented as having different purposes, expected uses and intended users. Evaluations are usually conducted to inform practice within specific situations, whereas research is conducted to contribute to knowledge and theory and illuminate social concerns. It is the contention within this paper that these distinctions should be viewed with less rigidity and greater nuance. Evaluations can be used to enhance practice in other organizations, to influence public perception and policy decisions, and to give impetus to theory building and future research studies. This approach to evaluation has been adopted by some practitioners in the field, but there is still a dearth of published material about such systematic program and service evaluation. Many professionals still see this type of evaluation as daunting in terms of time and skills, and many academics see evaluation as separate from research and not worth pursuing. The problem is further exacerbated by the limited use of different types of methodologies and instruments. Much of the evaluation in the field is conducted through surveys, some of it in the form of qualitative data taken from written answers to open ended questions, but a large proportion of it in the form of quantitative data taken from Likert scales, rating scales, check lists, and the like. If, as Henderson and Bialeschki (1995) suggest, evaluation projects use research methods, and differ in terms of objectives and purpose rather than in design and execution, we need to give greater depth and context when we evaluate programs and operations, and we need to think more broadly about the approaches we use, our methodologies, and the types of data we collect.

#### Models of Evaluation

A good starting point may be to understand some systematic models of evaluation and the implications for their use in evaluation projects. Two simple models explained by Henderson and Bialeschki (1995) are the goal attainment model and the goal free model. In the goal attainment model outcomes are measured against pre-established goals and objectives. Objectives operationalize broad goals and should be written so that they are measurable. This model of evaluation lends itself easily to a positivist approach that seeks “facts” and “truth” through the gathering and analysis of quantitative data such as numbers of clients served, levels of

satisfaction, increased levels of fitness or some other attribute. It fits easily into the Benefits Based Programming framework, and it is the most commonly reported type of evaluation. The advantages of this type of study are ease of administering, ability to collect data on large numbers, and presentation of findings that can be succinct and easily understood by outside readers. Studies conducted within the framework of Benefits Based Programming and using this model have attracted positive media attention and improved the public image of experiential education. However, we must be aware of the tendency toward reductionism if we focus our efforts too narrowly. Human behavior is nuanced and contextual and this can easily be overlooked by relying too heavily on one model and limited methodological approaches. Using the goal free model as a framework may help to alleviate this problem.

A goal free model allows one to examine what is actually there, regardless of the goals and objectives of the program or service. Of course, as pointed out by Henderson and Bialeschki (1995), it is unlikely that one would have no regard for the goals of a program when conducting an evaluation because there is usually some question or questions that guide the study. The evaluator must also limit the amount of information that can be collected. However, this model allows one to see unexpected outcomes, and these may be more important than the goals and objectives that were set for the program. This model can use quantitative and qualitative data, but it lends itself very easily to a qualitative approach.

### **Using a Goal Free Approach**

One obvious disadvantage of the goal free model is that it can be labor intensive. This does not have to be the case, however. In a recent evaluation study I conducted I interviewed a small sample of participants, staff, volunteers, and family members at a camp for people with disabilities. The organization wished to investigate the perceived outcomes of the program in light of the agency mission and to ascertain if there were outcomes that they had not anticipated or targeted. By keeping the focus narrow and the numbers small, but allowing for depth of information, resources were not heavily taxed. Yet results were meaningful, highly contextual and valuable to the organization. They also have the potential to be disseminated, not just as a marketing tool but in highlighting some interesting theoretical questions.

In this project, family members who acted as mentors for program participants were able to articulate a deep understanding of the empowerment aspects of the program. Although staff members and volunteers spoke of similar benefits, the family mentors saw the program as an even more powerful tool for change in the lives of their family members – not just in terms of personal development and change for the participant, but in terms of how the mentor might change. The standardized evaluation forms that are used at this center could never hope to capture the conceptual depth seen in this data. Not only does it give them a graphic picture of their program, it also points to a need to delve further into the concepts of advocacy and family mentors. A future study could address advocacy and how it could be highlighted more within the program. Even more importantly, what has been learned here could lead to increased knowledge within the field.

### **Conclusion**

As government support dwindles and competition for grant money increases across public and

private organizations, it becomes more important to be able to justify programs, missions, values and operations. The object of such justification is to raise the level of public understanding of the benefits of experiential education programs and to increase public and private support for such services. Disseminating the results of quality evaluation research is important to this process. Some evaluation research may also blur the boundaries between research and evaluation. It is conceivable that an evaluation study might be applicable to both a specific context and to theory building. There is a lot of evaluation occurring within experiential education programs. At present there is heavy reliance on a goal attainment model and on quantitative data analysis. We need to be open as well to a goal-free model and qualitative approaches to data gathering and analysis. And academics need to engage more fully with evaluation research and see it as a means of advancing knowledge as well as demonstrating program efficacy. We need to consider using a variety of models, approaches, methodologies and data sources, and evaluation research should be systematic, documented, marketed and disseminated.

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## SEER 2008 ABSTRACT

# The Effect of Leader Attributes, Situational Context, and Participant Optimism on Trust in Outdoor Leaders

*Wynn Shooter, Karen Paisley, & Jim Sibthorp*

### Introduction

Outdoor education researchers have accumulated a notable cache of work documenting the outcomes of participation in outdoor education programs (e.g. Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; Kaplan & Talbot, 1983). While continuing this work remains an important task, some researchers are turning their attention toward understanding the *process* of outdoor education. The outdoor leader is one course component that is common in all programmatic outdoor education experiences and authors agree that the relationships that form between participants and leaders are important and influence outcomes (McKenzie, 2003; Mitten, 1995; Sibthorp, Paisley, & Gookin, 2007; Walsh & Golins, 1976). Understanding how outdoor leaders can encourage healthy, constructive relationships between themselves and participants might be a vital step in understanding the process through which participants realize outcomes.

One important element of positive interpersonal relationships is interpersonal trust. Trust is “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor” (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712). Relationships that maintain a high degree of trust in a leader appear to influence outcomes positively. Although the outdoor education literature offers little understanding of trust development or the outcomes of trusting relationships, cross-disciplinary literature has documented many relevant outcomes such as learning, cooperation, and group performance that are influenced by trust in a leader (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mayer & Gavin, 2005; Rotter, 1967). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to test a model of trust development as it occurs between participants of outdoor education programs and outdoor leaders.

The model of trust presented by Mayer et al. (1995) provided the initial independent variables for developing the present model of trust development. However, a number of modifications were made to the Mayer et al. (1995) framework as it was applied to outdoor education. Mayer and his colleagues suggested three leader attributes: ability, benevolence, and integrity. Of these factors, ability was divided further into technical ability and interpersonal ability, in order to remain consistent with outdoor education literature (Priest & Gass, 2005; Sheridan, 2004; Swiderski, 1987). In addition, the definitions of benevolence and integrity were altered to reflect the orientation of the leader toward the participant and toward other group members, respectively. Further, leader gender was added as an additional predictor variable. The Mayer et al. (1995) model also proposed that each individual’s unique, dispositional “propensity to trust” would influence decisions of trust. Citing mixed results regarding the effectiveness of this variable to predict trust, the present study replaced propensity to trust with dispositional optimism. A final variable, situational context, was added to test how the immediate situation might moderate the effects of technical ability, interpersonal ability, benevolence, and integrity.

## Method

This study utilized a factorial survey design in an experiment that tested the effects of the independent variables (technical ability, interpersonal ability, benevolence, integrity, leader gender, situational context, and participant optimism) on trust. Researchers have used the factorial survey approach successfully to examine similar types of judgment and decision-making (e.g. Ludwig & Zeller, 2001; Rossi & Nock, 1982). This technique allows a researcher to operationalize independent variables in vignettes that communicate realistic, hypothetical situations. By randomly generating the variance of the independent variables, orthogonality is achieved, which allows for testing the relative effects of the independent variables, as well as their cumulative influence, on one or more dependent variables (Ludwick & Zeller, 2001).

The leader attribute variables and the situational context were operationalized and randomly varied within short vignettes. Participants in the study were college students enrolled in outdoor education skills courses. The participants read the vignettes, framed an image of an outdoor leader based on the information provided in the vignettes, and indicated a decision regarding the level to which they would trust the leader described in each vignette. In this multilevel factorial survey design, each participant read six vignettes, completed six measures of trust (level 1) and responded to the Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R) (level 2). The LOT-R was chosen because it is a reliable measure of dispositional optimism. This design resulted in six measures of trust ( $n = 539$ ) nested within each participant ( $n = 90$ ). The nested data structure suggested a multilevel modeling approach was appropriate for analyzing the data.

## Results

Hypothesis tests were conducted using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) software version 6. The initial null model revealed an intraclass correlation (ICC) of .14, indicating that approximately 14% of the variance in trust was attributable to differences in the participants. Results show that technical ability, interpersonal ability, benevolence, and integrity were each significant predictors of trust ( $p < .01$ ). However, the situational context did not moderate this relationship. Likewise, leader gender and participant optimism failed to influence trust scores significantly. Overall, this model explained 49% of the variance in trust scores. An orthogonal design, achieved through the random generation of the predictor variables, allowed for interpretation of the relative influence of the significant predictor variables. Technical ability ( $\gamma_{30} = 1.18, t = 14.87, p < .001$ ), yielded the greatest influence on trust, followed by benevolence ( $\gamma_{50} = .66, t = 10.1, p < .001$ ), interpersonal skills ( $\gamma_{40} = .50, t = 8.39, p < .001$ ), and finally integrity ( $\gamma_{60} = .45, t = 8.37, p < .001$ ).

## Discussion

Technical ability, interpersonal ability, benevolence, and integrity each predicted trust successfully. This finding suggests that outdoor leaders could positively influence participant's trust through conscious displays of these attributes. Further, the relative influence of technical ability suggests that participants hold great expectations for an outdoor leader in this regard. However, it is widely accepted within outdoor education practice that leaders should possess both technical and interpersonal skills (Priest & Gass, 2005; Sheridan, 2004; Swiderski, 1987) and, taken as a whole, these results support that conclusion, as well.

It is a curious finding that benevolence and integrity posted such similar relative impacts on trust. Given that integrity was about how the leader treated others and benevolence was about how the leader treated the participant, this finding suggests that participants may place considerable emphasis on information that they gather regarding the leader's behavior toward other group members as well as how the leader responds to him or her as an individual. Taken together, the success of these two variables supports the notion that a leader's character is important to participants (Hobbs & Ewert, 2008).

The design of the present study offers several limitations. Foremost among those may be the factorial survey design itself and the fact that the variables were presented within vignettes that amounted to hypothetical scenarios. Further, use of a convenience sample limits generalizability of the findings. In conclusion, this study found support for a model of trust development by identifying four leader attribute variables that influence trust development. However, work remains to account for the participant level dispositional trait differences.

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## SEER 2008 ABSTRACT

### Role of Pay Satisfaction in Instructor Satisfaction

*Jackson Wilson*

#### Introduction

Voluntary employee turnover is a major factor affecting AE organizations (Garret, 2003). Voluntary turnover is often dysfunctional for both employees and organizations (Birmingham, 1989; Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007). Turnover can result in increased employee and organizational costs (e.g. McKinney, Bartlett, & Mulvaney, 2007) and reduced organizational effectiveness (Kacmar, Andrews, Rooy, Steilberg, & Cerrone, 2006). The academic and practitioner AE literature has been discussing voluntary employee turnover for at least 30 years (e.g., Dawson, 1979). Moreover, if the camping literature is included in the definition of AE literature, then turnover has been a topic of interest since the 1950's in North America (e.g., Mirkin, 1955; Ott, 1956). A majority of this literature has been focused on satisfaction constructs (i.e. job satisfaction & burnout). The relative prominence of satisfaction in the AE turnover literature is congruent with the popularity of job satisfaction in the turnover literature of other disciplines as well (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000).

Many classic theories of turnover include job satisfaction as the central construct explaining voluntary turnover (e.g. Herzberg, 1971; Vroom, 1964). Job satisfaction is an attitudinal construct that is based on an individual's assessment of their employment (Gaertner, 1999). Although a large number of factors have been suggested as impacting instructor satisfaction, instructor pay has been a recurrent theme. On one hand, Barnes (2001) concluded that instructor pay has little to do with satisfaction and subsequent turnover, alternatively, others have claimed the opposite (e.g. Swagar, 1997).

Given the relative prominence of job satisfaction in the voluntary employee turnover literature, this research sought to identify what variables significantly impacted AE instructor job satisfaction.

#### Methods

A sequential exploratory research design was used for this study (Creswell, 2003). Data was concurrently collected using participant interviews and two sets of surveys. The semi-structured interviews (Charmaz, 2006) were conducted in order to identify themes about what variables AE instructors identified as impacting their job satisfaction. The survey data came from both an iterative and a summative survey. The iterative surveys asked each instructor to rate his or her satisfaction on 5 different dimensions and then rate his or her overall satisfaction each day of the expedition (one to three weeks). The summative survey collected instructor attributes and 24 dimensions of satisfaction.

The sample of instructors was a convenience sample from an expeditionary AE base camp in the Northwest United States. 37 interviews were conducted and 44 sets of course surveys were collected. The average age of the sample was 26 years old and was 44% female. 22% were

currently students in higher education, while 74% had already earned a bachelor's or a master's degree.

The interviews consisted of scripted open-ended interview question exploring what the research participants (i.e. instructors) valued in their instructional experience. The participant responses were initially coded using an open coding scheme, which was then transformed into a hierarchy of axial codes (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The identified themes were cross-checked with members in order to triangulate between the researcher and participant perceptions (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 2002).

A 2-level multi-level model (i.e. hierarchical linear model or HLM) was developed using the lme4 (linear mixed-effects models using S4 classes) package in the R statistical program. Restricted maximum likelihood (REML) was employed. The dependent variable was the daily instructor rated level of satisfaction. The choice of which predictors to use was based on the themes that emerged from the interview data.

## Results

The outcome variable was a measure of satisfaction that instructors reported using a 7 point Likert scale every evening that they were working an AE course (a total of 458 measures of satisfaction). Model fit was tested using a chi-squared test of the change of the log-likelihood. Subsequently a Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> test was calculated comparing the given model with the previous nested model and M1.

M1 is the base model for the sake of comparison and only allows the intercept to vary across instructor courses. M2 allowed slope to vary across course (multi-level modeling does not have the same sphericity assumption as repeated measures ANOVA) and found a significant increase in the amount of variance explained. A plot of the data suggested that the slope of satisfaction was not linear; therefore, M3 included time squared and found the expected increase in the explanation of variance.

Table 1. Model Comparison

Model	M1: Random intercept	M2: + Random intercept & slope	M3: + Time <sup>2</sup>	M4: + Satisfaction with pay
Fixed Effects	Int:4.93*** Time:0.70 ***	Int:4.96*** Time:0.67*	Int:4.86*** Time:0.96 Time <sup>2</sup> :-.17	Int:4.85*** Time:1.15 Time <sup>2</sup> :-.41
Log-Likelihood	-733.73	-722.94	-711.49	-623.30
Chi Squared		21.57***	22.91***	178.37***
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> vs. previous		0.01	0.02	0.12
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> vs. M1		0.01	0.03	0.15

Significance: \*≤.05, \*\*≤.01, \*\*\*≤.001

The one variable that explained the greatest variance beyond M3 was instructor satisfaction with pay. Satisfaction with pay was entered as a level 2 variable affecting the intercept, but not the slope of the level 1 equation. In contrast, the actual value of instructor pay failed to explain any variance in satisfaction. Gender, days in the field that season, instructor level of education, and

instructor student status, all explained a statistically significant, but practically insignificant (<1%) amounts of variance in job satisfaction. The instructor's tenure, the length of the course, perceived impact on students, and the age of the students all failed to explain any variance.

### **Discussion**

If one makes the assumption that job satisfaction impacts turnover, then the results of this study echoes Barnes' (2001) finding that the objective level of pay does not necessarily impact turnover; however, summative subjective instructor satisfaction with pay emerged as a major theme from the interview data and was similarly found to significantly explain variance in daily instructor job satisfaction. It is noteworthy that the other major theme that emerged from the interview data, perceived impact on students, did not explain any variance in the quantitative job satisfaction measure. Although a significant relationship was found, it is unclear whether there is a causal relationship and further longitudinal analysis is needed to understand the relationship. Moreover, the restrictive sample limits the generalizability of the findings.

More definitively, it was found that, on average, instructor satisfaction in this sample was lowest at the beginning of course and increased throughout the course, although perhaps at a decreasing rate (curvilinear fashion). This finding about changes of level of satisfaction during the course has potential implications for practitioners.

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## SEER 2008 ABSTRACT

# **The Challenges of Building Social Capital: Conference Attendance Patterns of Outdoor Orientation Program Staff at Four-Year Colleges in the United States**

*Brent J. Bell*

### **Introduction**

One purpose of professional conference attendance is to enhance social support. Intentionally fostering this support is an important political aim that should be developed. Although many multi-factor definitions of social support exist (Cobb, 1979; Cohen & Syme, 1985; Kahn, 1979; Shaefer, et. al, 1981, Weiss, 1974), all distinguish between an affective component (e.g., feelings of support, affirmation, emotional security) and an instrumental component (e.g., tangible access to resources, influence, technology to solve problems). This study integrated the distinctions between affective and instrumental support into Putnam's theory of social capital (2000), which he defines as "social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p. 19). This provides a way to help clarify the challenges to developing the political aims of outdoor education.

Although smaller, more intimate professional conferences may increase affective connections, they limit instrumental support because small conferences lack a critical mass of people (or finances) able to influence governmental policy, regulation, and funding access. This point has been the subject of recent commentary on outdoor education electronic mailing lists (i.e., Miner, 2007; Erpelding, 2007). Discussants wondered why outdoor educators do not concentrate efforts to fewer professional associations and conferences. These concerns are a call for more instrumental support, seeking to influence such areas as: funding, policies, and the stature of outdoor education. By example, the political efforts of service learning advocates throughout the 1990s led to increased funding and legitimacy for the movement (Seaman & Gass, 2004). Although smaller conferences might meet the affective needs of outdoor educators, instrumental needs are likely to be hampered unless a similar political movement is more deliberately pursued. This claim is not unique to outdoor education, as it reflects a national trend in the United States; although the number of new professional associations, the primary sponsors of conferences, is growing, average membership in these associations is decreasing (Putnam, 2000). Therefore, both conference size and attendance patterns are possible indicators of social support development in the field of outdoor education. However, little is known about conference behaviors patterns of outdoor educators.

This project surveyed collegiate outdoor orientation program staff in the US to seek evidence of the trend Putnam describes. We chose outdoor orientation program staff because these programs often work outside of the normal parameters of the college or university (traditional student affairs or academic programs), and these staff have few on-campus mentors, heightening the need for social support. These programs also face real programmatic threats both internally and externally. For example, newly appointed administrators have shut down long-standing, successful programs, unconvinced of their value (Bell, 2008), and land managers have proposed

limitations that will significantly alter program curriculum. Response to such challenges may be strengthened by a unified voice from a critical mass of program staff, raising the profile of outdoor orientation and coordinating strategic responses to regulatory agencies.

The primary research question was whether the conference attendance behaviors of outdoor orientation program staff would show participation at one specific conference, or if conference attendance is decentralized, mimicking the national trend Putnam (2000) identified.

### Methodology

Outdoor orientation staff members were surveyed via email as part of a larger data set of outdoor orientation programs ( $N = 164$ ). Through reminder emails and follow-up telephone calls, the research team was able to generate between a 97-100% response rate. Four small colleges refused to verify the existence of an outdoor orientation program. The total survey was 68 questions long and was pre-tested by six outdoor orientation program staff to edit for content and style. Two questions about professional membership and conference attendance were included in the survey: #61) Are you (the program and staff) a member of a professional group? #62) Do you (the program and staff) attend any professional conferences?

Data were screened and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Since the dataset was nearly complete, validity threats were largely due to error in the accuracy of response. To test this, researchers re-tested a random sample of ten outdoor orientation directors to determine a level of consistency in responses ( $Kappa = .83$ ).

To observe conference attendance patterns, researchers mapped attendance using a network diagram (Novick & Hurley, 2001), designating conference as the nodal entity, and arrows signifying shared conferences. This provided a visual representation of the relational connection between the conferences (Figure 1).

### Results

Overall, the results showed that of the 164 outdoor orientation programs that responded to the survey, staff from 42 outdoor orientation programs reported not attending any professional conferences (26%). Other program staff, however, attended multiple conferences. In total, 122 programs sent staff to 317 conferences, resulting in an average of 2.3 conferences attended per program. Three conferences had distinctly higher attendance concentrations than the rest: Association of Experiential Education (AEE,  $n = 47$ ), Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education (AORE,  $n = 42$ )

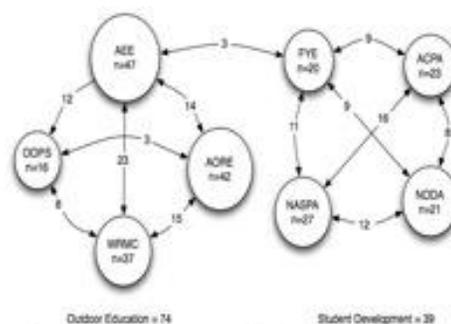


Figure 1. Conference participation patterns of outdoor orientation staff.

and Wilderness Risk Management Conference (WRMC,  $n = 37$ ). Two separate conference attendance patterns emerged from the network diagram. Staff attended conferences almost exclusively in one of two areas of association: outdoor education-based conferences (OE), or college student development-focused conferences (SD.).

### Conclusion

Our analysis did not reveal a centralized conference attendance pattern but rather a combination of nonattendance and attendance across 25 different conferences. Most interesting in these results is the affinity to a specific type of conference, either SD or OE focused, but not a combination of both. Although we expected staff to attend conferences that stretch their learning in new ways, the pattern revealed here shows a highly fractured field in which broader, instrumental supports might currently be sacrificed in favor of localized affective supports. This raises a concern to outdoor orientation programs, and possibly by extension outdoor educators, about the ability to mobilize politically and move forward as a viable educational movement. Through this lens, outdoor educators are not at risk of conferencing alone, but may be at risk of conferencing to feel good at the expense of advancing the field.

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## **SEER 2008 ABSTRACT**

# **Adventure-Based Programming and Social Skill Development in the Lives of Diverse Youth: Perspectives from Two Research Projects**

*Paul Shirilla*

### **Introduction**

Social skill development is emerging as an important issue for educators and practitioners in their work with adolescent youth. This presentation will use the results from two ongoing research projects to examine the relationship between adventure-based programming and social skill development in the lives of diverse youth. The first project is the Project Adventure Inc. RESPECT program, which is a 3-year comprehensive school reform initiative utilizing adventure-based programming as the core methodology. This project is being implemented in four urban Boston public middle schools. The second project is an evaluation of the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension's 4-H Bear Hill summer camp programming over the past two summers. The 4-H Bear Hill camp is located outside of Manchester, NH and serves a variety of youth from the greater Manchester and Seacoast areas of New Hampshire.

### **Literature Review**

Social skills have been shown to be a fundamental asset for healthy psychosocial development and are critical to the educational process of adolescent students (Moote Jr & Wodarski, 1997; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). In addition, social skills are also thought to serve as a preventative tool for several future problematic behaviors such as school and criminal behavior, dropping out of school, unhealthy stress, and violent behavior (Mahoney, Stattin, & Magnusson, 2001; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). While acting a deterrent, social skill development has also been shown to be a significant factor in current as well as future academic functioning and achievement (Malecki & Elliot, 2002).

Given the influence of social skills in positive youth development, researchers within the field of outdoor/experiential education have called for a more intentional focus on promoting social skill acquisition in their respective programming (Jordan, 1994; Nicholson, Collins, & Holmer, 2004). While some research on camp and adventure programs has not shown significant change in social skill development (Dickey, 1996; Michalski, Mishna, Worthington, & Cummings, 2003), other research has shown the effectiveness of such programming to promote prosocial development among adolescent participants (Boyle, 2002; Guettal & Potter, 2000; Reefe, 2005; Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007).

### **Methods**

The Project Adventure Inc. RESPECT program was initiated in the 2005-2006 academic year and was phased into the four participating schools by grade over the following two years, beginning with the sixth grade. Two neighboring schools who did not receive the RESPECT program acted as control schools. Consenting students in both the experimental and control schools completed the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) at the

beginning and end of each academic year. For the sake of this presentation, data from the 2006-2007 seventh grade students will be utilized since these students received the RESPECT program for the past two academic years.

For the 4-H Bear Hill summer camp evaluation, consenting participants in the eight one-week sessions of camp during the 2006 and 2007 seasons completed the Social Skills Checklist (SSC) (Gass, 2005) at the beginning and end of their week of camp. For the 2007 evaluation, a follow-up SSC administered by mail in October was completed by approximately 20% of the participants.

## **Results**

Results for the RESPECT program examine change in SSRS scores for 2006-2007 seventh graders over two academic years. Paired samples t-tests show significant declines in SSRS sum scores for both experimental ( $t(149) = 3.84, p < .001, ES (d) = .31$ ) and control ( $t(55) = 4.02, p < .001, ES (d) = .54$ ) students, however, experimental students declined less than control students over this time span. A one-way ANOVA comparing SSRS change scores between the two groups approached significance at the  $p < .05$  level ( $F(1,204) = 1.46, p = .22$ ).

For the 4-H Bear Hill summer camp, paired samples t-tests were used to compare mean pre/post differences in SSC scores in the both the 2006 and 2007 data. Results from the 2006 analysis show that there was a statistically significant increase in campers' overall SSC score ( $t(137) = 3.38, p < .001$ ) as well as in their Intrapersonal subscale scores ( $t(137) = 4.19, p < .001$ ). Effect size values for these two results were  $d=.29$  and  $d=.37$  respectively, indicating small-to-medium effects. Interpersonal subscale differences, however, were not statistically significant ( $t(137) = .92, p > .05$ ).

Results for the 2007 data showed similar trends to the 2006 data. Campers' showed a statistically significant increase in overall SSC score ( $t(455) = -3.78, p < .001$ ) as well as in their Intrapersonal subscale scores ( $t(455) = -5.36, p < .001$ ). Effect size values for these two results were  $d=.18$  and  $d=.25$  respectively, indicating small effects. Interpersonal subscale differences, however, were again not statistically significant ( $t(455) = -.76, p > .05$ ). Participants completing the follow-up measure, however, showed significant declines from post-test SSC scores ( $t(86) = 3.08, p < .01, ES (d) = .33$ ).

## **Discussion**

The results from these two separate studies examining the impact of adventure-based programming on the social skill development of diverse youth show somewhat contrasting outcomes. In the school-based Project Adventure Inc. RESPECT program, the declines observed by both experimental and control students exemplify the transitional nature of middle school years, with urban youth often facing further challenges such as increased levels of violence and poverty (Eccles et al., 1993). While the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant, the RESPECT program does seem to be an attenuating influence in the social skill declines for experimental students.

Results from the 2006 and 2007 4-H Bear Hill summer camp evaluations suggest that camp programming had a positive impact on the overall social skill development of its participants,

primarily in the development of intrapersonal skills. The follow-up declines in the 2007 data highlight an interesting dilemma for camp programming as participants return to their everyday lives, which are often devoid of any programming specifically aimed at enhancing social skill ability.

As social skill development becomes a more recognized component in the education of today's youth, these two research projects shed light on the impact of adventure-based programming in this domain among youth in diverse settings. While results are not overly positive, this research provides an opportunity to discuss this important topic within the context of adventure-based programming research.

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## SEER 2008 ABSTRACT

### **Northern Exposures: Models of Experiential Learning in Indigenous Education**

*Kevin Barry O'Connor*

This research involves the current educational challenges facing First Nation students of northern Canada through examination of two experiential and place-based educational programs presently being applied in both the public school system of the Yukon Territory (Experiential Programs in Whitehorse and surrounding communities, YT) and in two Cree Nation reserve schools in northern Alberta (Community-Based Experiential Education Program in Kehewin and Cold Lake, AB).

These programs successfully utilize experiential and placed-based initiatives to address the lack of success and disengagement amongst Indigenous students by promoting a holistic form of education that values the importance of place and its cultural knowledge. *The primary objective of this research is to discover which elements of experiential and place-based education lead to greater engagement of Indigenous students and improved educational outcomes.* These two programs are practical applications of experiential education and critical theory as praxis. The programs were chosen as they represent an extensive cross-section of cultural groups (Yukon First Nations, Cree, and Dene); the schools placement in educational system (public vs. reserve schools), diversity of geographic location (Yukon and northern Alberta) and scope (diverse pedagogies and epistemologies).

#### **Methodology**

*Setting.* I have spent approximately two months in each of the following communities observing and creating qualitative case study reports. These programs and their respective communities include:

- *Experiential Education Program-* Wood Street School, Ghùch Tlâ Community School, Selkirk Elementary and Elijah Smith Elementary, part of the Yukon Department of Education in Whitehorse, Yukon.
- *Community-Based Experiential Education Program-* Kehewin First Nation School and Le Goff School, part of Treaty Six Tribal Chiefs Peacekeeping Conservation Commission in St. Paul, Alberta.

*Participants.* As the collaboration with specific community and school participants is a primary tenet in the delivery of experiential programming, it is also foundational in this action research project. Each community has provided a lead collaborator who supplies direction and support for the research. The research includes input from Elders, Chiefs, associated community members, parents, educational administrators (department directors, principals and advisors), teachers and students.

*Data.* Qualitative research methods were chosen, as there seems to be some evidence that Indigenous methodologies are conducive to this type of research design (Chavers, 2000). In an

attempt to conduct good and emancipatory research, I have chosen what I believe to be strategies of inquiry that recognize the uncertainty of the human condition, the diverse nature of knowledge and the foundational aspect of context (Tobin & Kincheloe, 2006).

*Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry* focuses on the participants “everyday lived experience”, as they find themselves in the world and give meaning to it (van Manen, 1990). Evaluation of narratives, interviews and focus groups that center on student engagement, critical learning, and identity formation provide valuable information for this research.

*Participatory and Community Action Research (PAR/CAR)* is valuable as community collaboration and critical pedagogy are primary tenets. Through the process of PAR/CAR, a social justice value interacts with community connectedness and participation (Friere, 1970; Reitsma-Street & Brown, 2002) that supports a team approach to the research that respects the contributions of all participants and pays attention to the power relationships between participants, which includes the researcher(s).

*Comparative Case Study Analysis* provides a textual interpretation of each specific program (Burawoy, 2000; Yin, 2003). A rich description of each programs evolution is included. It is the hope that the particulars of each specific case study and also the commonalities and differences explored through comparative analysis of all three case studies provide valuable information for communities, schools, and educators. While this research does not seek to promote a universal form of education or a one size fits all structure, it foresees some transferability of successful elements for interested educational communities.

## **Results**

The results indicated many similarities in the factors that lead to greater engagement of Indigenous students in the two programs. Specific themes that emerged that were deemed crucial to both experiential initiatives were: the importance of *Partnerships* within the community that assisted in delivering the curriculum; the application of *Alternative Forms of Evaluation* in the programs; the use of *Field Studies* to deliver and engage students often beyond the specific curricular objectives; an acknowledgement of *Teacher-Centered Programs*; an incorporation of *Indigenous Culture, Language, and Spirituality* in all aspects of the educational context; issues of *Sustainability* of the alternative programs within a traditional educational setting; and an *Alternative Structure and Scheduling* of the programs.

A major difference that was noted between the programs is in the overall objectives to utilize experiential and place-based initiatives. The Yukon program was originally developed to address diverse learning styles and promote a more community oriented process of education. The Northern Alberta program is based on the integration of treaty rights within the process of learning to encourage students to be aware of and feel responsible for the lands they occupy. It is crucial to note that not only are there definite relations and nuances within each experiential and place-based program but explicitly specific within each school, community and reserve.

## Discussion

In summarizing the contribution that experiential and place-based processes have made to Indigenous education and knowledge production, four possible conclusions are suggested: First, the practical application of theoretical knowledge is a valuable contribution to the learning process. Second, an active participation developed by the immersion experience may provide motivation for recognition of environmental and social variation and the need for new strategies for social change. Third, the students develop an understanding of the interrelationship between the ecology of their community and its social framework within a global context. Finally, experiential learning provides the Indigenous student with the task of being conscious about and takes responsibility for the reality of their own political and cultural awareness. It is in this very act that the central value is realized: the ability of all persons to know their potential for development and self awareness (Denise & Harris, 1989).

It is a great challenge for educators to find ways of incorporating these alternative forms of education and, more specifically, to include Indigenous methodologies and perspectives into the curriculum as the formal educational system has dismissed such thought for years (Enos, 1999; McLaughlin, 1992). It is intended that the findings provide communities and educators with a better understanding of educational approaches that successfully engage Indigenous students in the process of learning through the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and methodologies through an experiential model; one that acts on the theoretical underpinnings that are espoused and actually drives the overall operation and philosophy of the school.

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## **SEER 2008 ABSTRACT**

# **The Effect of an Experiential, Adventure Based “Anti-Bullying Initiative” on Levels of Resilience: A Mixed Methods Study**

*Jesse Beightol, Jenn Jeverson, Sky Gray, Susan Carter, and Michael Gass*

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to assess the effect of the Santa Fe Mountain Center’s experiential, adventure-based “Anti-Bullying Initiative” on levels of resilience. The goal of this initiative was to create a more positive, caring, and safe learning environment for all students at a local elementary school in Santa Fe, NM. Activities were designed to promote participants’ resiliency skills, reduce bullying behavior, and create safer classroom environments. This study examined the effect of program participation on immediate changes in resilience, the enduring impact on resilience at 4-months post-treatment, and differences based on gender. In addition, this study sought to identify key program components that may have contributed to the observed changes.

### **Literature Review**

Many young people face significant challenges that place their ability to develop in positive ways at risk. One such risk factor is bullying. If not adequately addressed, bullying has the potential to produce negative consequences (e.g., difficulties concentrating in the classroom, depression, lower self-esteem) (Rigby, 2001). A strengths-based approach focusing on enhancing resilience, or the ability to develop “patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk” (Masten & Reed, 2002, p. 75), holds promise for mitigating the negative consequences often associated with bullying (Donnon & Hammond, 2007).

Despite the growing understanding that the development of resilient individuals and communities involves the presence of external factors (e.g., caring relationships) and the enhancement of internal assets (e.g., self efficacy, goals and aspirations) (Constantine & Benard, 2001), a reliable and consistent model for resilience enhancement has yet to be established. Adventure education experiences have the potential to serve as effective venues for enhancing resilience in young people, as many characteristics of adventure experiences parallel the internal assets and external factors necessary for resilience development (Benard & Marshall, 2001). Limited research has been conducted on this topic (Neill & Dias, 2001; Skehill, 2001; Ewert & Yoshino, 2008), producing mixed but promising results. Further research is necessary to understand the role of adventure education experiences in resilience enhancement.

### **Methods**

This study used a mixed methods, quasi-experimental design to measure students’ self-reported internal assets of goals and aspirations, problem solving, empathy, and self efficacy. The initiative consisted of 10 in-school sessions (role plays and problem solving activities) and 3 full-

day experiences at the Santa Fe Mountain Center's high ropes course facility. The treatment group ( $n = 52$ ; male = 26, female = 25) and comparison group ( $n = 54$ ; male = 29, female = 25) consisted of 5<sup>th</sup> grade students with similar demographics. Quantitative data were gathered using the Anti-Bullying Initiative Survey (Carter & Jeverson, 2006) and these findings were compared with results from focus groups, interviews, and program observations to assess both program processes and outcomes. Quantitative data were collected at pre-treatment, post-treatment, and 4-months post-treatment and qualitative data were collected at 4-months post-treatment.

## Results

A series of non-parametric tests demonstrated that participation in this program did correlate with enhanced levels of goals and aspirations in the treatment group from pre-treatment to 4-months post-treatment ( $z = -2.581, p = .010, r = .25$ ). In addition, a significant increase in self efficacy was found for the treatment group from pre-treatment to post-treatment ( $z = -2.669, p = .008, r = .26$ ). These findings were supported by qualitative results. While not a strong theme, some students attributed their development of goals and aspirations to this initiative. A strong emphasis was also placed on enhanced self efficacy, especially related to dealing with bullying situations. While not statistically significant, there were many examples of enhanced empathy in the qualitative data, most of which were connected to the use of the Comfort Zone model that enabled students to empathize with the challenges their peers faced. Problem solving did not emerge as a strong theme.

Significant findings were also found when comparing gender differences in the treatment group. Female students in the treatment group demonstrated significant increases in goals and aspirations ( $z = -2.627, p = .009, r = .37$ ) and self efficacy ( $z = -2.236, p = .025, r = .32$ ) while the male students did not demonstrate these changes. In addition, female treatment group students portrayed significantly higher mean resilience scores when compared to males. This disparity was supported by the qualitative findings.

Qualitative analysis revealed the following emerging themes: the presence of essential external assets, successful experiences followed by meaningful reflection, the enhancement of a number of internal assets, the transfer of program lessons to other settings, increased responsibility that led to enhanced external assets available for students and their peers, and the cyclical nature of the program which continually reinforced important lessons.

## Discussion

Despite limitations related to survey instrumentation (e.g., ceiling effect, abnormal data distributions, low correlation coefficients), this program appeared to play a positive role in resilience enhancement and supported previous findings (Neill & Dias, 2001; Ewert & Yoshino, 2008). While this study did not directly assess the impact of the initiative on bullying behavior, results suggest that participation in this adventure education experience may reduce the risks of negative consequences often associated with bullying by increasing resilience traits.

Identifying resilient outcomes enabled this program to provide important tools and experiences that appear to have helped enhance the students' internal assets, though the changes were not necessarily consistent or long lasting. Continuity between the adventure program and the school

contributed to improved outcomes that were valued in the classroom setting. Providing increased levels of responsibility enabled the students to contribute to the external factors available in both classroom and peer settings. The emphasis on enhancing both individual and community assets is consistent with current directions in resilience research (Ungar, 2005). Variations on resilience scores based on gender deserve further inquiry and align with research highlighting the need to consider gender differences in adventure programming (Skehill, 2001) and resilience research (Wasonga et al., 2003).

The Resilience Cycle, a model of resilience enhancement based on this initiative, provided a valuable conceptual framework that will contribute to the fields of resilience and adventure education practice and research. Further investigation is necessary to assess the appropriateness of this model as an effective framework for resilience enhancement in an adventure education setting.

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## SEER 2008 ABSTRACT

# Sensation Seeking: A Potential Factor Influencing Perceived Risk and Perceived Competence in Adventure Experiences

*Cass Morgan*

### Introduction

This study examined the relationship between the sensation seeking personality trait to changes in perceived risk and perceived competence during an adventure experience. Participants (n = 57) were enrolled in a 14-week introductory scuba diving course offered at a university in eastern North Carolina in 2006. The data was analyzed using a repeated measures analysis of variance; a post-hoc test was conducted to assess a main effect. Supporting literature and findings from this study are discussed.

### Literature Review

Some individuals, namely high sensation seekers, engage in risky experiences for the stimulation involved in the experience (Zuckerman, 1994; 2007). Research supports a correlation between the sensation seeking personality trait to participation in high-risk sports such as: skydiving (Hymbaugh & Garrett, 1974); whitewater kayaking and canoeing (Campbell, Tyrrell, & Zingaro, 1993); mountaineering (Breivik, 1996); rock climbing, (Robinson, 1985); and scuba diving (Heyman & Rose, 1979). High sensation seeking individuals have lower perceptions of risk than do low sensation seekers, who appraise risky situations with a higher perception of risk (Rosenbloom, 2003; Zuckerman, 1994). Martin and Priest (1986) in their Adventure Experience Paradigm suggests that perceived risk and perceived competence change due to involvement in adventure experiences (e.g., Priest & Bunting, 1993; Priest & Carpenter, 1993; Vagias, Morais, & Dziubek, 2005). However, it is unclear as to whether these changes are effected by a personality *trait*, specifically sensation seeking, though it is theorized that perceptual changes in competence and risk may be influenced by personality *types* (Priest & Gass, 1997). Furthermore, adventure education theory proposes that the interplay of risk and competency create adventure experiences and dictate, at least in part, the outcome of the experience (Barnes, 1997). That is, actual and perceived levels of risk and competency determine whether the experience results in disaster, boredom, or adventure (Priest & Gass, 1997). As such, it is important to determine whether the sensation seeking personality trait is a factor influencing perceptions of risk and competence.

### Methods

A descriptive research model was utilized to determine the relationship between sensation seeking scores to changes in perceived risk and perceived competence over a 14-week introductory course in scuba diving. Participants were asked to complete the *Sensation Seeking Scale form V*, a 40-item questionnaire developed to determine level of sensation seeking (Zuckerman, 1994); a demographic questionnaire; and the *Dimensions of an Adventure Experience* (DAE), a tool developed to assess perceptual changes in risk and competence during an adventure experience (Priest, 1992). At the orientation to the scuba diving course, the

researcher administered three questionnaires (SSS V, DAE, and a demographic questionnaire). To determine any changes in perceived risk and competence, the DAE was administered an additional six times that were considered by an expert panel to be novel and challenging (e.g., first time on scuba, first open water dive, and first offshore dive). Each participant completed the DAE before and then following each of these experiences to determine any perceptual changes. In addition, the DAE was also administered upon completion of the course to assess any overall change.

## **Results**

Of the 94 students enrolled in the basic scuba diving course, 88 individuals agreed to participate in the study for a response rate of 93%. Of the initial 88 participants, 35 participants failed to provide complete data, therefore they were not included in the analysis. The final sample consisted of 57 participants for a response rate of 65 %. The final sample consisted of 36 males (63.2%) and 21 females (36.8%). The majority of the sample (93%) had a moderate to high sensation seeking score. Changes in perceived risk and perceived competence were analyzed using repeated measures ANOVA. Following significance, a post hoc test was conducted. A 1 X 8 repeated measures ANOVA was employed to test for an interaction effect between sensation seeking and perceived risk as well as perceived competence.

Data in this study indicated a significant ( $p < .000$ ) decrease in perceived risk and a significant ( $p < .000$ ) increase on the competence factor throughout the course. However, the results did not find a significant interaction effect between sensation seeking to changes in perceived risk or perceived competence. The findings of this study provide empirical evidence supporting a relationship between repeated experience in high-risk recreation to changes in perception of risk and competency. More specifically, results indicate that over time, and with repeated experience, perceptions of risk lower and perceptions of competency increase. Furthermore, individuals manifest heightened perceptions of risk prior to engaging in the activity and lower perceptions of competency. Repeated exposure elicited this same response. The findings of this study support and further confirm the literature that indicates repeated involvement in high-risk recreation decreases participants' perceptions of risk and increases their perceptions of competence.

## **Discussion**

The objective of this study was to describe the relationship between sensation seeking to changes in perceived risk and perceived competence in a basic scuba diving course. The results of this study did not indicate a significant interaction effect between sensation seeking scores to changes in perceived risk and perceived competence. This may be due to the sample's range of sensation seeking scores, which primarily fell into the mid to high range of sensation seeking scores. Future research should investigate how participants with more variance in sensation seeking scores respond to adventure activities. Results from this study provided further empirical support confirming that perceived risk lowers throughout an adventure experience. Likewise, increased perceptions of competence support the theoretical framework of Martin and Priest's (1986) Adventure Experience Paradigm (AEP) suggesting continued involvement in adventure recreation increases perceptions of competence and reduces perceived risk.

This study lends towards the consideration of some potentially relevant future questions: 1) Does repeated involvement in adventure recreation facilitate the development of astute assessments of risk and competence? 2) What role might someone's predisposition to seek or avoid risk influence the outcomes of engaging in adventure recreation? Further understanding participants' responses to adventure recreation can assist practitioners in facilitating experiences in ways that best target desired outcomes, and while this study adds valuable information to the literature, additional research is needed in order to ascertain how personality traits may influence outcomes in adventure experiences.

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## SEER 2008 ABSTRACT

# Outdoor Orientation Program Effects: Sense of Place and Social Benefits

*Mathew L Austin, Bruce Martin, Robin Mittelstaedt, Kevin Schanning, & Derek Ogle*

### Introduction

Over 200 schools currently use some form of the Outward Bound-adapted model of outdoor orientation (OO). Assisting students with the transition to college is a primary goal of these programs (Bell, Holmes, Vigneault & Williams, 2008). This study was conducted at a small mid-western liberal-arts college with a strong environmental mission. Participation in an OO program is required of all new students. In the fall of 2006, 186 freshmen went on 19 different trips. This research explores two program outcomes pertinent to the goal of assisting students with their transition to college. First, it explores the degree to which Outdoor Orientation (OO) programs foster sense of place among new students. Second, it explores the social benefits of participation in OO programs.

### Literature Review

Documented gains associated with Outdoor Orientation (OO) programs include personal growth (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1996) an increase in self-efficacy (Hinton, Twilley, & Mittelstaedt, 2007) and improved retention (Gass, 1990). Outdoor Orientation programs have also had a positive effect on participants' social skills, such as developing social networks (Gass, Garvey, & Sugarman, 2003) adjustment, small group skills, and reducing stereotyping (Galloway, 2000). One area that remains unexplored is the effectiveness of these programs in fostering a *sense of place* among students. *Sense of place* is defined as "an experientially based intimacy with the natural process, community, and history of one's place" (Sanger, 1997, p. 2). *Sense of place* incorporates dependence, identity, awareness, and attachment (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001).

### Methods

The pre/post-test questionnaire consisted of 27 questions central to *sense of place*, *social benefits*, and other trip-specific questions. Most questions pertained to student attitudes and were measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale of "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Students were also asked to report recent and anticipated social behaviors, using a 4-point scale ranging from "never" to "often." The survey was administered during the orientation check-in process and again at the end of each trip while participants were transported back to campus. A total of 139 students completed the pre-test survey, and 178 completed the post-test survey; a total of 118 students completed both surveys for an overall matched pairs response rate of 63%. Reliability and factor analyses were conducted to examine the psychometric properties of the two scales designed to measure *sense of place* and *social benefits*. Paired-samples *t*-tests, crosstabs, and Bowker's chi-square test of symmetry were all used to examine participant responses. Replies to open-ended survey questions were analyzed and coded according to themes

and concepts that emerged from the data. In an attempt to control for post trip “group euphoria” (Hattie, Marsh, Neil, & Edwards, 1997) nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of students whom had continued participation with OO as leaders. Interviews further explored students’ experiences and impressions of OO. Line-by-line coding was conducted according to the themes of *sense of place* and *social benefits*.

## Results

A comparison of pre-test and post-test responses revealed significant differences in the number of friendships students created ( $t = -15.15$ ;  $df = 91$ ,  $p = .00$ ). The average number of friendships increased from 2.2 ( $SD = 3.81$ ) to 12.8 ( $SD = 8.01$ ). OO participants also reported a significant increase in the number of people on campus they would trust with an emotional secret ( $t = -7.32$ ;  $df = 82$ ,  $p = .00$ ), increasing on average from 0.6 ( $SD = 1.12$ ) to 4.8 ( $SD = 5.49$ ).

A separate factor analysis (FA) was performed on the 10 Sense of Place items as well as the 15 items measuring Social Benefits. Bartlett’s test indicated the 10 Sense of Place items were more than adequate [ $\chi^2 = 395.54$  ( $df = 45$ ,  $p = .00$ )] and KMO results (.82) indicated these data were “meritorious” for conducting a factor analysis (George & Mallery, 2006, p. 252). The Sense of Place FA confirmed three themes, accounting for 72% of explained variance. Cronbach’s alpha revealed the overall scale ( $\alpha = .87$ ) has a high degree of internal consistency, and provides a reliable measure of Sense of Place. For the Social Benefits FA, Bartlett’s test revealed these 15 items were more than adequate [ $\chi^2 = 469.72$  ( $df = 105$ ,  $p = .00$ )] and KMO results (.65) indicated these data were between “mediocre” and “middling” for conducting a factor analysis. The Social Benefits FA confirmed four themes, explaining 60.87% of the variance. Cronbach’s alpha results indicated this 15-item scale also has a low degree of reliability ( $\alpha = .48$ ).

Participants showed significant positive shifts for 9 of the 25 questions regarding *sense of place* and *social benefits* ( $p < .00$ ). Students’ *sense of place* scores increased significantly on the following items about the region: feeling connected, knowing the area, being a part of the area, and a feeling of attachment. Students’ *social benefits* scores increased significantly on the following items: having a sense that they will fit in, sense of a strong social support network, that having a lot of friends influences their comfort, and that they find themselves in and adapt well to unfamiliar social situations. Following their trip, 89% of all students agreed there are benefits to participating in the OO program; 78% reported having a discussion with someone from a different background that broadened their perspectives, and 88% agreed they were exposed to new ideas, cultures, and backgrounds on their OO trip. A vast majority of students reported trips as beneficial mentioning: social benefits (93%), new experiences, things, or skills, (22%), a reduction of fear (15.3%), benefits regarding place (13.1%), and fun (11.7%), with only 1.5% mentioning physical benefits. Responses to nine open-ended interviews produced qualitative data that provided rich anecdotal evidence, further supporting these findings.

## Discussion

Program participants perceived an increase in *sense of place* and *social benefits* as a result of their orientation experience. This research supports previous *social benefits* findings and establishes *sense of place* as an important concept worthy of further investigation. Data suggest that perhaps program emphasis should focus on increasing student’s abilities to work in small

groups, to try new things by themselves and to develop a concern for social issues. Questions raised during interviews about the longevity of positive outcomes, benefits for leaders, and the lack of academic transition help for freshmen suggest areas in need of future study. Helping students to develop a sense of community can have a significant, positive influence on student retention (Jacobs & Archie, 2008) and this research challenges colleges to consider including an outdoor orientation as an opportunity to foster community both among persons but with the natural world as well.

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## SEER 2008 ABSTRACT

# Outcomes of a Spiritually-Focused Wilderness Orientation Program

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### Introduction and Literature Review

Researchers have been studying the conditions that matter in supporting the successful transition and persistence of students to the collegiate environment for more than three decades (Astin, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2005; Upcraft, Gardner & Associates, 1989). As first suggested by Sanford (1962, 1967), for students to be successful they must be both challenged with educational experiences that foster learning and personal development and supported by the college environment. Recently a focus on student spiritual growth and development as an important aspect of higher education has emerged. Chickering, Dalton and Stamm (2006) share concern that higher education has for far too long

encouraged the development of fragmented and inauthentic lives by ignoring the “inner” development of values and beliefs, emotional maturity, moral development, spirituality, and self-understanding among college students. For institutions to support students as holistic beings in their transition, attention must be given to both the internal and external realm of the students’ experience. One common way institutions support the first-year student transition is through orientation programs and more specifically, wilderness orientation programs offered at the beginning of the academic year.

The wilderness orientation program of interest in this study is Montreat College’s Wilderness Journey for First Year Students (WJFYS) which is an Outward Bound-type wilderness experience program. The program includes the instruction of technical skills necessary for safe and efficient backcountry travel as well as group and personal enjoyment, but these activities are secondary to the goals of the program which include: Christian discipleship, stewardship, leadership and service; all facilitated through a small group expedition in the wilderness. WJFYS is unique in its design because of its length (12-14 days) and its overt focus on the use of the wilderness as a catalyst for Christian spiritual development in the lives of its participants.

Given the increase in campus initiatives aimed at assisting first-year students through wilderness orientation programs (Bell, 2008; Galloway, 2000) and the emphasis on examining student spiritual growth and development; further research investigating the outcomes of such programs is warranted. The research question guiding this exploratory study was to understand the students’ perceptions of a spiritually-focused wilderness orientation program and the influence of their participation in the program on their transition to the College.

### Methods

The WJFYS course (OE 181) is open to any incoming student (freshman or transfer) who is physically able to participate and has met the application deadline. The students arrive on campus to participate in a wilderness expedition 12 days prior to the regular New Student Orientation (NSO) in which all students participate. The WJFYS students continue to meet

throughout the fall semester in order to continue to build community and provide support through the transition to college life. During the program year studied there were 11 students (8 male and 3 female) and two instructors - a professor of Outdoor Education and an upper-class student. There were four transfer students and seven first-time freshmen. All eleven students participated in the study.

This investigation utilized a mixed-method design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) as a means of combining qualitative and quantitative methods for exploring the students' perceptions of their experience during the WJFYS course. This study employed three phases of data collection. Phase one included analysis of a 3-5 page essay written by the students one month after the expedition. Phase two involved administering the Student Adaptations to College Questionnaire (SACQ) one month after the start of the fall semester to the WJFYS students and a control group. The results from the SACQ were used to help identify areas of further inquiry. The sample size is not large enough to provide any generalizations from the findings of the SACQ. Phase three was a focus group interview conducted with the WJFYS students at the end of their first semester at the College in order to better understand the influence of the wilderness orientation program. The data collected from the SACQ was explored through descriptive statistics, tested for normality and an independent t-test was used to test for significant differences between the WJFYS students and the control group. Throughout the qualitative data analysis, elements of the Constant Comparative Method (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) and naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) served as a guide, whereby emerging themes were constantly compared with new data being analyzed. Specifically, the data analysis process followed the steps outlined in part by Tesch (1990) and Vaughn, Shay & Sinagub (1996), which assisted the researchers in the reduction and interpretation of the text.

## **Results**

Analysis of the data collected from the SACQ indicated that students who attended the wilderness orientation program performed significantly higher on the SACQ Full Scale ( $t(18) = 3.00, p < .008$ ) and on three of the four subscales: Social Adjustment ( $t(11.50) = 3.70, p < .003$ ), Personal-Emotional Adjustment ( $t(16.24) = 3.45, p < .003$ ) and Goal Commitment/Institutional Attachment ( $t(12.48) = 2.98, p < .011$ ). While the WJFYS students also scored higher on the Academic Adjustment subscale, the results were not significant. The following major themes emerged from the qualitative data collected both through the post-expedition essays and the focus group interviews at the end of the semester: (a) the wilderness journey establishes community, (b) the wilderness journey facilitates developing competence, (c) the wilderness journey enhances a sense of stewardship – a responsibility to care, (d) the wilderness journey promotes spiritual development through an increased trust in God, an increased communion with God, an increased awareness of one's own personal faith and an environment that supported faith development, (e) the wilderness journey encourages the development of integrity – the difference between what one believes and what one lives, and (f) the wilderness journey promotes the transference of learning to the rest of life.

## **Discussion**

This study provides insight into the experiences of first-year college students who participated in a spiritually-focused wilderness orientation program. The results are meaningful in answering

some of the questions asked by both those involved in traditional first-year student transition programs and those providing wilderness orientation programs focused on the spiritual growth and development of college students. The themes that emerged from this study indicate four overarching categories that the students recognized as important related to their experience: (a) community, (b) developing competence, (c) stewardship, and (d) spiritual development. Given the increased attention to the education of the “whole” person, student affairs personnel and adventure/wilderness program staff might consider ways in which their programs can enhance student’s transition to college. One of the key findings of this study was the role of environment in creating space for students to explore their own spirituality through reflection. The challenge to all those involved in college student’s lives is to find ways to encourage time for reflection while on campus.

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## SEER 2008 abstract

# The Effects of Short-Term Therapeutic Wilderness Camping on the Therapeutic Alliance of Counselors and Youth-in-Treatment

*Matthew D. Liddle*

### Introduction

Therapeutic alliance (TA), or the working relationship that develops between clients in treatment and their counselors, has been shown to be a robust predictor of treatment outcome across a broad range of therapeutic modalities. This study examined the relationship between TA and short-term therapeutic wilderness camping trips conducted with adolescent groups in a partial hospital/day treatment setting.

### Literature Review

Of all essential aspects of treatment processes that the therapist and client exert any agency upon (e.g. treatment modality, treatment fidelity), therapeutic alliance often accounts for the largest variance in outcome (Horvath & Symonds, 1991, Lambert & Barley, 2001). Despite a broad array of studies on TA, there is a surprising gap in the literature surrounding alliance-building treatment settings or particular interventions designed to enhance TA. Adventure-based therapies may be a modality of intervention that is particularly adept at forming alliances, a notion suggested previously by Russell (2006), Russell and Phillips-Miller (2002) and Gass (1993).

In adolescent mental and behavioral health care, developing and sustaining therapeutic relationships with clients may be vital to outcome. Adolescents are typically more resistant to treatment than adult clients, in part because they are often referred to treatment against their wishes, do not recognize or acknowledge the existence of their problems, and are at odds with their parents about the goals of therapy (Shirk & Russell, 1998; Oetzel & Scherer, 2000; Bickman, Vides de Andrade, Lambert, Doucette, Sapyta, Boyd, Rumburger, McDonough, & Rauktis, 2004). Yet research has found that resistive, hostile, or negativistic behavior impeded the formation of alliance and positive outcome (Frieswyk, Allen, Colson, Coyne, Gabbard, Horwitz & Newson, 1986), and clients who have difficulty with social relationships or poor family relationships are also less likely to develop strong alliance (Horvath & Luborsky, 1993). Adventure-based interventions conducted with clients and their counselors together may be a method to enhance TA among difficult adolescent client populations.

### Methods

The study employed a pre-test post-test non-equivalent group design, drawn from a non-randomized convenience sample of 5 classrooms in a partial hospital/day school program. All students and teacher/counselors (T/Cs) from each classroom were included, totaling 45 students and 10 T/Cs. Each classroom participated in a 5-day therapeutic wilderness camping trip at a primitive base camp setting. TA was measured with both youth and T/Cs in the weeks immediately preceding and following the trip, using the Pressley Ridge Therapeutic Alliance

Scale (Doucette and Bickman, 2001), a 30- item self-report questionnaire with separate but corresponding versions for youth and T/Cs. Of interest were the following research questions:

- *Do youth and T/Cs report significant changes from pre-trip to post-trip in therapeutic alliance, as measured by their PR-TAS score?*
- *Were there significant differences in change in therapeutic alliance scores between subjects by a) gender of student; b) age of student; c) timing of their trip (earlier in the school year or later); d) category of students' axis I diagnosis (internalizing vs. externalizing); or e) their T/Cs' number of years of experience in teaching?*
- *Were there significant differences between youth and T/C ratings of alliance?*

One-way repeated measures within subject ANOVAS were conducted with both youth and T/C scores to investigate the possibility of significant change in TA. A series of paired samples *t*-tests investigated the possibility of significant differences by demographic groupings.

## Results

The ANOVA conducted with youth pre-trip/post-trip scores did not indicate a significant effect over time, Wilks's  $\lambda = .99$ ,  $F(1,59) = 0.78$ ,  $p = .781$ ,  $\eta^2 = .001$ . No significant differences were found among demographic or clinical groupings.

The ANOVA conducted with T/C scores did indicate a significant effect over time, Wilks's  $\lambda = .60$ ,  $F(1,83) = 56$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .40$ ,  $r = .28$ . Additional significant differences were found among two demographic groupings. T/Cs reported significantly higher improvements in their TA with younger students ( $r = .32$ ). T/Cs participating in early semester trips experienced significantly higher improvements in ratings of TA over T/Cs participating in late semester trips ( $r = .24$ ). Follow-up paired samples *t*-tests found that T/Cs on both early semester and late semester trips experienced significant improvement in TA, but T/Cs participating in early semester trips had a significantly higher improvement than T/Cs in later trips.

Paired samples *t*-tests evaluated whether youth and T/C ratings of alliance differed significantly at time one and time two. Tests at both time one and time two were significant,  $t(72) = -4.77$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $t(61) = -8.90$ ,  $p < .00$  respectively. In both cases, T/Cs tended to rate the quality of TA significantly higher than the youth.

## Discussion

Therapeutic wilderness camping may not be an effective alliance-building intervention among youth-in-treatment. However, youth results for this study are consistent with trends in other youth TA studies. Bickman et al. (2004) and Rautkis, Andrade, and Doucette (2007) found youth alliance scores to remain relatively constant over time, proposing a "window of opportunity" occurring early in the therapeutic engagement during which the level of alliance is formed, and after TA ratings are generally unchanging. Perhaps for youth in this study, the intervention was outside the "window", too late to impact already established alliance levels.

Results for T/C scores are encouraging. Shirk and Karver's (2003) meta-analysis of TA studies among youth found counselor ratings of TA more strongly correlated with treatment outcome

than youth ratings. Although no causal links can be drawn from this study, interventions with positive effects on counselor alliance ratings could be increasing youth outcomes as well – i.e., if we know that high counselor TA scores correlate with positive youth treatment outcome, it follows that an intervention increasing counselor ratings of alliance may positively effect youth outcomes. The differences by timing of trip are also noteworthy. T/Cs in early semester trips report post-trip TA scores comparable to the pre-trip scores of late semester teachers – but *months* earlier in the school year. These early increases in alliance may be of great interest, as multiple studies have found early measures of alliance to be more predictive of positive outcome than later measures (Barber, Connolly, Crits-Christoph, Gladis & Siqueland, 2000; Horvath and Symonds, 1991; Klein, Schwartz, Santiago, Vivian, Vocisano, Castonguay, Arnow, Blalock, Manber, Markowitz, Riso, Rothbaum, McCullough, Thase, Borian, Miller & Keller, 2003). Further studies are encouraged, and should strive for larger samples, more rigorous/sensitive statistical tests, correlations with outcome, and include control groups.

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## SEER 2008 ABSTRACT

# Family Crisis and the Enrollment of Children in Wilderness Treatment

*Nevin J. Harper*

### Introduction

Wilderness camps and programs have long been identified as viable residential treatment options for troubled adolescents (Durkin, 1988). Wilderness treatment programs in the United States, regardless of reputation and service quality, have received increased scrutiny in mainstream media. Many reputable programs have been depicted, rather haphazardly, in alignment with programs described as “boot camps” and unregulated “treatment” programs; essentially, punitive and cruel. Parents of troubled adolescents considering residential or wilderness treatment are faced significant decisions of whether to send their child, and if so, determine which program will best meet their child’s needs with ethical integrity. Family involvement is recognized as a best practice in residential treatment and serves two critical functions. First, it allows families to engage in treatment processes, and second, it exposes families to program philosophy, practices and the care their child is receiving.

An assessment of family involvement practice in wilderness treatment was undertaken to (a) examine the parent decision-making process regarding the enrollment of their child in wilderness treatment, (b) elicit family perceptions of their involvement in treatment processes, and (c) assess parent perspectives of ethical and clinical treatment of their children. At least one parent attended between two and four days of programming. Families had weekly contact with a therapist, communicated with their child through letters, were encouraged to complete on line parenting modules and to seek local counseling support in their home communities. While parental participation is mandatory at the two programs in this study, additional family members are encouraged to participate. Approximately half the children were enrolled involuntarily and treatment averaged 38 days.

### Methods

A phenomenological approach utilizing a time-series interview format with parents, children, and intact family groups when logistically possible comprised the research design. Data were collected from participants of two wilderness treatment programs between June 2006 and April 2008. Pre-determined intake dates identified 14 case study families (one cohort of youth and their families from each program,  $n = 6$  and  $n = 8$ ). Family members were interviewed pre-treatment, post-treatment and two-months post-treatment. Interviews were primarily conducted in person, by phone and occasionally via email and ranged from 40-65 minutes in length. The three-interview format was utilized for its history-experience-reflection model of data elicitation put forward by Seidman (2006). Interviews and researcher’s reflexive notes were transcribed; data were analyzed deductively utilizing NVivo software.

## Results

Four major themes were identified: (a) Family crisis abated, (b) Meaningful separation, (c) Mixed emotions, and (d) New beginnings/Not fixed. *Family crisis abated*: Most families considered their circumstances extremely unstable; the child's behavior was the dominant concern in the household and parents feared the worst. With previous failures in educational, community, legal and clinical interventions, many youth were enrolled as a final option. Child enrollment in wilderness treatment created significant duress for the whole family, although parents consistently reported immediate reduced family stress in the home. Adolescents were often sullen and angry at intake. *Meaningful separation*: The act of sending a child to wilderness treatment was an empowering step for parents in regaining control of their family's dynamic. Although physical distancing of the child has taken place, emotional distance allowed the rest of the family to reflect on their life circumstances and events that have brought the family to this place. With wilderness therapists and staff as mediators, parents and children began communication and therapeutic processes separately and at times conjointly. *Mixed emotions*: Parents expressed a wide range of emotions regarding their decision to send their child to wilderness treatment, the process, and outcomes. Fears of child resentment were common among parents. Guilt and shame over not being able to take care of the family, while rarely stated directly, was often implied, and more so by families that required external transport services to get their child to treatment. During and following treatment, parents and families were generally satisfied with family change and hopeful for future growth. *New beginnings/Not fixed*: Most families recognized the stabilization and reorganization of family roles and responsibilities, and were inspired to take advantage of the "clean slate." They also identified the need for more work. Parents and their children identified the safety of the wilderness treatment group as a surrogate family—and conversely, a false environment. All assumed new knowledge and skills were yet to be tested in home and community settings. Further, families recognized the level of support available during treatment, but questioned whether a system of support was available in their home communities to maintain and continue improving individual and family function gains.

## Discussion

Parents describing program practices did not question the ethical and clinical care of their children. Families had adequate information from programs although a few parents would have liked to verbally communicate with their child and were not satisfied with the mail-only system. Through their participation, parents reported high degrees of confidence and trust in the program's ability to address child and family concerns. While these qualitative findings suggest positive impacts on family function, a two-scale standardized measure of family function utilized with a larger sample from these two programs showed significant improvement in only one of four possible results, the child-report of general family functioning (see Harper, 2007). Parent's perceptions of self and general family functioning, and child-report of self were non-significant although depicted an improving trend. Bettman (2007) identified reduced child empathy toward parent's needs and less functional attachment relationships with their parents post-wilderness treatment. In context, wilderness treatment programs have shown considerable positive individual youth outcomes (Harper, Russell, Cooley, & Cupples, 2007; Russell, 2003). Can the intensive nature of the wilderness treatment modality be exacerbating, or generating new family dynamic problems by working mostly with the child, and not enough with the family? Offered as a preliminary hypothesis, practitioners of wilderness treatment should consider the balance of

their treatment strategies between children and families; it may better serve families to increase family contact and type of participation.

Wilderness treatment programs, due to location and cost, may be hard pressed to increase family involvement within their current infrastructure. Programs can consider (a) working more with local populations to increase access to families, (b) alter program models to increase family contact time, or (c) more directly address family-based problems. These alternatives require further exploration. An underlying assumption of family involvement in this sample was that the child was in treatment, and that families were ‘involved’ rather than engaged in an explicit ‘therapeutic’ relationship; the child-as-client, rather than the family. Bandoroff and Scherer (1994) found clinically successful results in family functioning in their wilderness family therapy program utilizing the family-as-client approach. The perception of ‘family-as-client’ may yet prove critical in achieving meaningful change at the family level in wilderness treatment.

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## SEER 2008 ABSTRACT

# Optimal Challenge: The Impact of Adventure Experiences of Subjective Well-Being

*Leila I. Durr*

### Introduction

Adventure Therapy (AT) and the use of activities and outdoor experiences for educational and therapeutic purposes have a long and rich history. In recent years, the popularity and use of adventure programs in schools, clinical treatment facilities, and various other settings has increased. This increase in a therapeutic context has brought the field of AT to the awareness of clinicians, consumers, and researchers. Although participation is growing rapidly, research on the effectiveness and impact has been slow to substantiate these claims.

### Literature Review

Authors typically introduce AT by offering that the research is sparse and methodologically flawed but that its effectiveness is generally accepted and that adventure and wilderness programs can and do result in positive changes in the participants (Bandoroff, 1989; Gibson, 1979; Gillis & Thomsen, 1996; Moote & Wodarski, 1997). In addition, over the past 25 years, researchers have called for a new direction of research to answer more specific process-oriented questions such as how these programs bring about change and what components or activities are most effective (Bandoroff, 1989; Gibson, 1979; Gillis, 1992; Russell, 2004). Regardless, existing studies still largely evaluate program effectiveness and there continues to be a paucity of research on the process of Adventure Therapy or Programming (AT/AP) experiences.

AT is best defined as an experiential approach to counseling or psychotherapy that integrates adventure, or adventure-based, activities and experiences with more traditional forms of psychotherapy (Gillis & Thomsen, 1996; Newes & Bandoroff, 2004). One of the core elements of AT/AP presented in the literature as key to facilitating growth and change within these experiences is the construct of challenge (Newes & Bandoroff, 2004; Gass, 1993; Kimball & Bacon, 1993). Challenge is used to facilitate the process of taking individuals out of their comfort zones in hopes that they experience a sense of disequilibrium that propels them to develop new, and ideally, healthier, coping mechanisms to regain their equilibrium (Gass, 1993; Nadler, 1983; Fletcher & Hinkle, 2002). Thus, change or growth occurs.

This study sought to contribute to the gap that exists in the research by examining the role of challenge within AT/AP experiences. The overall purpose was to investigate the relationship between challenge and subjective well-being. Specifically, the goal was to determine whether the level or degree of challenge impacts mood and whether an optimal level of challenge yields significantly more positive subjective well-being. The researcher also examined whether differences existed based on actual or perceived perceptions of challenge as well as whether there is a correlation between self-report and observer-rated levels of challenge.

## Methods

A within-subject repeated measure design was used in which each participant completed four challenge course tasks or elements of varying difficulty levels. Participants were 20 adults, ages ranging from 23-36 ( $M = 29$ ,  $S.D. = 4.63$ ) who volunteered to participate in an adventure laboratory and study. 60% of the participants were female and 40% were male. Ethnicity included 85% who self-reported as Caucasian/White; 10% Latinas/os; and 5% Asian. Eighty percent of the participants had no previous experience with ropes or challenge courses.

Measurement to determine the level of challenge was conducted via self-report and an observer-rated measure. The self-report Activity Challenge Scale combined items from both the Experience Sampling Method used to determine flow (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1987) as well the Adventure Experience Paradigm research (Priest & Carpenter, 1993; McIntyre, 1999) to yield a four-item Likert scale measuring perceived risk/challenge and perceived competence/skill. The observer-rated measure (Activity Engagement Scale) was created for this study and asked raters to evaluate how each participant appeared while completing, or attempting to complete, each task. Subjective well-being was assessed using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988).

## Results

To determine the relationship between level of challenge and subjective well being, a series of Wilcoxon Signed Ranks tests and correlation analyses were used. Perception of challenge level was rank ordered with “1” being given to scores closest to the “optimal challenge” score of zero, and “4” assigned to scores furthest from zero or “optimal challenge”. Rank order was also assigned to PA and NA scores from the PANAS with “1” being given to scores reflecting the most positive (closer to 50) or least negative affect (reverse scored so closer to 0), and a ranking of “4” for scores associated with the least positive (closer to 0) or most negative affect (reverse scored so closer to 50). Spearman’s *rho* correlations were then conducted on these rankings per participant. These correlations were in turn analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test.

Results provided partial support that optimal challenge experiences produce significantly more positive affect than non-optimal challenge experiences, but only under the condition of being assessed immediately after participation ( $W = 1.878$ ,  $p = .030$ ). No differences were found between predicted and actual perceptions of challenge levels in their effects on subjective well-being. In addition, results did not show a significant correlation between self-report and observer-ratings of challenge levels.

## Discussion

The results that optimal challenge experiences are better than non-optimal experiences at producing positive affect when assessed immediately after participation do seem consistent with theoretical and practical foundations of AT/AP. Unfortunately, interpretation of these results must be done cautiously as this only provides moderate and conditional support rather than the expected strong relationship between optimal challenge and positive well-being and growth outcomes. Regardless, this lack of unequivocal support is a noteworthy contribution as it raises questions regarding the theoretical mechanisms by which adventure therapy has always been

assumed to operate. These results, along with measurement limitations encountered, also provide a challenge to proponents of the field to find a better measurement scheme by which to assess challenge level. In addition, findings highlighting the fact that observers might not be able to accurately assess participants' experienced challenge level are interesting in light of common practice for facilitators to use their observations to determine and adjust level of challenge for individuals and groups.

For over 25 years, researchers have called for more methodologically sound methods as well as research that examined the process of Adventure Therapy and Programming. Although findings in this study were minimal and/or inconsistent, as one initial attempt to utilize rarely used methodological design and examine a critical ingredient within AT/AP, this investigation has contributed to the empirical research and literature. Clearly more studies need to be conducted as the process, content, and quality of participants' experiences in adventure activities will continue to prove to be worthwhile arena of research as popularity in adventure experiences and rate of participation continues to rise.

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## **A Brief History of the Symposium on Experiential Education Research (SEER)**

by *Keith Russell*

The Symposium on Experiential Education Research (SEER) is a research symposium that provides an outlet and venue for researchers in the field of experiential education to present, share, dialogue, and further develop their research ideas.

The first SEER took place at the Association for Experiential Education's (AEE) 2001 International Conference in Charleston, West Virginia. Fittingly, it was Dr. Alan Ewert of Indiana University who conceived of and led the effort to establish that first SEER. A widely published researcher and author in the field of adventure-based education, Dr. Ewert is also known for his distinguished career in academia, three decades as an Outward Bound instructor, as holder of the Patricia and Joel Meier Outdoor Leadership Chair, past editor of the *Journal of Experiential Education*, and as fellow and past president of the prestigious Academy of Leisure Sciences. In providing the leadership to launch SEER, Dr. Ewert was giving back to the field that he has helped develop throughout his academic and professional career. The symposium occurs concurrently with the International AEE Conference each year and involves the presentation of research papers from leading international scholars in the field of experiential education. The process by which papers are selected for SEER begins each spring, when a call for papers is released in the *JEE*, on listservs, and other outlets, asking researchers, graduate students, and practitioners to submit their abstracts to a blind, peer-reviewed process that is facilitated by the co-chairs of SEER. After receipt of the abstracts the affiliations are stripped from each paper and they are sent out for blind review to a panel of researchers in the field. Abstracts are reviewed for relevance to the field of experiential education, research methodology, and logic and clarity in writing. The papers are then ranked, and the top abstracts are selected for presentation at the Annual International AEE Conference. In addition to presentation, the abstracts are published as a booklet, which is distributed at the conference and in the spring edition of the *Journal of Experiential Education*. Reading these abstracts is a great way to glimpse current research interests and cutting-edge research methodologies in the field.

In Little Rock, Arkansas (2007), the SEER program was modified to 90-minute, theme-based sessions. In this way, papers were grouped by topic in order to better promote SEER to practitioners and other conference attendees so they could attend sessions that were of interest to them.

Each presenter is allotted 20 minutes to present his/her research, which typically includes an introduction, a description of the methods employed, and the results and conclusions developed from the research. In 2007 and 2008, four countries were represented in the papers, adding an international perspective to the proceedings. Session attendees, which included both researchers and practitioners, noted that they enjoyed the new format, and discussions indicated an interest in the subject areas. We hope that these shorter theme-based sessions will continue to be of interest to attendees and the broader membership of AEE. In addition to the papers presented, opening remarks and closing remarks are offered each year by leading scholars, practitioners, and leaders

in the field of experiential education.

In 2008 SEER will be engaged in dialog with the Council on Research and Evaluation (CORE) in to explore ways SEER and CORE can work together to support the needs of AEE members. As the field continues to grow and evolve in a social, political, and economic context of evidence-based programming and practice, research will play a vital role in helping maintain and further the mission of experiential education in helping children, youth, families, and communities develop their fullest human potential. Research in educational, therapeutic, recreational, and other experiential learning settings are all welcome in SEER. It is our hope that SEER will be one of the many mechanisms for helping further AEE's mission in the years to come.

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