DISSERTATION

EXPERIENTIAL APPROACHES TO PERSONAL TRANSFORMATIONS: OUTWARD JOURNEYS AND INWARD ADVENTURES

Submitted by

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY BRANDY C. HODGSON ENTITLED EXPERIENTIAL APPROACHES TO PERSONAL TRANSFORMATIONS: OUTWARD JOURNEYS AND INWARD ADVENTURES BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

EXPERIENTIAL APPROACHES TO PERSONAL TRANSFORMATIONS:

OUTWARD JOURNEYS AND INWARD ADVENTURES

This is the story of a group of seventeen late-adolescents who participated in a six week experiential immersion program through their alternative high school. The program, designed to serve as a rite of passage assisting these students in their transition toward adulthood, allowed them to participate in personal growth work, adventure travel, language and cultural immersion, and service to others.

Four major units comprised the entire experiential education program. These included pre-trip retreat and requirements, four weeks of domestic "school within a school" immersion preparation, two weeks of international immersion in Chile, South America, and reintegration components upon return to the United States. Each of these four units was an immersion experience of its own and the curricular components were fairly consistent in that education was holistic, including physical, cognitive, social and emotional aspects of challenge and learning. Throughout the program students were asked to focus on personal growth and group dynamics, service to others, physical adventure activities, and intellectual development.

This qualitative research study sought to describe the program, the students involved, and the outcomes attributed to participation in order to answer the question of how meaning was made through the experience. Changes in participants which were attributed to participation in the experiential program have been termed "inward",

"outward", and "upward" to describe the intrapersonal and interpersonal changes, as well as the encompassing and holistic "Experiential Transformations" which occurred.

The qualities which were deemed transformational changes included increased senses of self awareness and clarity, commitment to sobriety, developing self confidence, and an appreciation of growth through discomfort. Some students identified that the program had served for them as a transition from their teen years toward adulthood.

These broad changes, termed experiential transformations, were defined through this study as holistic, beneficial and empowering personal and interpersonal changes, attributed to participation in an event or series of events. A model was developed to represent the interplay of cognitive, emotional, and experiential elements throughout the program which may have provided opportunities for these holistic changes and transformations to occur.

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As all who have undertaken a similar endeavor probably understand, this work has woven its way through several years of my life and has taken on aspects of who I was and who I have become during the various stages of the process. I am clear that the writing here cannot be attributed to me alone. It has been affected and influenced by the many lives that have been, and are, a part of mine through my years of graduate study, and all of those prior. Certainly, some people have played more significant roles with this particular venture and my gratitude, appreciation, and love for them far surpass what I can express in words, though I wish to try to do so here.

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Peace, love, and sunshine,

Brandy

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand." (Confucius, 450 B.C.)

Background and Purpose of Research

"That experience changed my life!" I often hear people express life-changing, transformative aspects of a travel adventure, immersion program, wilderness trip, or other experiential event. As a life-long learner with an adventurous spirit, as well as a person who identifies herself as an educator, facilitator, coach, counselor, and guide, my curiosity is piqued by this expression. I love the possibility of playing a role in helping to create and facilitate experiences that may positively impact, and potentially transform, lives. My curiosity leads me to wonder about, and feel empowered by, the possibility of discovering aspects of these experiences and applying new insights to my work with others.

I have been profoundly affected by several immersion experiences in my own life. My purpose in pursuing this investigation is to better understand what types of experiences have the potential to transform lives. I wish to gain insight which will help me to better design and facilitate such "life-changing experiences" in order to maximize the potential of participants. Further, not only do I hope to learn how better to serve as an

agent of change in society by helping others to become empowered and motivated to maximize their potential, I also hope to apply these findings to better realize my own potential and improve my own quality of life. In my journey to understand participants and their experiences, I will continue to develop, and transform, my own personal and professional self.

Focus of Inquiry

This study will describe a six-week immersion program with an international component, created to serve as an experiential rite of passage for seventeen adolescent participants. The students who participated in the immersion experience attended Millennial High School in College Town, USA. Millennial High School is described on the district website as "...an alternative high school which features a learning environment based on self-empowerment." Millennial's three-fold goals are described as: assisting students in developing life skills, increasing self-esteem and confidence, and achieving educational success; providing an alternative educational setting for completion of a high school diploma program; and helping students develop skills and attitudes necessary to succeed in their home high schools.

The students who attend Millennial High School range in age from 15 - 20. The majority of students have previously attended a traditional high school program, and felt unsuccessful in that environment for a variety of social, academic, and personal reasons, unique to each individual. Each student is required to attend a six-week, entry level program to learn and practice specific communication and life skills before matriculating into the general student body of the school. The purpose of the entry program is to give students a sense of the common language and culture of the school, improving their

chances for success in their new environment. Another unique programmatic aspect of the school is that the academic calendar is divided into "hexters," six-week terms, that allow for creative and non-traditional scheduling of classes, including both the entry program and the program which will be a part of this inquiry.

One distinctive experience that Millennial High School can provide is through the "Traveling Scholar" program. Several such experiential learning trips have been implemented over the years in the school, giving students an academic and experiential opportunity to engage in school work and then travel to various places. Previous programs have been led in the Utah desert, Native American reservations, and Guatemala. During these hexters, students are given opportunities to interact with people, perform service learning projects, and learn in novel settings. At the completion of the program, they return to make presentations to their home school and community. The students on the trip become a cohort, spending all of their time at the school before the trip, and on the journey, together, and somewhat separated from the remainder of the school population, serving as a "school-within-a-school" model of education.

This was the third consecutive year that a Traveling Scholar program to Chile was offered at Millennial High School, though each program has had slightly different lengths of international time and destinations, the content and activities have remained similar. A unique aspect of the Chile Traveling Scholar Program is that in addition to academic and experiential components there is an intentional focus on personal growth through service learning and cultural immersion. In order to become a participant in the program, students must have initiated interest and follow-through by demonstrating commitment to the trip and their peers in a variety of ways. These included organizing fundraisers,

soliciting donations from sponsors, earning service hours throughout the school and community, and attending meetings and pre-trip excursions. As many of the students have histories of substance use and abuse, they are also required to demonstrate sobriety and are asked to take urinalysis tests several times prior to and during the six-week term.

Though the common literature often refers to students of this nature as "at-risk," I personally will avoid the use of this term in describing these students because I feel it is an unclear and unfair label that cannot possibly portray the variety of intelligences, backgrounds, abilities, and personalities of these students. (Further, I wonder if we would be better off in describing the traditional schools from which these students came as "at-risk" of not being able to best serve the needs of all students?) I will sparingly use the term "at-risk" in my review of the literature in order to help describe prior studies and findings and to honor the language that has been used by other researchers of similar topics and populations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this inductive, emergent phenomenological case study is to understand the lived experiences of a group of high school students who participate in a six-week, experiential immersion program with an international component and to explore how these students make meaning from their participation in such a program. I will also attempt to better understand and describe the critical components of both the individuals and the program which allowed for growth, learning, and "experiential transformations" to occur. "*Experiential Transformations*", were defined through this study as holistic, beneficial personal and interpersonal changes and differences attributed to participation in an event or series of events.

Research Questions and Sub-questions

The following research questions guided my interviews and investigation in order to best understand the experience and how students were impacted through it.

- How is meaning made of a six-week high school immersion program, which includes a two-week international excursion?
    - What is the "essence" of the lived experience for program participants? (Description of program and settings, pre-trip activities, domestic and international immersion components.)
    - What are the qualities of the students who chose to participate in such a program and what are their hopes and expectations of the program?
    - What are the significant aspects of the program that affect change in students?
    - What insights, growth, and changes occur for students throughout the immersion experience?

Unique Aspects of this Investigation

Though the topic of experiential education can certainly not be considered "obscure", the research questions posed here were difficult to study. I wished to learn more about the beneficial outcomes of a six-week immersion program for a group of adolescents. In order to undertake a study such as this, a large amount of time in the field was required. Also, there were several aspects of this particular experiential program which could potentially impact the students. Because of the unique design of this program and the qualitative nature of the investigation it would be impossible to find

another study that could exactly replicate the experience. Four weeks of the program took place at the students' alternative high school, with academic (studying the language, culture, geography, and science of Chile) as well as a personal growth components, preparation for travel abroad, and overall health and wellness topics. This "at home" portion of the program was followed by two weeks immersion in Chile which also included service learning, personal growth, academic, and adventure travel components. This combination of "traditional" schooling and experiential / adventure / travel programs is less frequently found in the literature, making this a unique topic for consideration and study, though individual aspects of this program have been researched through other fields. Adolescent development and psychology, transitions and "rites of passage", and the impacts and benefits of experiential education are a few of the pertinent areas that contributed to this research undertaking.

Focus of the Current Literature

In this brief review of the literature, theoretical and background information are provided which might help to ground the concepts that were investigated in the following case study of how adolescents make meaning of their experiential immersion program. As is the case with emergent studies such as this, it was difficult to anticipate the directions that the research investigation would take, and thus the literature review was ongoing throughout the design, collection, analysis, and writing aspects of the project. Though experiential education can be considered a field of its own, it also can be viewed through an interdisciplinary lens, encompassing multiple fields such as education, physical education, counseling, and psychology. It would be unrealistic to try to review and describe the broad scope of topics that lends itself to be considered, and thus this

serves as an introduction and overview of some of the main ideas helping to ground this particular study.

Much of the empirical research in the field of experiential education is of mixed design, showing the quantitative and qualitative benefits as well as posing questions that still need to be answered regarding impacts of leaders / facilitators, analysis of further benefits (and possible drawbacks), and transference (lasting impacts) of experiential programs.

Benefits, Outcomes, and Applications of Experiential Programs

Evidence suggests that there are many concrete benefits that have been produced through the participation in experiential / adventure education programs (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, Richards, 1997; McKenzie, 2003). The following section will highlight some of these benefits, outcomes, and applications of experiential programs, including personal growth, interpersonal skill development, and transformational outcomes.

Personal growth and interpersonal skill development. While traditional academic approaches to education focus on intellectual development, experiential education focuses more on the whole person (Kolb, 1988). Experiential activities can lead to a more integrated approach to growth and learning, offering kinesthetic, emotional, and cognitive levels of understanding. Education is a holistic endeavor, encompassing changing and growing understandings of selves, relationships, and world; including academic, extracurricular, and non-academic aspects, of which only academic portions are regularly evaluated and used as indicators of learning in traditional school environments (Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

The integrated approach provided by experiential programs can have powerful and lasting outcomes for individuals and further affect their relationships with others, both personally and professionally. Though many outdoor and experiential education programs enhance emotional growth, it might not always be the primary intent of a program to do so. This growth may occur as an unintentional consequence of participation, deemed incidental growth, or can be planned, intentional outcomes of programs (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2000).

Adolescents involved in experiential programs show increases in social acceptance, behavioral conduct, self-actualization and life effectiveness skills, along with decreases in hopelessness (McKenzie, 2002). Trust, communication, problem solving, fun, and decision making are additional benefits reported. Common outcomes of multi-day adventure education programs are self-awareness, self-confidence, self-reliance, interpersonal skills, concern for others, and concern for the environment. These beneficial outcomes were found to vary depending on the programmatic variables and the impacts of leadership / facilitator qualities. Research design factors also play a role in the finding and reporting of these outcomes (McKenzie, 2002).

In a qualitative case study approach, Davidson (2001) found that boys participating in a six-week outdoor education class learned, in varying degrees, about perseverance, motivation, responsibility, and the self-determination of their lives through challenge. Davidson also suggests that the value and meaning of outdoor education cannot fully be measured through quantitative measures and scores, but that the true benefits are demonstrated when an individual begins to challenge assumptions about self and society.

Hattie et al. (1997) undertook a meta-analysis based on 1,728 effect sizes from 96 studies on the effects of adventure programs on an array of outcomes. Forty major outcomes were identified in the adventure literature, which were categorized as follows: Leadership, self-concept, academic, personality, interpersonal, and adventuresomeness. Findings in the meta-analysis indicate that adventure programs had greatest immediate effects on leadership, academic, independence, assertiveness, emotional stability, social comparison, time management, and flexibility. A theme through these categories of greatest effects relates to providing participants with a stronger sense of self-reliance and control. One of the significant findings of this study was that substantial continued gains followed immediate gains from programs, indicating that programs impact participants long after the courses are complete. Though Hattie et al. (1997), used quantitative studies in their meta-analysis, the need for qualitative focus on providing clear documentation relating to background variables, instructor effects, and the nature of programs is noted and recommended by the researchers for future successful research evaluations.

Transformational outcomes of experiential programs. Experiential learning takes an interdisciplinary approach to personal change, including aspects of the physical, cognitive, and emotional. It occurs when people are engaged in a concrete activity and develop new understanding through the experience and reflection, which can then be transferred to affect change in future activities (Cassidy, 2001). Common outcomes of multi-day adventure education programs are self-awareness, self-confidence, self-reliance, interpersonal skills, concern for others, and concern for the environment, and a more conscious awareness of the links between course components and these skills could result in greater gains for participants (McKenzie, 2002).

Changes that occur through experiences, often involving questioning assumptions and rethinking premises, can be a process that is transformative. Change can be incremental, happening gradually, or extreme, such as a paradigm change, involving a changing of beliefs and values about how the world works (Imel, 2000). Transformative learning experiences such as these will often straddle the borders of psycho-therapy, education, and spiritual practice, as individuals have the opportunity to expand their consciousness and experience therapeutic results (Elias, 1997). It is an important distinction though that experiential learning is not the same as psycho-therapy and can still produce transformational results.

Different views of transformative learning exist, including one advocating a rational approach dependent upon critical reflection, and another relying more on intuition and emotion, but sharing commonalities. People learn in interwoven but different ways, and rational, intuitive, and imaginative processes can all be effective in fostering a learning environment for transformative learning (Imel, 1998). Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997) seeks to guide people to awareness and change through the cognitive process of critical reflection. The field of transformational learning helps develop autonomous thinking, allowing learners to make their own interpretations rather than act on the knowledge and experience of others. This process can guide individuals to an awareness of their frames of reference and assumptions, which then can be challenged and transformed through critical reflection (Mezirow, 1997).

Taylor (2001) calls for a more whole-person approach in fostering transformative learning, emphasizing a trust on implicit memory, which is largely unconscious, as well

as introspective thought. This interdependent relationship between emotion and reason can provide a more inclusive view of transformational learning. Other models of transformation also exist and are found through various disciplines in the literature.

Impacts of experiential programs on adolescents. An abundance of literature in the field of experiential education is targeted towards the adolescent population. Various positive outcomes have been described for this group of participants, a few of which will be further described.

Adventure-based education confronts individuals with problems requiring full participation including a feeling of personal risk. These types of programs are ideal for developing, or acting as a catalyst for, positive self-esteem changes in adolescent populations (Kolb, 1988). The actual risk to a participant in adventure education activities can be minimized when safely controlled. The feelings of anxiety and fear form a sense of perceived risk which can help effect personal change (Kolb, 1988). Terms such as personal growth, change, and transformation, are frequently claimed as additional benefits of experiential programs, but carry a range of meanings difficult to define and quantify. Cushing (1999) helped to distinguish and clarify type and parts of transformation through the analysis of student narratives and different types of curricula including aspects of skill development, citizenship, and critical thinking.

In studying experiential education programs, Conrad and Hedin (1982) found increases in several areas of adolescent psychological development. Self-esteem gains and moral reasoning scores were found particularly in students participating in outdoor based programs. Strong gains were also found toward taking responsible action and

having more personally responsible attitudes. Positive attitudinal changes towards adults, others, and being active in the community were also reported.

Garst, Scheider, and Baker (2001), studied how outdoor adventure program participation impacts adolescent self-perception. Results indicate a relationship between experiential programs and gains in social acceptance and behavioral conduct, but did not necessarily explain how the changes occur, or whether or not they have lasting impacts, or transference. Additionally, results of a quasi-experimental study on an experiential seminar program with high school seniors demonstrated significant gains over a semester in personal, group, and social responsibility, attitude toward people, problem solving, self-concept, and attitude toward learning (Buswell, 1982).

Lan, Sveen, and Davidson, (2004) sought affective and cognitive outcomes for at-risk youth who participated in an experiential wilderness program. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized. Participants were above 13 years of age and considered at risk by the referral agency (employment, education, justice, and welfare agencies. Significant long-term effects, reflecting greater self-actualization and decreased hopelessness, were found. Results indicate that there are some benefits gained through the participation in this program, but causation is not identified, nor are the variables that influence these changes including participant, facilitator, and program characteristics.

A study conducted by McLeod and Craig (2004) evaluated the life effectiveness skills of middle school boys gained through an experiential learning and outdoor education school program. Participants took part in the experiential program throughout their ninth grade year of school. Overall life effectiveness skills significantly increased

from pre test to post tests. Significance levels between the four stages of post testing indicate that other variables may be in effect and calls for further studies.

Factors Which Impact the Outcomes of Experiential Programs

Historically, most studies of adventure-based experiential learning programs have focused on outcome issues to the exclusion of programmatic issues such as nature of instruction and duration of course (Bocarro & Richards, 1998). McKenzie (2003) collected data from ninety-two students who had participated in an Outward Bound Canada program finding twenty-nine course components which influence course outcomes. Course activities, physical environment, instructors, and the group are examples of these. Certain course components were found to positively influence increases in self-awareness, confidence, motivation, responsibility, interpersonal skills, and concern. Other course components impacted participant outcomes in negative ways. Furthermore, it may not necessarily be the total adventure experience, but only parts of the program, that make a lasting difference (Hattie, et al., 1997). This research indicates that there are clear facilitator and programmatic variables impacting the type and level of outcomes from experiential and adventure activities. The following sections will discuss some of the literature regarding these programmatic issues and how they may influence the outcomes of experiential education programs.

In discussing the benefits and outcomes of experiential programs, studies must not only investigate the impacts on participants, but also how these impacts might be influenced, both positively and negatively, by the person who is leading the experience. For example, instructor feedback, personality, and impact as role model has been shown

to directly increase positive course outcomes such as student self-awareness, motivation, interpersonal skills, and concern for the environment (McKenzie, 2002).

Many other variables exist within the individuals who are charged with creating and facilitating these types of adventure programs, indicting that significant research should be conducted on how these variables impact the experience, both positively and negatively. Research on something as complex and multi-faceted as personality and leadership style is intricate, convoluted, and is an area that calls for qualitative research methods. Many of the previous studies on such instructor factors have been exploratory in nature, producing the beginning foundations which call for further work. A more conscious awareness of the links between course components and facilitation skills could result in greater gains for participants (McKenzie, 2002).

Hartley and Williams (1988) explored how gender, personality, soft skills training and leadership styles of outdoor leaders impacted the experience of participants involved in these programs. Their exploratory attempt to understand the effects of these qualities on students' course outcomes consisted of a field study designed to examine major variables that have been previously ignored in outdoor leadership. Many of these variables had direct effects on other variables, indicating that multiple facilitator traits work together to create the participants experience. It is difficult to separate personality variables, gender socialization variables, and experience variables, and how they impact a person or group experience.

Another attempt to identify which aspects of facilitation effect participant perceived benefits, was made by Lindenmeier, Long, and Robertson (2004). A core set of benefits associated with particular challenge course experiences was identified and

possible ways of purposefully influencing the presence of these benefits was explored. Focus was placed on five factors that could be manipulated by the facilitator as a means of inducing benefits. These included environmental characteristics, front-loading, interpersonal interactions, processing, and activity manipulation. The most commonly reported benefits included: trust, communication, problem solving, fun, and decision making. Other benefits found included success, socialization, self-efficacy, satisfaction, judgment, fun, enjoyment, encouragement, and decision making, but did not achieve statistically significant results.

A trained and qualified facilitator is able to not only provide a safe and challenging experience, but will also be able to guide the experience through a conscious model, coaching participants to elicit growth and learning. This intentional leadership is as much an art as it is a skill set, best honed through practice and experience. A skillful leader may also use the approach of narrative in responding to clients' "stories", allowing them to explore different narratives of themselves, and explore different ways of viewing the world (Tennant, 2000). The creative use of metaphors in experiential processes is another significant facilitator skill. Metaphors can be seen as instruments and opportunities to help facilitate human growth, the ultimate goal of responsible education (May, 1996.)

Outdoor, experiential programs are based on a model in which learning primarily occurs through the interpretation of experiences that can be given wider meaning (Isenhart, 1983). Transference, the ability to integrate new knowledge into "real life", is a critical component of experiential training programs. Sometimes reflection and

transference will happen on its own, though a skilled leader can aid the process through the use of questioning and guided reflection.

A trained facilitator will be conscious of striking a balance between competence level and risk level in planning and leading an experiential training program. Risk does not only include physical risk, but also emotional and psychological well-being. The "Adventure Experience Paradigm", a model developed by Priest (1985), looks at the key components of a quality experience. According to this model, a high level of competence and low level of risk can lead to a "recreation / exploration" experience with little new learning occurring. Conversely, high risk with low competence levels can lead to "devastation and disaster", not an ideal outcome. Through achieving a balance of risk and competence, a "peak adventure" experience can be created where learning is maximized and growth occurs.

An important aspect of creating excellent experiential programs is through a conscious approach to planning, leading, and facilitating. A quality experiential program will provide a sense of closure, allowing participants to fully integrate the cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects of the session(s) and leave with a sense of new understanding to self and perhaps a plan for application of this new insight into their personal and/or professional life (Rohnke, 1989).

The art and skills of balancing theory, risk, leadership style, processing needs, environmental factors, activity planning and sequencing, interpersonal skills, and participant interactions makes the job of a competent facilitator complex, delicate, and intentional work. When done well, an experiential program leader has the potential to positively impact lives.

Though the role of the instructors of programs is clearly an important factor in the outcomes of experiential programs, other variables certainly impact changes that can occur in participants. As demand for experiential and adventure style programs has increased, a proliferation of companies wanting to provide adventure training programs has followed, creating programs which may not be as safe or effective and facilitators who may not be as qualified or skilled as others. In determining which programs will produce more desirable results, Gass (1992) proposes that the most effective adventure training programs will share the characteristics of: context, continuity, consequences, and care. "Context" refers to the development of parallel structures that will connect the adventure and business environments. "Continuity" focuses on the future needs of the company, and how the learning will address these needs through transference of the learning. The "consequences", or risks, involved in an unfamiliar adventure environment can heighten the focus and perceptions of the participants. The breakdown of hierarchical barriers through equal positioning also can enhance the powerful learning consequences that occur. Ethical and safety considerations that protect clients from physical, emotional, or social injury are elements of "care" critical for optimizing the learning experience.

Conrad and Hedin (1982) sought to discover program practices which were most effective in facilitating adolescent development, and discovered patterns which influenced positive change. Programs with the presence of a formal, at least weekly, seminar seemed to be the single strongest factor in explaining positive student change. Programs of longer length and stronger intensity were also correlated to positive change.

Participant background, personality, age, and gender (among other qualities) may also affect the outcomes that occur from adventure programs. Unfortunately, limited

information is usually provided in such studies on this factor (Hattie, et al., 1997) indicating a need for more in-depth, qualitative studies to help illuminate some of these factors.

Significance of the Study

Several audiences will find significance and relevance in this study including institutions, professionals, and individuals who are committed to personal and interpersonal growth and development. Institutions such as public and private K-12 schools, as well as community colleges and universities, might choose to use the information in order to assist students who are transitioning through critical time periods (i.e. between grade levels, entering or leaving a new school) to more successfully navigate these changes. Schools, along with other private and public agencies, might also better understand how best to retain and support students, including those defined as "at-risk", through difficult times. In addition, educational and therapeutic methods and content might be better informed and developed in order to meet the needs of students through both traditional educational (classroom) and alternative programs and settings (study abroad, wilderness expeditions, challenge courses, adventure therapy, etc.) Taylor's (2001) call to integrate opportunities to learn through kinesthetic and other modalities along with helping them to understand and manage their emotions is a potential step in this direction.

Professionals (teachers, therapists, coaches, facilitators, guides) will also find this study significant and useful. As people who are dedicated to working with and helping others to learn and grow, it is helpful to understand what aspects of an experience are defined as "transforming" in order to better create programs and utilize practices which

foster positive change. Additionally, particular leaders or leader qualities which are described as having been significant to the process of change might offer a key to how best we can support, guide, and empower our clients/ students through their own processes of growth and transformation.

Finally, individuals who are committed to their own personal growth and development of personal potential can benefit from the findings of this study as they may gain clues as to how better to navigate change in their own lives. Information on change through experiences will prove useful in the development of interpersonal skills and relationships – both personal and professional. Finally, through this inquiry, we might learn more about how to support the process of individuals becoming changes agent for society.

Promoting learning for personal change is one of the underlying assumptions of experiential education, adult education, and transformational learning. A cultivating of self which is both independent and has a sense of social responsibility is an aim of many programs (Tennant, 2000). A study by Loughlin (1994) explored the transformation of consciousness that led individual women to develop a deeper sense of self around women's issues and also led them to become agents of change. Similarly, Miller (2001) found that wilderness expeditions, one of several environments for experiential learning, can affect personal growth, appreciation and respect for the diversity of others, and an improved understanding of and responsibility towards society.

Researcher's Stance

I am passionate about personal growth and transformation through experiences because they have been profound and empowering aspects of my own life. As a

participant and a facilitator of many types of experiential courses, I wish to be a reflective practitioner and also inform my practice in philosophy and pedagogy which will allow me to best serve the needs of my participants. Years of experience have helped me to teach and facilitate based on programs and techniques which have been personally effective and transformative for me and, based on feedback, also for my students. I set about this project to develop my insight and further inform and ground my practice in research and theory.

My personal past guides the direction of my future. Coming from a supportive family and a fairly traditional background and having achieved success in traditional schools, I was on a somewhat unconscious, unanalyzed path. I had bought into societal driven and supported approaches to living. Working for grades, as opposed to learning, in school was my mode. I was one of the "bright" ones. I knew how to play "the game", take the tests, and learn the lessons. I survived in the ranks of the traditional patriarchal educational systems, but I do not believe I *thrived* in that environment. I bought into the systems and culture of my socialization, and felt that I would be measured by my ability to earn as much money as possible in traditionally respected ways. Declaring a future in a medical career received accolades, so even though I recognized a nagging inconsistency between the ways of western medicine and how I felt I could best use my talents and passion to serve others, I followed the self-pronounced career goal of becoming a doctor throughout my undergraduate experience. I also had a passion and a talent for teaching, but never felt that education was overtly fostered or encouraged as a viable profession for me. Moreover, in the time of "women can do anything" I perceived that entering the field

of education – already a traditionally held "women's field" of low pay and low respect – would be a sellout of my talent and potential.

Along the way, certain friends, other individuals, and experiences brought me to question political, social, and personal values that I had previously held, and began to pervade the "bubble" I had been raised in and had continued to create for myself. Though unable to articulate the dissonance I was feeling, I intrinsically knew that I needed something more from my life and began questioning my decision to pursue medical school. My final semester of my undergraduate career I participated in a three month field study to Central America. This experience allowed me to get beyond myself and see the world differently. Realizing "my world" was only one small sliver of what actually existed left me wondering if the same were true for the person whom I was. The semester abroad opened my eyes to cultural and diversity issues in the world, implanted a passion for international travel that I have continued to foster, and also allowed me to honor aspects of myself that were not necessarily valued (socially nor monetarily) in my home society.

I returned to Colorado with more new questions than answers, and even less sure of the single-minded path I had been on towards the medical profession. Still committed to working with and helping others, I decided to pursue a career in teaching and simultaneously trained as a raft guide and a ropes course facilitator. My work in these fields has helped me to integrate and articulate my belief in holistic approaches to health, wellness, and education.

Within a few years of my teaching career I was asked to implement a "success skills" class for the "at-risk" adolescents in our traditional junior high school. My interest

in working with all types of people helped foster my ability to connect with these "tough" kids. I wanted to help create the program because I felt something was lacking in our school systems; something that could help these misguided young people to find their own path and realize they did have a degree of choice and power in their lives. I began working with students on a "head, heart, hands" integrated curriculum (a way of explaining to students that it would include cognitive, emotional, and physical components), and soon my passion had moved far beyond the traditional content areas I was teaching and into conversations and lessons with students about maximizing potential and improving the quality of life. Thankfully, in teaching and working with this curriculum, I too became a student of it, and continued to improve the quality of my own life.

Mezirow (1997) defines transformative learning as the process of effecting change in a frame of reference which encompasses cognitive, conative, and emotional components. Teaching the success curriculum and integrating it into my own life was personally and professionally transforming. Personally, I became more conscious of multiple aspects of myself including, my communication strengths and struggles, my conflict style and patterns, and my own dreams and goals. Shifts started occurring in relationships and my more clearly defined sense of self helped refine many of my core beliefs and values. After a few semesters, I was no longer as interested in teaching solely a traditional science curriculum, which had already become secondary to my passion for connecting with students and now felt tertiary to this "new" curriculum. My focus became helping people live better lives through personal growth and interpersonal development. As I started sharing these ideas with others, I often was labeled an

"alternative" or an "at-risk" teacher - quite ironic to me, never considered academically "at-risk" as the valedictorian of her high school. Well meaning friends and others would tell me, "Oh, if you want to teach *that* kind of stuff, you should really be at a school like (local "alternative" school)." Having this 'label' put on me as a teacher helped me to experience the harm that can be done by the misuse and over use of the term "at-risk" in describing someone who does not fit into or is not achieving success in the traditional system.

My instinctual response, and my defensiveness, when others seem to confine and label me as an "alternative education teacher" has been, "if this type of teaching and curriculum works so well for those deemed most "at-risk," imagine the possibilities of what it could do for us all!" Rather than creating separate systems that lead to tracking individual students into "alternative," "regular," "special needs," "Advanced Placement," or any other of myriad groupings in our schools, I hope to create systems that foster a sense of interdependency, teaching us all how to be our best selves.

I have since had opportunities to utilize similar curricula with a variety of populations, including both traditional and alternative junior and senior high school students, college students at the beginning and ending of their undergraduate careers (Freshmen and Senior Seminar classes), as well as adults in the process of a mid-career change entering the teaching profession. Each audience has provided me with new sources of information and further sets of questions about how best to help people as they commit to their own personal goals and growth. Through each of these classes I have also noticed that teaching and learning about personal growth has continued to propel me on

my own journey of transformation. I am committed to the concepts of choice and empowerment and believe that each person has the capacity to create her own reality.

Though I believe that, ultimately, I am in control of what I learn and the choices I make, other significant individuals have certainly influenced me and helped me to "see and be" differently. I am given hope that I, too, have the potential for becoming a change agent in the life of another. This has become a part of my mission: to create and implement experiential programs that have the potential to transform lives.

As my career journey unfolds, I have continued to take breaks for international and inward exploration. Travels to Nepal, Thailand, India, New Zealand, Australia, Ecuador, Peru, Norway, Costa Rica, and Spain have compelled me to extend my own comfort zones, learning more about the world as I learn more about myself. My self-interest in continuing my own journey of personal transformation is an added component to my pursuit of this topic. My main purpose in completing this study is to better understand the processes of transformation that have taken place in others so that I can better be an agent of change as an educator, counselor, facilitator, and guide of experiential programs.

CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"Education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living." (John Dewey)

Educational practices often claim to elicit change, learning, and even transformation in participants. The field of experiential learning, in particular, seeks to foster these transformative processes through the engagement in and reflection on meaningful activities. In order to better understand experiential transformative growth, it is necessary to first develop a definition and conceptual foundation of experiential education and some of the fields that are often included within it.

In this review of the literature, theoretical and background information are provided to ground the concepts that will be investigated in the phenomenological study of how meaning is made of an international experiential immersion program with a group of adolescents. I first will provide a history and conceptualization of experiential learning and define some pertinent comprising fields, including outdoor education, adventure education, and adventure therapy. An overview of the history and role of qualitative research in experiential learning will be provided, with particular consideration given to the case study methodology, including strengths and weaknesses of this method.

Next, I will address some of the common benefits and outcomes of experiential programs including: intrapersonal and interpersonal skill development; transformation

and change; corporate, societal, and global benefits; and impacts on adolescent participants.

Third, transformational outcomes of experiential programs will be identified and discussed. This background overview will help to found a discussion of some of the critical components and outcomes of experiential programs that constitute and lead to learning, change, and transformation within the field of experiential education. Facilitator, curricular, environmental, and other programmatic factors will be addressed with references to relevant research and literature.

A section on adolescent development and identity formation will follow, as it pertains to this particular study population. Definitions and frameworks for understanding adolescents are included.

Next, rites of passage, describing and outlining a framework of the historical and contemporary needs of such transition processes is discussed. This section will include rationale, theoretical framework, needs and perspective from a Western culture, and research on previous use of experiential programs as rites of passage.

A section on how experiential courses can serve as models of programs that can assist in successful the navigation of adolescent transitions will follow. This final portion of the chapter will integrate these topics, connecting the need for experiential rites of passage to the specific populations of adolescents, with particular consideration for adolescents in alternative learning environments. A final summary will include implications of the literature and concluding comments.

History and Conceptualization of Experiential Learning

Experiential Education Foundations and Definitions

An understanding of the basic premise and underlying theory of experiential education will assist in understanding an ensuing discussion of the role of research in the field. The term "experiential education" has been defined in many ways by various researchers, including: programs offering an integral part of the general school program, but taking place outside of the conventional classroom, involving students in significant tasks with real consequences, (Conrad & Hedin, 1982); a special approach to learning which recognizes the world outside school as a learning environment, placing a high value on direct experience (Buswell, 1982); and as a philosophical orientation toward teaching and learning which encourages links between concrete activities and abstract lessons to maximize learning (Sakofs, 1995). "It is through experience and the practice of living that understanding develops", (Scott, 1998, p. 328).

If it seems interesting that no one definition for this term exists, it is helpful to note that the Association for Experiential Education (AEE) considers the ongoing process of defining the work, values and principles of its members as an important aspect of being an active member of the field and a life-long learner. AEE does provide the following definition as a place to begin the conversation: "Experiential education is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values." (2006). Critical themes do exist within the various definitions, and include an active holistic experience which includes the intentional processes of reflection, analysis, and application to future living and learning.

In answering the question, "What is experiential education?", Chapman, McPhee, and Proudman (1995), as theorists and practitioners in the field, provide ideas and perspectives which help to illuminate this difficult to answer question. A few of their critical, defining factors will be included here. Students are directly and actively engaged with the material – exploring for themselves to find answers to questions. Teachers play the critical role of helping students to make connections, guiding rather than directing the learning process. The value is in the asking of the question, the attempt to understand, in the pursuit of growth and understanding. Combining direct experience with guided reflection and analysis, an active student- centered experiential approach allows numerous opportunities for connections within the mind, body, heart, spirit, and soul. A series of critical relationships between learner and self, teacher, and learning environment is critical to the learning experience. An apt thought to contribute to the nebulous process of defining this branch of education, "Of all things that might be true about experiential education the one thing that is unassailably true is that you can't find out by defining it." John Huie (cited in Chapman, et al., 1995, p. 239)

Joplin (1995) charges experiential programs with two responsibilities for their design, providing an experience and facilitating the reflection on the experience. She further provides nine characteristics which clarify the characterization of experiential learning in educational settings. These characteristics include programs that are: student based, personal in nature, process and product oriented, evaluated internally and externally, holistic in understanding (including both quantitative and qualitative factors), organized around experience, perception based, and emphasize the individual and his/her relationship and functioning within the group.

In an article considering the philosophical foundations of experiential education, Crosby (1995) reviews the history of theories of education leading from the Sophists in ancient Greece, to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Descarte, Hume, Kant, and finally John Dewey (1859-1952). Dewey integrated many of these previous thoughts and philosophies in the belief that both theory and practice, reason and senses, are components in achieving knowledge, and he is credited by many with providing the foundation of what most people call experiential education.

According to Dewey, the goal of education is being able to understand and use our experience by developing the thought processes by which the experiences can be examined. Crosby's analysis of the heritage of experiential education helps to found the philosophy and practice as a form of education which teaches tools that can be used regardless of current perceptions of truth and objectivity.

The field of experiential education has many componential fields including outdoor and adventure education, which are often used interchangeably, but do have slight definitional differences. The area of adventure therapy, also using experiential processes to help people learn and grow, is of particular interest regarding the intended outcomes of transformation or change in a participant. Some brief definitions will be provided below to clarify the subtle differences between these programs.

Outdoor education. Outdoor education promotes learning from experience through the outdoor environment, whether natural or man-made (Boss, 1999). Outdoor education follows the philosophy of Dewey, involving cooperative learning environments, stressing an interactive process between teachers and students, and is experiential by nature (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2000).

Adventure education. Adventure education aims to build self-confidence and teach environmental awareness through activities that include an aspect of risk (Boss, 1999). Again, experiential by nature, and often taking place in the outdoors, the element of perceived or actual risk can heighten the experience.

Adventure therapy. Physical and attitudinal changes and improvements were noted in the 1900s when tuberculosis patients were taken outdoors as a means of quarantine. Therapeutic use of the outdoors was further developed in the 1940s when Kurt Hahn developed programs for young soldiers that led to the foundations of the Outward Bound movement. Reports of dramatic behavioral change in groups of adjudicated youth on 21-day courses further the support for the development of adventure therapy. Primary locations for current work in the field include challenge / ropes courses, multi-day wilderness / travel programs, and residential camping programs (Gillis & Gass, 2003).

Adventure therapy programs have the intentional aim of producing therapeutic results through experiential adventure activities. "Adventure therapy is an active and experiential approach to group psychotherapy, utilizing an activity base (e.g., cooperative group games, ropes courses, outdoor pursuits, or wilderness expeditions), and employing real and/or perceived risk (physical and psychological) as clinically significant agents to bring about desired change." (Gillis & Gass, 2003). These programs often take place in wilderness setting, and can include games, ropes courses, expeditions, and other forms of adventure. Additionally, personal growth programs, not necessarily designed as therapy, are intended to positively impact general psychological well-being. (Berman, Davis-Berman, 2000)

Qualitative Research and Experiential Education

Though there has been a recent growth in experiential based training programs, a deficiency in scholarly knowledge regarding the benefits, quality, and effectiveness of these leadership programs has been found, prompting a need for more research in these areas (Collins, 2001). Quality research can help legitimize experiential education as an effective medium to learn and affect positive behavioral change, and it is important that the research methodology chosen is appropriate to answer the questions being posed (Bocarro & Richards, 1998). Much of the empirical research in the field is of mixed design, showing the quantitative and qualitative benefits of experiential education, as well as posing questions that still need to be answered regarding impacts of leaders / facilitators, analysis of further benefits (and possible drawbacks), and transference (lasting impacts) of experiential programs. The following section will discuss the role of qualitative research in the field of experiential education.

Both quantitative and qualitative paradigms have their place in experiential educational research, and evaluators and stakeholders can best be served by examining the possibilities offered by each approach and matching it with the information they are seeking (Braverman, Brenner, Fretz, & Desmond, 1990). Henderson (1993)compares the two dominant paradigms to the yin-yang symbol from Eastern traditions of knowledge, referring to the interdependency of seeking facts or causes (positivism) and allowing for the interpretation of meaning attributed to experience in the natural environment (interpretive). Operating in the field of experiential education, the qualitative and quantitative approaches are both needed to address emerging questions. Several researchers argue that traditional approaches to research in experiential education are not

adequate alone, and that a key feature being missed is the experiences of individuals and the meanings they make from the experience (Allison, & Pomeroy, 2000). In regards to qualitative phenomenological research, "we are interested in seeing how people interpret their worlds, and how we can, in turn, interpret their interpretations" (Shank, 2002, p.81).

In a qualitative study, the investigator serves as the primary instrument for the collection and analysis of data, and must have a high tolerance for ambiguity allowing for adaptation to events and changes in direction (Merriam, 2001). Schram (2003, p.101) creates a nice metaphor of researcher and participants in a fieldwork study as "walking together on separate paths", allowing for the researcher to maintain distinct intentions within the multiple roles she may play. Experiential program leaders are a natural part of the group and in a strategic position for participant observation and in-depth interviewing (Rowley, 1987) gaining insights to help answer research questions.

The researcher in a qualitative inquiry analyzes and reports the detailed views of participants, conducts the study in a natural setting to build a complex and holistic picture of the phenomenon being studies (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative research has strength in the opportunity to get close to people and circumstances. The focus unfolds naturally and has not predetermined course, and is often described as naturalistic (Schram, 2003).

Experimental studies, using mostly quantitative methods, are used to answer specific focused questions, have value to key stakeholders with concerns about program outcomes. Naturalistic evaluations, using qualitative approaches, describe experiential programs from the vantage of participants who experience directly, rather than through the view of predetermined questions (Braverman, et al., 1990). Both have significant potential for increasing understanding of experiential programs, but the naturalistic

approach allows more comprehensive questions and more topic areas due to the researchers' freedom to explore questions as they arise. A greater degree of ambiguity in the answers can result in this increased freedom. A good researcher will strive to clarify terms, construct good questions, listen carefully, and develop good interview rapport to reduce this possible drawback (Braverman, et.al, 1990).

Experiential education is "holistic, pluralistic, fluid, inclusive, and has 'meaning,' and these conceptualizations require an expanding and critical view of appropriate research questions as well as research methods" (Henderson, 1993, p. 53). Qualitative methods offer ways for understanding meaning of behavior and techniques for educators to better facilitate growth in human beings. Though not "better" than their counterpart, qualitative approaches do provide an opportunity to gain important insights on the effects of experiential programs and bringing legitimacy to traditional claims which cannot be confirmed by quantitative approaches alone (Rowley, 1987). Applying traditional research methods to nontraditional programs is not serving the field of experiential education. There is often not enough consistency among programs to effectively apply measures and instruments that are often used in other fields such as psychology or education, and a qualitative strategy is more appropriate allowing researchers and evaluators to maintain flexibility while including traditional research elements (Bocarro, et al., 1998).

One of the differences between experiential education and mainstream education is the "intimate knowledge" that comes from touching, tasting, smelling, and being a part of an environment, versus the more cognitive scientific approaches used to study it (Kraft, 1992). Experiential education and qualitative research methods lend themselves

naturally to one another. Rather than testing currently held concepts, hypotheses, or theories, qualitative research is designed to inductively build them (Merriam, 2001). Qualitative inquiry requires the researcher to engage in active interpretation, noting and sometimes missing significant pieces of information, building on assumptions, and demonstrating worth through explanatory power (Schram, 2003).

Particularly in the field of experiential education, there is a need for providing some of the details about how and why changes are occurring, and not just whether or not they are doing so. Though adventure activities have been found to develop traits such as self-confidence, interpersonal skills, and responsibility, few of these characteristics can be quantifiably measured. Kolb (1988), among other researchers, calls for qualifiable, as opposed to quantifiable, instrumentation and methods such as observation reports, interviews and written exercises as a possible source of data. A wide range of program implications can be gained through qualitative approaches, but these may take the form of ideas or hypotheses which, though necessary to lead to more quantitative research questions, are often not seen as valuable or conclusive (Braverman, et al., 1990). In general, qualitative methods are used to explore the field with the aim to formulate empirical questions which can be further tested, though sometimes the reverse is true (Amesberger, 1996).

Many experiential educators take pride in a constructivist epistemology with the centrality of the learner in their programs, while research in the field is often incongruent to this belief system and more outcome-focused. Though outcomes are only one aspect of the rich information that can be gathered from programs, there still remains a focus on trying to prove that experiential education works rather than shifting the focus to the

subjective meaning of the participants, not allowing for justice to the work taking place (Allison & Pomeroy, 2000). Though research that proves the outcomes to be positive (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997) may justify programs to funders and increase confidence in experiential work, "research of this nature does little to help improve practice or understanding of the experiences of participants in programmes" (Allison, et al., 2000).

Use of the case study methodology in experiential education research. Case studies are prevalent in the educational fields (Merriam, 2001), a key element being the case as a bounded system. Three special features help to further define the case study in that it is: particularistic, focusing on a particular program and phenomenon; descriptive, providing a holistic and rich description; and heuristic, illuminating the reader's understanding of the phenomenon and bringing about the discovery of new meaning (Merriam, 2001).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) lay out a structure for a case study including the problem, the context, the issues, and the lessons learned. Case study research has its roots in anthropology and sociology (Creswell, 1998) and is utilized across a variety of disciplines. The case study allows for an in-depth analysis, utilizing multiple sources of data, to understand a bounded system, and insights from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research (Merriam, 2001). Case studies are anchored in real-life situations; result in a holistic account of a phenomenon, and offer insights to the readers. Case study has proven useful in many areas, particularly in studying educational innovations (Merriam, 2001).

Case study is ideal for research questions that are holistic and in-depth in nature (Tellis, 1997). This method is a natural and fitting way to study experiential education programs as the participants, facilitators, and program are a case within a bounded time and setting. The unit of analysis, is often a system of action, and case studies offer multi-perspective analyses which can give voice to the powerless and voiceless (Tellis, 1997). Establishing meaning, describing real-life contexts of an intervention, using multiple sources of data to aid in the validity of the process are all components of qualitative case study methodology that lend themselves to the field of experiential learning.

Qualitative case studies, of course, have some potential limitations, and are important as one of several tools in a researcher's repertoire. Because a case is a bounded system, and a small "convenient" sample by nature of the methodology, results are not intended to be generalized to a greater population. Another aspect that could be perceived as a limitation is the role of the researcher in such a study. Since the researcher serves as the "instrument" in qualitative work, there is no means of establishing what is known in the quantitative world as validity or reliability. Instead, verification is established through triangulation of data, among other methods. Another aspect of qualitative research that does not pertain to, and could be perceived as a limitation, by the quantitative world is the influence of the researcher and participants on one another, as well as the subjective influence of the researcher in collecting and analyzing data. These drawbacks are mitigated by the benefits of providing different sources and types of data, and a rich, thick, detailed description to add to the body of research that already exists or to help develop an understanding of new areas that need to be investigated.

Though certainly not to be considered exclusively, nor to ignore some of the potential weaknesses, it seems clear and evident that qualitative research is an important tool in exploring and describing the meaning and learning behind experiential programs. Experiential educators and researchers are called to continue to weave together the insights gained from their programs and research questions in order to improve practice and better develop programs that will produce positive outcomes in participants. Though quantitative methods are useful to examine if and to what extent outcomes are achieved in experiential education programs, qualitative methods are necessary to inductively discover program characteristics that might be affecting the outcomes experienced and how participants perceive these effects (McKenzie, 2000).

Common Outcomes of Experiential Programs

Evidence suggests that there are many concrete benefits that have been produced through the participation in experiential / adventure education programs (Hattie et al., 1997; McKenzie, 2003). Adolescents were found to have increases in social acceptance, behavioral conduct, self-actualization and life effectiveness skills, along with decreases in hopelessness. Trust, communication, problem solving, fun, and decision making are additional benefits reported. Common outcomes of multi-day adventure education programs are self-awareness, self-confidence, self-reliance, interpersonal skills, concern for others, and concern for the environment. These beneficial outcomes were found to vary depending on the programmatic variables and the impacts of leadership / facilitator qualities. Research design factors also play a role in the finding and reporting of these outcomes (McKenzie, 2002).

In a qualitative case study approach, Davidson (2001) found that boys participating in a six-week outdoor education class learned, in varying degrees, about perseverance, motivation, responsibility, and the self-determination of their lives through challenge. Davidson also suggests that the value and meaning of outdoor education cannot fully be measured through quantitative measures and scores, but that the true benefits are demonstrated when an individual begins to challenge assumptions about self and society.

Hattie et al. (1997) undertook a meta-analysis based on 1,728 effect sizes from 96 studies on the effects of adventure programs on an array of outcomes. Forty major outcomes were identified in the adventure literature, which were categorized as follows: Leadership, self-concept, academic, personality, interpersonal, and adventuresomeness. Findings in the meta-analysis indicate that adventure programs had greatest immediate effects on leadership, academic, independence, assertiveness, emotional stability, social comparison, time management, and flexibility. A theme through these categories of greatest effects relates to providing participants with a stronger sense of self-reliance and control. One of the significant findings of this study was that substantial continued gains followed immediate gains from programs, indicating that programs impact participants long after the courses are complete. Though Hattie, et al. (1997), used quantitative studies in their meta-analysis, the need for qualitative focus on providing clear documentation relating to background variables, instructor effects, and the nature of programs is noted and recommended by the researchers for future successful research evaluations.

Intrapersonal Skill Development

One of the claims of experiential adventure programs is that they can help provide participants with a better sense of self and with a new awareness of needs for further growth. Experiential programs assist participants to develop holistic models of wellness, allowing individuals to asses and define what is important to them – intellectually, socially, emotionally, physically, culturally, environmentally, and spiritually. Personal mastery, helping people to create visions of what they want in their own lives (Senge, 1991), is one way of describing a potential outcome of experiential programs focused on personal growth.

Before a person can become better at working with and leading others, it is essential that a sense of self awareness is developed. The disciplines of adult education and transformational learning are two fields which align with this aim of experiential education. Promoting learning for personal change is one of the common underlying assumptions. A cultivating of self which is both independent and has a sense of social responsibility is an aim of many programs (Tennant, 2000).

Helping people to become open to changing their selves and welcoming growth moves them into a place of development and improvement, and beyond mere endurance or survival. Providing opportunities to learn about such topics, practice them immediately in an experiential activity, and apply them personally will allow for greater likelihood that the lessons will be internalized and utilized. The sense of euphoria that is often felt at the end of a successful adventure experience is a unique outcome of these programs that can further lead to intentional personal change (Rowley, 1987).

Interpersonal Skill Development

Individual personal growth (self-awareness and insights) can lead to the improvement of interpersonal skills which can positively impact both personal and professional relationships. Rather than viewed as a linear model (intrapersonal precedes interpersonal development), a spiral approach of development of these two interconnected concepts can be fostered. As individuals learn more about whom they are, they can apply this insight to how they interact with others; and, as they learn more about these interactive dynamics, they become more conscious of their self in these groups and more likely to make positive personal changes.

Investing in programs that enhance these skills will not only benefit the individual, but will also benefit the larger constructs of society within which the individual belongs. For example, experiential activities often encourage "thinking outside of the box" to promote creativity. Creative thinking is necessary in personal and work environments in order for innovation to take place (Rowan, 2003). An effective experiential training program can provide participants with opportunities to practice, build, and enhance creative talents.

Personal credibility and self-efficacy are two essential components of leaders of the future (Khoury, 2001). These elements enhance the substance (values, actions, belief in self) of a leader, which, is what makes an individual better able to manage and inspire others, gain followers, and enhance bottom-line business results (Khoury, 2001). Experiential programs focus beyond competency development, encouraging participants to reflect on the impact their actions and decisions have on others. Sullivan Dickens and Sagaria (2000) discuss the relational value system inherent in collaborative processes such as these. In building interpersonal skills as a facet of leadership development,

collaboration and dialogue, often an outcome of experiential programs, are encouraged as effective styles of communication.

Experiential activities can be implemented which build relationships while bringing out group dynamics such as communication patterns and conflict styles. These experiences can further be processed to help generate a more complete perspective of topics such as effective communication, "win/win" problem solving, dialogue versus debate, active listening, and peaceful resolution of conflict. Putnam Tong (2000) discusses the important distinction between tolerating and welcoming someone else's opinion. The personal and professional relationships formed through collaboration are reported as special, close, and emotionally intimate (Sullivan Dickens & Sagaria, 2000).

Transformation and Change

Outcomes such as personal growth, change, and transformation, are frequently claimed as benefits of experiential programs, but carry a range of meanings difficult to define and quantify. Change, involving questioning assumptions and rethinking premises, can be a process that is transformative, political, and involves learning. Change can be incremental, happening gradually, or extreme, such as a paradigm change, involving a changing of beliefs and values about how the world works (Imel, 2000). Transformative learning experiences will often straddle the borders of psycho-therapy, education, and spiritual practice, as individuals have the opportunity to expand their consciousness and experience therapeutic results (Elias, 1997).

According to Maslow (1964, p. 204), "the far goal of education – as of psychotherapy, of family life, of work, of society, of life itself – is to aid the person to grow to fullest humanness, to the greatest fulfillment and actualization of his highest

potentials, to his greatest possible stature... to become actually what he deeply is potentially." He continues with propositions that education must be seen as helping every individual toward this goal, as a life-long process, which is certainly not confined to the classroom. This aim of education describes the process of transformation that can be possible in experiential education programs.

Different views of transformative learning exist, including one advocating a rational approach dependent upon critical reflection, and another relying more on intuition and emotion, but sharing commonalities (Imel, 1998). Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997) seeks to guide people to awareness and change through the cognitive process of critical reflection. The field of transformational learning helps develop autonomous thinking, allowing learners to make their own interpretations rather than act on the knowledge and experience of others. This process can guide individuals to an awareness of their frames of reference and assumptions, which then can be challenged and transformed through critical reflection (Mezirow, 1997). Taylor (2001) calls for a more whole-person approach in fostering transformative learning, emphasizing a trust on implicit memory, which is largely unconscious, as well as introspective thought. This interdependent relationship between emotion and reason can provide a more inclusive view of transformational learning. Other models of transformation also exist and are found through various disciplines in the literature.

Many teachers value transformative learning over simple learning and Robertson (1997) describes facilitating this type of "aha" experience, as helping the learner "gain such profound insight about a topic that his or her perspective moves to a dramatically more empowered level". This process is cognitive as well as highly emotional as learners

more from one paradigm of knowledge to another, and can better be facilitated through a model of transition. Acknowledging and processing the loss of an old paradigm paves the way for the emergence of a new paradigm, and the use of reflective questioning is critical to the enhanced facilitation of this process (Robertson, 1997).

Psychotherapeutic approaches are often utilized to aid individuals in the realization of personal transformations and, as mentioned earlier, adventure therapy is an experiential approach to obtaining these types of results. Many links exist between adventure-based education and other therapeutic processes. In particular, Gilsdorf (1998) links Gestalt therapy, a process of bringing back to life personally significant themes, and the philosophy of experiential education. Both fields focus on the realization of present potentials and an emphasis on personal growth, promoting growth through tension and challenging experiences, have characteristics of flow, and take a holistic approach to learning or therapy.

Gillis and Gass (2003) provide six critical points as rationale for the use and development of adventure programs with therapeutic, or transformational, intentions:

1. Concrete physical actions and experiences help clients gain insight through personal actions, language, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. The therapy becomes more holistic involving physical, affective and cognitive interaction.
2. Comparison of the "unfamiliar" experience and the member's current reality can provide new perspectives towards treatment.
3. Eustress, the healthy use of stress, requires individuals to use problem-solving abilities (trust, cooperation, effective communication...) serving as a catalyst for change.

4. Adventure experiences are designed progressively with resolvable conflict, so members can build their senses of competency and increase their skill base. A variety of domains are used including, cognitive, social, emotional, and psychomotor learning.

5. Members can focus on their abilities rather than on their dysfunctions, stretch their perceived limitations, and discover strengths through solution-oriented structures.

6. Therapist role changes from passive and stationary to more active and mobile, allowing her to observe behavior more closely and holistically.

With the above mentioned theories, rationale, and program outcomes in mind, experiential education practitioners can better plan and lead programs with the intention of producing transformational outcomes.

Transformational outcomes of experiential programs. Experiential learning takes an interdisciplinary approach to personal change, including aspects of the physical, cognitive, and emotional. It occurs when people are engaged in a concrete activity and develop new understanding through the experience and reflection, which can then be transferred to affect change in future activities (Cassidy, 2001). Common outcomes of multi-day adventure education programs are self-awareness, self-confidence, self-reliance, interpersonal skills, concern for others, and concern for the environment, and a more conscious awareness of the links between course components and these skills could result in greater gains for participants (McKenzie, 2002).

While traditional academic approaches to education focus on intellectual development, experiential education focuses more on the whole person (Kolb, 1988). Experiential activities can lead to a more integrative approach to growth and learning, offering kinesthetic, emotional, and cognitive levels of understanding. Education is a holistic endeavor, encompassing changing and growing understandings of selves, relationships, and world; including academic, extracurricular, and non-academic aspects, of which only academic portions are regularly evaluated and used as indicators of learning in traditional school environments (Brooks & Brooks, 1999).

The integrated approach provided by experiential programs can have powerful and lasting outcomes for individuals and further affect their relationships with others, both personally and professionally. Though many outdoor and experiential education programs enhance emotional growth, it might not always be the primary intent of a program to do so. This growth may occur as an unintentional consequence of participation, deemed incidental growth, or can be planned, intentional outcomes of programs (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2000).

Organizational and Corporate Outcomes of Programs

In a survey of corporate recruiters by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, the top ten characteristics sought in new hires in order of importance are: communication skills, honesty/integrity, teamwork skills, interpersonal skills, motivation/initiative, strong work ethic, analytical skills, flexibility/adaptability, computer skills, and self-confidence (cited by Asher, 2004). These benefits (perhaps with the exception of computer skills), are fostered through participation in experiential and adventure programs. Initiatives, problem solving activities, rescue scenarios, and outdoor

adventure experiences are examples of tasks that can challenge teams of people (such as management units in a business) to utilize a variety of skills. These skills can include decision-making, leadership, problem solving, communication, and conflict resolution, and can ultimately improve interpersonal, managerial, and other business practices (Gass, Goldman, & Priest, 1992). It follows that not only will individuals be better suited for the professional work world through their participation in experiential activities, employers will also benefit from a workforce that is more qualified by its own standards.

Many types of corporate training programs exist, and companies invest a great deal of time and resources in these programs. According to Bergman (1995), this investment is worthwhile. Companies that invest in training can improve in the following: company profitability, product quality, firm productivity, and employee performance. Bergman cites programs that have demonstrated these results through a wide variety of technical and basic skills training programs, and she notes that improvements in employee skills, as well as self-confidence, self-esteem, job satisfaction, and morale, also lead to improvements in firm performance. Many experiential programs directly target the improvement of intrapersonal attitudes as well as interpersonal skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving abilities. Therefore, these specific types of trainings will lead to the same bottom line benefits noted by Bergman. Again the connection between corporate success and personal growth is exemplified, justifying a need for experiential programs that encourage personal growth and leadership development.

Isenhart (1983) identified three specific ongoing organizational needs that are met through experiential employee development programs, including: the encouragement of

leadership, development of talent critical to success, and renewal of individuals for continued contribution to the greater organization. Experiential programs address learning at both individual and group levels fostering the understanding of the concept of interdependency. Collins (2001) found programs that promote leadership development need to add value to the entire organizational system at the core levels of individual, group, organization in order to be effective. With evolving networks in a global economy, the need for visionary leaders with team management skills is increasingly important (Collins, 2001). Committing to each individual's personal growth can lead to collective visions for an organization (Senge, 1991) further affirming that each of these transformational aspects is intertwined with the others.

Other Societal and Global Impacts of Experiential Programs

The core values of integrity, mutual respect, knowledge, and toleration of cultures and differences can be cultivated through an experiential program with a focus on personal growth and leadership development, embedded in multi-cultural and global perspectives. This celebration of difference can help all people obtain the skills and rights necessary to succeed in the economic and political systems of the world (Putnam Tong, 2000) and is an integral part of the proposed experiential curriculum. With increasing globalization and the need to compete in world markets, creative leadership, collaboration, and teamwork skills are even more essential (Rowan, 2003).

As individuals begin to recognize their place in the global community, respect and tolerance develop into appreciation and welcoming of diversity, and may gain awareness of ways in which they are participating in oppressive systems. Experiential programs are often means of consciousness awareness for participants. This raising of consciousness

empowers people to make choices which reflect their values and selfhood (Putnam Tong, 2000).

The ecological concept of sustainability and the feminist model of global interdependence (global feminism) further provide a stable foundation for a curriculum which seeks to nurture human potential intrapersonally and interpersonally. Walker's "womanist" notion (cited in Putnam Tong, 2000) describes a commitment to the "survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female". An experiential setting that seeks to foster these ideals will be a true community of learners where each individual contributes to the care and development of the self, the group as a whole, and the environment. A dynamic balance will occur, where members both take and give from the experience and the resources in order to sustain the group in a state of dynamic equilibrium.

Further, in many multi-day experiential programs, each person in the group is interconnected personally, where the failure of one member is felt as a failure to all, and individual success is celebrated as group success. These concepts are more difficult to simulate, as they must be fostered continually within the group. Programs must consist of a non-hierarchal structure where all participants contribute equally, positive and inclusive communication is developed and utilized, and collaborative decision making occurs. Allowing individuals the opportunity to step out of their comfort zones and take some personal and interpersonal risks will allow them the opportunity to gain new perspectives and develop shifts in their dominant paradigms, including multi-cultural paradigms. A relationship centered approach to living in a global society, decision-making, and life

career development entails shifting from a paradigm of independence to one of interdependence (Carlton, 2003).

The opportunity for individuals to recognize systems (particularly their own) of privilege and oppression can be difficult, yet life changing. Profound experiential lessons and paradigm shifts have occurred through experiences of traveling internationally. Independent travel, group travel, and study abroad allow one to better view her/his interconnected position in the global community. Living in a country and culture different from one's own can provide the vantage point of seeing self and country through new eyes and is an important consideration in planning experiential programs aimed at fostering transformative effects.

Examples of experiential programs which have resulted in societal outcomes include a study by Loughlin (1994) which explored the transformation of consciousness that led individual women to develop a deeper sense of self around women's issues and led them to become agents of change for other women. Similarly, Miller (2001) found that wilderness expeditions, can affect personal growth, appreciation and respect for the diversity of others, and an improved understanding of and responsibility towards society.

Impacts of Experiential Programs on Adolescents

Adventure-based education confronts individuals with problems requiring full participation, including a feeling of personal risk. These types of programs are ideal for developing, or acting as a catalyst for, positive self-esteem changes in adolescent populations (Kolb, 1988). The actual risk to a participant in adventure education activities can be minimized when safely controlled. The feelings of anxiety and fear form a sense of perceived risk which can help affect personal change (Kolb, 1988).

Personal growth, change, and transformation, are frequently claimed as additional benefits of experiential programs but carry a range of meanings, which are difficult to define and quantify. Cushing (1999) helped to distinguish and clarify types and parts of transformations through the analysis of student narratives. Different types of curricula, including aspects of skill development, citizenship, and critical thinking were found to impact change.

In studying experiential education programs, Conrad and Hedin (1982) found increases in several areas of adolescent psychological development. Gains in self-esteem and moral reasoning scores were found in students participating in outdoor based programs. Strong gains were also found toward taking responsible action and having more personally responsible attitudes. Positive attitudinal changes towards adults, others, and being active in the community were also reported.

Garst et al. (2001), studied how outdoor adventure program participation impacts adolescent self-perception. Results indicate a relationship between experiential programs and gains in social acceptance and behavioral conduct, but did not necessarily explain how the changes occur, or whether or not they have lasting impacts, or transference. Additionally, results of a quasi-experimental study on an experiential seminar program with high school seniors demonstrated significant gains over a semester in: personal, group, and social responsibility; attitude toward people; problem solving; self-concept; and attitude toward learning (Buswell, 1982).

McLeod and Craig (2004) evaluated the life effectiveness skills of middle school boys gained through an experiential learning outdoor education school program. Participants took part in the experiential program throughout their ninth grade year of

school. Overall life effectiveness skills significantly increased from pretest to posttests. Significance levels between the four stages of post testing indicate that other variables may be in effect and calls for further studies.

Critical Factors of Experiential Programs which Impact Transformation

Maximizing the potential of an individual, aiding in the processes of self-actualization and transformation, seems an illustrious yet formidable task. Helping people to become better people, who in turn will foster better relationships, which in turn will contribute to a greater degree of effectiveness both personally and professionally, and contribute to the building of a better world is a venture requiring, and worthy of, the investment of time and resources. It also requires the development of quality programs and trained leaders who can skillfully and artfully guide this transformative process. Some essential programmatic, personnel, and environmental components exist, which increase the likelihood learning and transformation will occur as outcomes of experiential programs. The roles of facilitators, course components, and the environment will be further discussed in the following sections.

Facilitators and Program Leaders

Role and qualities of facilitators. Many variables exist within the individuals who are charged with creating and facilitating experiential adventure programs, indicting that significant research should be conducted on how these variables impact the experience. A trained and qualified facilitator will be able to not only provide a safe and challenging experience, but will also be able to guide the experience through a conscious model, coaching participants to elicit growth and learning. This intentional leadership is as much an art as it is a skill set, best honed through practice and experience. It is fluid and relates

to other aspects of an experiential program, influencing program outcomes. Though impossible to quantify and fully describe these qualities, there are some specific models and skills of competent facilitation that can provide a framework for improving practice.

Teachers and guides who understand the process of reflection and connect them to meanings in the culture are required for transformation to take place; the adult role includes functions of both mentor and instructor (Scott, 1998). One of the critical pieces in a reflective experiential education process is the role of "elders" who lead the process of reflection, direction, experience and affirmation. The role of educator in experiential programs becomes that of facilitating the learning environment and supporting the learner in problem solving, growth, and development as individuals bring their own life stories and perceptions to the experience (Allison & Pomeroy, 2000).

A trained facilitator will be conscious of striking a balance between competence level and risk level in planning and leading an experiential training program. Developing the idea of Abraham Maslow, who described "peak experiences" as tremendous moments of meaning and life-direction (Hoffman, 1990), the Adventure Experience Paradigm, a model developed by Priest (1985), looks at the key components of a quality experience. According to this model, a high level of competence and low level of risk can lead to a "recreation / exploration" experience with little new learning occurring. Conversely, high risk with low competence levels can lead to "devastation and disaster", clearly not an ideal outcome. Through achieving a balance of risk and competence, a "peak adventure" experience can be created where learning is maximized and growth occurs. In order to create such an experience, a facilitator must be aware of these elements of risk and

competence in both the participant and actively work to balance and sustain optimal levels of both in a dynamic process.

Even when actual, physical risk is controlled at a moderate level, adventure-based education confronts individuals with problems requiring full participation including a feeling of personal or emotional risk. These types of programs are ideal for developing, or acting as a catalyst for, positive self-esteem changes in adolescent populations (Kolb, 1988). The actual risk to a participant in adventure education activities can be minimized when safely controlled. The feelings of anxiety and fear form a sense of perceived risk often remain, helping to effect personal change in participants (Kolb, 1988).

Experiential programs are based on a model in which learning primarily occurs through the interpretation of experiences that can be given wider meaning (Isenhart, 1983). Transference, the ability to integrate new knowledge into "real life", is a critical component of experiential training programs. Sometimes reflection and transference will happen on its own, though a skilled leader can aid the process through the use of questioning and guided reflection. Very few practitioners have developed the diversity of skills needed to truly engage learning during the vital time of reflection (Bunyan, 1994).

A skillful leader may also use the approach of narrative in responding to clients' "stories", allowing them to explore different narratives of themselves, and explore different ways of viewing the world (Tennant, 2000). A transformative facilitator will be able to not only provide a safe and challenging experience, but also will guide the experience through an intentional model, coaching participants to elicit growth and learning. The creative use of metaphors in experiential processes is a significant

facilitator skill. Metaphors can be seen as instruments and opportunities to help facilitate human growth, the ultimate goal of responsible education (May, 1996.)

Hartley and Williams (1988) explored how gender, personality, soft skills training and leadership style of outdoor leaders impact the experience of participants involved in these programs. Their exploratory attempt to understand the effects of these qualities on students' course outcomes consisted of a field study designed to examine major variables that have been previously ignored in outdoor leadership. Many of these variables had direct effects on other variables indicating that all of these facilitator traits probably work together to create the participants experience. It is difficult to separate personality variables, gender socialization variables, and experience variables, and how they impact a person or group experience.

Another attempt to identify which aspects of facilitation effect participant perceived benefits was made by Lindenmeier et al. (2004). A core set of benefits associated with particular challenge course experiences was identified and possible ways of purposefully influencing the presence of these benefits was explored. Focus was placed on five factors that could be manipulated by the facilitator as a means of inducing benefits. These included environmental characteristics, front-loading, interpersonal interactions, processing, and activity manipulation. That a leader of an experiential program can, and does, have profound effects on the outcomes of experiences is clear. It is less clear *how* these facilitator qualities impact the participants and how to optimize transformative outcomes through facilitation.

A model developed by Karl Rohnke (1989) for creating excellence in experiential programs through a conscious approach to planning, leading and facilitating can give

insight to improving practice. First, group formation needs to be considered. What are the issues and goals of this group and at what stage are they in the group process? Secondly, the selection of appropriate activities and their sequencing can impact the success of a program. Activities need to be appropriate to group stage and participant ability as well as follow a natural process of perceived and actual risk. Third, the briefing of activities is an important step which includes: informing participants of safety issues, helping them to understand the purpose of the activity, giving them a chance to set appropriate goals for themselves as well as choose their level of participation. Next, the leading of the activity allows the facilitator to maintain empathy, monitor / note group dynamics, refocus the group or intervene when necessary, and coach the process as appropriate. Following the activity, a debriefing process can aid in the aforementioned transference of learning. This is a chance for participants to reflect on what they experienced, interpret the meaning behind it, and apply it to their future. A quality experiential program will provide a sense of closure, allowing participants to fully integrate the cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects of the session(s) and leave with a sense of new understanding to self and perhaps a plan for application of this new insight into their personal and/or professional life (Rohnke, 1989).

A shift in a facilitator's understanding of the term 'education' is necessary to look at transformative properties where education is seen as a reflective process, requiring learners to reflect on the significance and meaning of their own life based on their personal experiences (Scott, 1998). As facilitators, "our challenge is to develop formational experiences that offer us alternate forms for reflection and the possibility of

attaining new skills and understanding" (Scott, 1998, pp331). The facilitator's role is one of energy, creativity, and vision (Bunyan, 1994).

Facilitator training and experience. Due to the sudden growth of adventure programs, a widening gap has emerged between practice in the field and professional theory. Even programs that define themselves as educational, rather than therapeutic, will work with clients who may experience clinical incidents through the programs. Critical clinical incidents, unplanned events that occur with individuals or groups that are potentially damaging to self or others, sometimes occur during experiential programs (Gray & Yerkes, 1995). Berman, Davis-Berman, and Gillen (1998) propose that because there may be as many emotional crises as physical crises in adventure education, in training leaders for such programs it is as important to teach crisis intervention and management as it is to teach first aid. Whether professionals in the field view themselves as counselors, instructors, or therapists, documentation of client progress is important to overall outcomes and can help improve services to clients (Gray & Yerkes, 1995) and other specific skill training can promote a greater likelihood of positive outcomes.

Individuals develop and promote their own steady state or homeostasis in order to function effectively. When this state is interrupted or imbalanced through an event, as is often the case in an adventure or wilderness program, a crisis may occur. It is important for group leaders to understand, plan for, and intervene in such a crisis in order for a positive resolution to occur (Berman et al., 1998). Because of the increasingly complex issues in adventure courses, including violence, depression, teen alcohol and drug abuse, the skills of recognizing and responding to client distress are essential to outdoor adventure professionals (Gray & Yerkes, 1995).

Creating experiences that are parallel to a client's real life provides insight that can mirror successful resolution of program experiences and the therapeutic issues underlying them. The use of meta-communication, connecting the real-world words/language (e.g., feeling "tugged at", "at the end of my rope") to the adventure experience, is described as an important skill in hypothesizing about novel experiences that may help in the co-creation of applicable solutions (Gillis & Gass, 2003).

The characteristics of experiential program instructors seems to have received the most attention from researchers in contributing to effectiveness of programs, but does not provide enough information to be useful in increasing effectiveness, creating a need for more specific data (McKenzie, 2000). The art and skills of balancing theory, risk, leadership style, processing needs, environmental factors, activity planning and sequencing, interpersonal skills, and participant needs and interactions makes the job of a competent facilitator complex, delicate, and intentional work. When done well, an experiential program leader has the potential to positively impact lives.

Programmatic and Course Components

Curricular components that effect change. As mentioned previously, essential components of a transformational, experiential curriculum will include: personal awareness and growth, interpersonal skill and leadership development, and grounding in the concepts of global interdependency and sustainability. Curricular components will be actively experienced by the participant, and will include cognitive, affective, and kinesthetic elements. A focus on a transfer of the insights gained into the participants' daily lives is additionally imperative for learning and transformation to occur.

The challenge involved in adventure education activities can lead to a constructive level of anxiety which when overcome successfully can lead to participant growth (McKenzie, 2000). The level of challenge in most experiential program activities increases incrementally, enabling growth throughout the program. Both the successful completion of these challenges, as well as the role of failure, can lead to positive outcomes if balanced and mitigated properly (McKenzie, 2000).

Full immersion in experiential programs creates a sense of flow as people become engaged in the physical, cognitive, and emotional aspects of activities. This immersion can assist in people becoming more open to discovery and learning opportunities (Butler, 2000). Experiential programs enhance the climate of a group through the encouragement of ideas, and the elimination of the fear of failure fostered by a spirit of play and experimentation, rather than a sense of competition and independence (Kerka, 1999). An effective experiential program will encourage these same qualities, providing participants with opportunities to practice, build, and enhance creative talents.

Cushing (1999) helped to distinguish and clarify type and parts of transformation through the analysis of student narratives. Aspects of skill development, citizenship, and critical thinking were all found to play a role. Conrad and Hedin (1982) also sought to discover program practices that were most effective in facilitating adolescent development, and discovered patterns that influence positive change. Programs with the presence of a formal, at least weekly, seminar seemed to be the single strongest factor in explaining positive student change. Programs of longer length and stronger intensity were also correlated to positive change.

The concepts of emancipation and empowerment can lead to personal transformation through engaging the hand, eye, and brain, in expressing the identity of the whole person. In prison education systems there exists an exclusive focus on cognitive skills, one of the problems with many education systems in general. Integrating the creative arts as a framework to incorporate the elements of choice, inclusion, and change was found helpful in providing a more holistic education (Clements, 2004).

Often, examples of transformation occur following a negative, challenging, or difficult experience. For example, major impediments to development such as illness, discrimination, and poverty, can sometimes spark a response from an adolescent, starting a progressive growth towards a competent existence (Czikszentmihaly & Larson, 1997). By creating an environment that is perceived as safe to the learner, and through skillful questioning and conscious leadership, people can be coached into uncomfortable, yet learning rich, experiences. They can further be coached and encouraged to partake in the important step of self-reflection, which will better help them to navigate the process of change. Tennant (2000) posits that the pedagogy of self -reflection not only helps in the discovery of who one is, but also on the creation of who one may become.

Experiential curricula that help create these challenging, even uncomfortable, experiences can build resiliency, expand comfort zones, and lead to positive change. Resilience, a term used to describe qualities which foster successful adaptation and transformation despite adversity, can allow people to develop social competency and skills, autonomy, a critical consciousness, and a sense of purpose (Benard, 1995). Developing a capacity to be "collaborative innovators" includes a shift in ways of thinking, while acquiring skills of resiliency, creative decision-making, and self-reliance

(Carlton, 2003). Maintaining a positive outlook in the face of adversity, the concept of "blessing chaos", can encourage us to take risks and trust that both positive and negative forces will interact to foster positive change (Carlton, 2003).

Brown (1989) suggests that programs using techniques for awakening deep levels of awareness might facilitate greater transformation. Introspective methods such as deep relaxation, meditation, visualization, and dance, may help participants enjoy and find more meaning in experiences. "We need to help participants awaken, utilize, and develop more of their human potential" (Brown, 1989, p. 50).

Transfer of learning, the effect that an experience has on future experiences, must be planned for as an objective of the program (Gass, 1985). Providing practice, a means for students to internalize their learning, including significant others in the experience, encouraging student responsibility for learning, and providing follow-up experiences are some of the steps encouraged by Gass (1985) to increase learning transfer.

An additional and important programmatic aspect related to transformational outcomes is service learning. Service learning, an experience-based movement which emphasizes active over passive, producing over consuming, and students as solvers of problems rather than the problems themselves is a powerful contemporary movement that is impacting and transforming the lives of individuals, classrooms, and schools (Kraft, 1992). In contemporary society, the transition to adulthood rarely involves a meaningful work experience, though young people respond remarkable when asked to engage in something real, where they feel and are needed (Kielsmeier, 1989).

As students prepare for, experience, and reflect on a service project, they are empowered to make decisions, participate in society, and incorporate learning (Everest,

2001). Service learning experiences can expose students to new challenges and possibilities, and lessons and memories gained can influence attitudes and thoughts well past the initial event (Johnson, 1996). Service learning benefits schools, communities, and young people by engaging them in community service and political activism (Boss, 1999) and contributes to the power and transformational potential of an experiential program.

Timing of programs / Transitions. In many cultures, "rites of passage" exist to serve as symbolic events as people are transitioning between key aspects of their life. In the dominant Western culture, there lacks formalized models of these transitions, leaving many people confused and struggling through difficult times alone. During these periods of identity shift, people are often more open, ready, and willing to assimilate new ideas and concepts that might help facilitate the transformation they are seeking. Transitions bring major changes to the daily context of life, and often cause the breakdown of habitual patterns, forcing the conscious development of new behaviors to fit the new circumstances (Dornbusch, 2000). Examples of such transition time in our culture include post-high school; career decision points at college entry, mid-college, and post-college; mid-career changes; transitions in relationship (divorce, marriage, loss of loved one); and retirement. Transition is a natural part of life, which is not usually comfortable, and therefore is often denied. These periods of transition in the human lifespan parallel the empowering paradigmatic shifts in epistemologies known as transformative learning (Robertson, 1997).

Anthropologists have studies rites of passage in various societies involving a separation, transition stage, and reintegration stage which is intended to achieve more

than just transition, but the transformation into the next stage or role in life (Maddern, 2000). According to Venable (1997), when adolescents handle their own transition into adulthood, the results can be destructive. They will find a peer group or gang that approves of them if they are not valued at home, and if not given the opportunity to share the status of responsible adults, they will develop their own illegal or near fatal adolescent "initiation" rites.

Adventure programs have been used in college environments to increase retention, orient new students, and facilitate social skills for students who are experiencing a challenging transition in their lives (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2000). This example shows that experiential programs occurring during significant life transitions have the potential for powerful impacts on students.

Environment. Experiences which are deemed transformational, or peak experiences, are enlightening and, according to Yaffey (1991) are, "far more likely to occur on the mountain than on the bus, in a cave than in an office, and at the top of a strenuous route than at the end of a stressful day." The power of the environment is a profound part of experiential transformations.

People learn in unique, though interwoven, ways and rational, intuitive, and imaginative processes can all be effective in fostering a learning environment for transformation (Imel, 1998). Educational researchers have concluded that schooling should include greater use of reflection and reasoning, looking more like out-of-school functioning, rather than the type of learning that is increasingly isolated from the rest of what we do (Resnick, 1997). Kraft (1992) suggests that we must look to other settings, outside of traditional classrooms, as possible sites for meaningful learning to occur. The

wilderness is one example of such a setting which holds the possibility of being a learning and a "life changing" environment. The natural consequences of a wilderness environment, along with the aesthetic and spiritual qualities are also considered to facilitate personal transformation (Bacon, 1983, cited in McKenzie, 2000).

The adventure learning environment differs from the classroom in several ways that lend to a more motivated and ready learner. These include: an attractive, welcoming (often outdoor) physical environment; an intimate small group that increases social interaction; problem-solving, versus lecture, as the dominant mode of instruction, real problems, adventure, uncertainty, and risk that lead to mastery, increased self-esteem, and meaning (Kraft, 1992). An unfamiliar physical environment can enable participants to experience a state of dissonance, creating a constructive level of anxiety, which can lead to positive benefits such as increased self-concept (McKenzie, 2000).

One area, which has not been deeply considered in the field of experiential education, is the use of cross-cultural or international settings as environments for learning and changing behavior (Kraft, 1992). The culture shock that can be experienced during an overseas experience, or often on the return to one's home, is an example of how a novel environment can impact growth. International travel experiences can become transformational, resulting from an unexpected and disorienting experience (Elias, 1997).

Several links exist between the literature bases of transformative learning theory and cross-cultural learning, including a phenomenon known as a "trigger event" in the former, and as "culture shock" in the latter. Exemplifying the concept of a negative experience that fosters positive change, adults often identify these happenings when describing a learning event which changed their lives (Lyon, 2002). The terms departure

trigger, culture trigger, and re-entry trigger, were defined by Lyon (2002) to describe a disorienting dilemma experienced during an overseas experience, before, during, or after the experience, implying that these events need to be considered in both situational and chronological contexts. These stages are also often experience by participants in multi-day wilderness experiences and follow a similar model. The use of reflective thinking, the concept of transformation, and the role of supporting relationships are also common to the fields of transformational and cross-cultural learning (Lyon, 2002) and similarly align with concepts that promote positive change in experiential education programs.

The process of helping others to develop a new world view through access to accurate and complete information can be accelerated through international experiences. Kraft (1992) points out that the international setting has many of the same characteristics of the wilderness setting that impact transformation. In addition to change in the environmental setting, linguistic, cultural, religious, political and multiple other cues lead to a level of culture shock. The successful navigation of various stages of culture shock can lead to life-changing learning experiences. Travel experiences have the potential to impact one's world knowledge, subtly change an individual, or provide a true perspective transformation through a disorienting dilemma (Roberson, 2002).

"Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you and the storms their energy while cares will drop off like autumn leaves." (John Muir, 1910, p. 56). Before there were challenge ropes courses, Outward Bound programs, or adventure therapy curricula, people have realized the healthful and transformational qualities of the natural environment. Though all programs do not take place in remote

wilderness settings, fostering qualities of the wilderness may improve perceived outcomes, assisting participants to reconnect with nature and their own natural selves.

Adolescent Development and Identity Formation

Definitions

Adolescence is the nebulous, difficult to quantify and define, period of growth between childhood and adulthood. Different in individuals within and among races, cultures, genders, the transition between these two stages of life is gradual and uncertain (Rice, 1999). Traditional barriers between childhood, adolescence, and adulthood may be breaking down (Sicard, Moorman, Nichols, & McNair, 1994) as age ranges for being economically self-supporting, first-time parents, and college freshman vary in our culture from 16 to 60. Considered a part of early adolescence, puberty is marked by a period of rapid physical growth and the development of reproductive capacity. Though the timing and length of the onset of puberty varies, it is considered a major transition requiring significant psychological adjustment (Sicard, et al., 1994). Puberty is common to all individuals as a part of growth and development in the process of becoming an adult. It is important to note that the period known as adolescence is not universal across cultures. Rather, adolescence where a period of prolonged economic dependence and a lengthier educational period is the norm is found primarily in industrialized nations.

The period of adolescence spans several years, from the onset of puberty until a person becomes self-sufficient and prepared to assume adult roles (Jaffe, 1998). This involves shifts in relationships with peers and parents, and the development and appreciation for greater responsibilities and consequences. The sense of identity that is formulated through the process of adolescence includes biological, cognitive, and social

transitions (Glover, 1999). The psychological and physiological effects vary, but are intertwined and certainly affect one another. Cognitive transitions allow for changes in interpersonal relationships, which affect both family and peers. The transitions of adolescence guide the search for self understanding, preparing individuals for future roles in the adult world (Glover, 1999).

Frameworks for Understanding Adolescence

Professionals in myriad fields of study, including: biologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists have considered the phase of adolescence through their unique lenses. Each of these fields offers its own perspective that contributes to the understanding of this topic, a few of which will be discussed further here.

Erik Erikson (1950, 1959, cited in Rice, 1999) described eight stages of human development in which an individual must master a psychosocial task in order to acquire a positive ego identity. According to Erikson, the task of adolescence is to establish ego identity. Though this is a lifelong process, Erikson emphasized that adolescence is a time of fluctuation and experimenting, which allows the individual to establish a sense of personal identity and a clearer concept of who one is and what one wants to become. Important to the topics of this paper, Erikson (1959, cited in Rice, 1999) also described adolescence as a period of psychosocial moratorium, where the individual is allowed to experiment with roles in order to find a unique niche in society. A failure to establish identity in this period results in an adolescent experiencing self-doubt and role confusion, which may lead to self-destructive, one-sided preoccupation with the opinions of others,

or the other extreme of no longer caring what others think. The possibility of withdrawal or turning to drugs or alcohol to relieve this anxiety also exists (Rice, 1999).

In the area of cognitive development, Jean Piaget is well known for his study of continuous development of intellect over the lifespan. Piaget (1967, cited in Rice, 1999) outlined four stages of cognitive development, the fourth of which pertains to the time of adolescent development. During the period of formal operational stage, from 11 years of age up, adolescents are able to think more logically and abstractly and are able to think about their thoughts introspectively. They are able to use inductive reasoning, bring facts together, and think beyond what is, to what might be, aiding in planning for the future.

Albert Bandura (1973, cited in Rice, 1999) emphasizes that children learn through observation and imitation of behavior, referred to as modeling. This social learning theory was demonstrated through studies on aggressive behavior, and the role of reinforcement is emphasized in influencing future behavior. As adolescents learn to set reasonable goals and reach them, internal satisfaction gradually replaces the dependency on parents, teachers, and bosses for external praise and reward. From the theoretical perspective of social learning, it is of great importance to note that what adults do and the role models they represent are far more important in influencing adolescent behavior than what they say. For example, adults can encourage virtues by exhibiting virtues themselves. (Rice, 1999)

Acknowledging that both biogenetic and environmental forces play a role in human development, many anthropologists such as Margaret Mead (1970, cited in Rice, 1999) challenge linear stage theories (such as those of Erikson and Piaget) and view adolescence as more of a continuous growth pattern rather than an abrupt change or

transition. This view aids in understanding a more holistic account of development which takes into consideration prior learning experiences, how the environment effects an individual, and a person's history, all of which contribute to growth and development, particularly during the transition of adolescence.

Sexual maturation and decision making, body image, cultural and ethnic identity development, self-concept, identity development, and the social processes of dating are a few of the critical issues that adolescence will need to confront as they mature to adulthood. Also, the drive to individuate is a natural part of the transition process of adolescence as the child pulls away from parents towards peers and becoming a fully independent adult of his/ her own right (Foster, 1998). The successful completion and resolution of these dilemmas will allow an adolescent to enter adulthood as a stable, caring individual with a positive and integrated self image. Though biological maturity towards adulthood will progress regardless, a guided time of cognitive and emotional adolescent development may assist individuals through this transitory period with a greater ability to achieve their personal potential.

An understanding of these developmental processes of adolescence helps found and provide rationale for having a more conscious and formalized process of the transition to adulthood, as described in the next section.

Rites of Passage – A Model for Life Transitions

Rationale

People undergo a series of transitions throughout their life span. During these periods of identity shift, many individuals are open, ready, and willing to assimilate new ideas and concepts, which help facilitate the transformations they are seeking. Transitions

are inherently stressful, bringing major changes to the daily context of life, and often causing the breakdown of habitual patterns, which forces the conscious development of new behaviors to fit new circumstances (Dornbusch, 2000). Examples of such transition time in our culture include: career decision points of post-high school; college entry, mid-college; mid-career changes; transitions in relationship (divorce, marriage, loss of loved one); and retirement.

Formalized education can also be understood as an initiation, and as a part of every socialization process, it is also bounded by rituals or "rites" (May, 1996). Schooling can be a structured or informal time of institutional separation including forced seclusion from family and even from children at other levels of development (Stockrocki, 1997). As adolescents transition and prepare for their adult roles, it is important to note that forces from the family, peer group, neighborhood, and school can impact the developmental processes which contribute to functioning in subsequent environments such as college, military, or work (Dornbusch, 2000). Programs and leaders at this critical transition time have the potential to positively impact young people, creating forces which will help them to more successfully navigate this period of change.

Rites of Passage, though not always formalized nor considered as such, are intertwined in multiple aspects of the lives and culture of Western society. Common modern occurrences such as births, marriages, graduations, New Year celebrations, and deaths, possess remnants of the rites and rituals from historic backgrounds, but do not always take on the deep meaning and significance of their historical counterparts. Perhaps this omission of the conscious awareness of history and purpose of these rites and rituals, leaves people feeling less committed to and less deeply affected by, watered

down versions of ceremonies. True purposes and understandings of rites of passage may help individuals move beyond merely surviving stages of their live, towards learning, growing, and transforming through them.

Theoretical Framework for Rites of Passage

In 1908, Arnold Van Gennep (1960), a French anthropologist, helped to identify, name, and describe several rites of passage throughout various world cultures. He describes transitions of: individuals and groups; pregnancy and childbirth; betrothal and marriage; funerals; as well as transitions of the natural world, such as the cycles of the years, seasons, and moons. His often cited triparate model of these rites of passage include the rites of separation (preliminal), rites of transition (liminal), and rites of incorporation (postliminal), which he notes are not always equally important or elaborated in different and specific transition processes.

Most significantly, for the purposes of this current review of the literature, is what is termed by Van Gennep (1960) as "Initiation Rites" that take place in many cultures as a formal means of signifying the transition between childhood and adulthood. Van Gennep points out the lack of appropriateness in describing initiation rites as rites of puberty, since puberty can range in age and definition between and among cultures, races, genders, and even classes. He further describes several approaches to the initiation of a child into adulthood through myriad cultures around the globe. The historical perspective of some of these traditions, including mutilation (whether by scarification, circumcision, piercing, or even amputation) as a form of differentiation, form a helpful understanding of the significance of these rituals in many societies. Furthermore, the historical traditions of these transition rites helps to put into perspective and provide a better understanding of

some of natural, often labeled aberrant, behaviors of contemporary adolescents. Examples include body markings, piercings, tattoos, changes in clothing and hair color and style, and a search for meaning and significant role models (Scott, 1998). Though the biological rationale for these cultural ceremonies is not described, perhaps the clearly defined processes of other cultures helpes to guide young individuals into their new roles in life, allowing them to better navigate the natural, yet ambiguous transition that we call adolescence.

In looking at the common principles and practices of many cultural initiation rituals, Kessler (2000) describes a rite of passage as a structured, guided process to help young people become conscious of their transition, gain and utilize tools to assist them during separations and transitions, become initiated into the next step, and be acknowledged by the community of adults and peers for their courage and strength through the process.

Needs and Perspective from a Western Culture

Though times and cultures change, the fundamental inner journey in the process of maturation from childhood through youth to adulthood is essentially the same (Maddern, 2000). Anthropologists have studied rites of passage in various societies involving a separation, transition, and reintegration stage, which are intended to achieve more than just transition, but also a transformation of a person who effectively functions in the adult society (Maddern, 2000).

In contemporary Western society, many forms of these "rites of initiation" still exist, but often are not included, or well defined, in the dominant culture, leaving many young people without a clear, safe, and guided way to understand and form their new

position as adults in society. Rites of passage mark distinctions in lives, celebrating and facilitating changes in social categories. While found in Jewish, Buddhist, and several other cultures, no standard rite of passage from childhood to adulthood exists in dominant North American culture (Venable, 1997), leaving many people confused and struggling through these difficult times alone. "Rites of passage meet a need in our young people, and they renew the community as a whole. Initiation may transform a girl into a woman and a boy into a man, but it also strengthens the community by adding new adults who have much to contribute, who are responsible carriers of the culture" (Kessler, 2000, p.33)

Most young people in industrialized countries are provided an extended period of exploration as they make the transition from adolescence to adulthood, and culture plays an important role in this process (Nelson, 2003). In modern Western society, specific cultures and religions certainly have guided traditions to signify the adolescent transition including the bar/bat mitzvah in Judaism, the mission in the Mormon church, and the quinciñera in the Hispanic culture, but there is a lack of traditional culturally-guided rites of passage available to the majority of young people in the dominant culture. There is a clear need to build healthy experiences to better guide adolescents through formative developmental periods based on their needs (Neill, 2000). Western theories of human development often place the strongest emphasis on mental capacities – intelligence and cognitive development – with a push towards individual development and personal process (Scott, 1998). Rites of passage programs, on the other hand, recognize the shared process of the community; "not only those who are being initiated are changed; the entire community is affected" (p. 321). The integrative quality of rites of passage leads to

success because multiple essential elements of development are often included: sexuality, societal relationships, personal status, identity, skill development, and mortality.

"We should be forming youth and educating adults and, in fact, we do the opposite: educate youth and form adults" (Scott, 1998, p. 333). Traditional educational practice, attempting to teach skills to young people who still do not know who they are and how they fit might, not be best practice in helping young people achieve their potential. It may be easier, and more appropriate, to teach skills to those who have first formed a sense of self and therefore have an understanding of the need for the skills. Rather than educating only minds and hoping that young people will find their way to adulthood through their own means, "we must work to reclaim passage from anonymous hands, offer youth clear and respected borders for passage, and restore significant formational practice to a place in a deliberate process of coming of age in our culture" (Scott, 1998, p. 334).

Experiential Programs as Rites of Passage

"Initiations teach independence, emotional resilience, spiritual awareness, a sense of identity, purpose and responsibility" (Maddern, 2000, p.33). With the pressure and focus of modern education on intellectual knowledge and physical skills, emotional and spiritual growth and well-being are pushed aside. Experiential adventure-based education, an approach to teaching a secure sense of self, acquiring coping and communication skills, and developing personal responsibility, is being increasingly utilized as an adaptable form of prevention and education of the whole person (Neill, 2000).

Adventure education programs create rich experiential environments which facilitate transfer and growth to everyday life, continuing well after the program ends (Hattie et al., 1997) and, as advocated by Neill, (2000) there is more than sufficient evidence to justify the further implementation of adventure-based programming in mainstream schooling. Empirical evidence indicates that adventure education programs are effective means for enhancing adolescent self-concept, among other outcomes suggesting much potential for further development and incorporation of such programs (Neill, 2000).

Rites of passage or rites of transition are a formalized way to mark and assist in the successful navigation of life transitions, and outdoor education courses, which have an aim of facilitating transformation in participants, are often utilized for these rites (Cushing, 1998). Generally, the stages of separation, the period of learning, experimentation, reflection, and re-incorporation are incorporated into rites of passage, and experiential programs commonly mirror these phases. For example, experiential and adventure programs have been used in college environments to increase retention, orient new students, and facilitate social skills for students who are experiencing a challenging transition in their lives (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2000.)

Wilderness expeditions, an intensive form of outdoor experiential education, can be examined as a rite of passage as participants transition from conventional society through a phase of growth and learning, and back again (Andrews, 1999). Expedition participants are engaged in the processes of separation, transition, and reincorporation. In his work with adolescent rites of passage in wilderness settings, Foster (1998) speaks of the "mirror of nature", the reflection of self in elements of the natural world such as the

wind, trees, flowers, stones. Foster acknowledges that the movement for these rites of passage, though now popular and considered "eco-psychology" will not last unless the genuine desire persists from parents, children, and community of the understanding that people in life transitions and/or crises must go into the wilderness alone and empty to confirm the new life status and rebalance. Meaningful experiences become embedded within rituals on wilderness expeditions, which share the common threads of community, sense of self, and sense of place. These experiences help participants return to society empowered by creative energy, an expanded worldview, and a greater sense of hope (Andrews, 1999).

As exemplified above, the rites of passage model, including separation, liminal, and re-integration phases, is often applied to experiential education courses. Though much work has been aimed at enhancing facilitation strategies for the first two stages, Cushing (1999) found that the exit phase, particularly, is in need of more attention to assist students to sustain growth once back in regular lives. Cushing (1998) posits that the rites of re-incorporation, transitioning the novice back into society, are typically overlooked in contemporary outdoor education courses, and that longevity of transformations will be improved by creating more emphasis on this process. Specifically, she describes key elements that can foster this re-incorporation, including opportunities to express and perform new roles, building in extrinsic as well as intrinsic rewards to reinforce the transformation, and providing longer term support on an ongoing basis to encourage continued risk-taking and growth.

Experiential Rites of Passage Programs with Adolescent Populations

Adolescent Rites of Passage

Rites of initiation, led by adults, to help young people navigate the changes between childhood and adulthood were a part of several pre-industrial cultures (Kessler, 2000). Contemporary teenagers create their own transition rites and symbols ranging from "driver's licenses, proms, and graduation ceremonies to the dangerous rituals of binge drinking, first baby, first jail sentence" (Kessler, 2000, p.30). Adolescence is a time of physical and cognitive transformation, growth and change. The development of outdoor education camps to assist young people in recognizing and celebrating the transition into young adulthood as part of a rite of passage has been modeled in Australia and could be applied to other settings (Thompson, Battersby, & Lee, 1998).

The transition of adolescence is often considered a period of difficulty, defined for many young people by problem behavior such as drinking and delinquency, which have the possibility of becoming patterns. According to Venable (1997), when adolescents handle their own transition into adulthood, the results can be destructive. They will find a peer group or gang that approves of them, if they are not valued at home and, if not given the opportunity to share the status of responsible adults, they will develop their own illegal or near fatal adolescent "intiation" rites.

Merten (2005) found that girls negotiated their transition to adolescence by moving through stages similar to a rite of passage, finding ways to negate their little girl identity, deal with their "in between" situations, and find actions to symbolize their new identities; these stages often taking the form of violative behavior. He further points out that it is difficult to determine whether this behavior signals serious trouble or is

expressive of the transition happening. Rather than interpreting the behavior as disruptive and punishable, Merten suggests that schools and adults who become more engaged with students can create the safe environment necessary for learning to take place and for students to negotiate this transition.

Several other factors may contribute to a more overall successful experiential transition program for adolescents including forming positive, connected relationships with adults, and engaging in meaningful service and work environments. There is a strong need for intimacy, cognitive challenge and feelings of competence and autonomy during the developmental period of adolescence. Different expectations from parents and teachers, unfamiliar settings, strains and changes in peer relationships are all consequences of school transitions at this age. Enhancing student/adult relationships, addressing fears, and teaching interpersonal and coping skills are all attributes of successful transition programs (Shoffner & Williamson, 2000). In contemporary society, the transition to adulthood rarely involves a meaningful work experience, though young people respond remarkably when asked to engage in something real, when they feel, and are, needed (Kielsmeier, 1989). Service-learning is beneficial to young people as well as to the community served and would serve as an important component to a successful, experiential rite of passage program.

Adolescents in Alternative Learning Environments / "At Risk" Youth

"Our youth loves luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, and disrespect for other people. Children nowadays are tyrants. They no longer rise when their elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble their food, and tyrannize their teachers" (Socrates, 5th Century BC, cited in Lewis, 1998).

Teenagers have been troubling their elders for centuries. Exemplified in a quote from ages past, misunderstanding between generations is nothing new. Still, as a society we cannot disregard changing times. We must consider how to adapt our systems of education and socialization in order to best prepare our young people for adulthood, rather than holding tight to outdated models which (may) have served well in previous times. Poverty has been identified as the factor most likely to put a person "at risk" for drug abuse, child abuse, violence, teen pregnancy, and school failure (Benard, 1997).

It is estimated that one million youth per year leave school without completing the basic requirements, including literacy skills, which hinder employability. In their book, *Hope at Last for At-Risk Youth*, Barr and Parrett remind us that the danger of students doing poorly in school goes beyond them just failing and dropping out, but of "entering adulthood illiterate, dependent upon drugs and alcohol, unemployed or underemployed, as a teenage parent, dependent on welfare, or adjudicated by the criminal justice system" (1995, p. 3). Recent research has been successful in identifying factors that place youth at risk. These factors can be divided into those related to individual, family, and community, and those related to school. Factors such as having a low-value of education, low self-esteem, pregnancy, change of residence, attempted suicide, single parent family, are a few of the identifiers (Barr & Parrett, 1995).

As Barr & Parrett recognize, schools and communities must be careful regarding identification and labeling of students as "at-risk" due to the research that has shown the self-fulfilling prophecy potential of labels such as these. Instead, offering programs that foster success, and allowing all students opportunities to participate and learn from such programs, is encouraged. In support of this idea are the issues that any child can, at any

time, become at risk. Additionally, factors which are considered to be major impediments to development, such as, illness, poverty, and discrimination, can sometimes create a response in an adolescent, which creates growth toward a more directed existence (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1997). Characteristics of individual resiliency that enable individuals to overcome risk factors have been identified, and some students may choose not to learn, regardless of ability level and outside effort.

Multiple biological, social, and psychological factors in the environment, family, and individual are predictive of adolescent antisocial behaviors such as delinquency, violence, substance abuse, and school drop out. These risk factors include such items as: availability of drugs and firearms, media portrayal of violence, economic deprivation, family conflict and involvement in pattern behavior, early antisocial behavior, lack of commitment to school and academic failure, rebelliousness, and having friends who engage in the behavior (Ayers & Shavel, 1997).

Researchers have identified protective factors, which can mediate exposure to risk, aiding adolescents to avoid becoming engaged in risk behaviors. Carefully designing programs to address specific risks, assessing individual risk levels and directing program efforts can assist experiential education and adventure therapy programs in preventing and intervening in problem behaviors (Ayers & Shavel, 1997). These programs hold great promise as effective intervention programs to help foster success in adolescents.

Rather than looking at children and families through a deficit lens, Benard (1997) describes how educators can foster resiliency through positive beliefs about all students. The protective factors of resiliency despite risk can be grouped into the categories of caring and supportive relationships, positive and high expectations, and opportunities for

meaningful participation (Benard, 1995). The idea of fostering resiliency is particularly appealing in that all students can benefit from such factors to aid them in their future. The Northwest Regional Educational Lab has synthesized research on resiliency factors and identified the following attributes of a resilient child: social competency, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future (Benard, 1991, cited in Barr & Parrett, 1995). If schools, parents, communities can help to foster these traits in young people, all in our society will benefit from a healthier and more productive generation. Schools and communities which work together to improve overall success can in turn become a self-fulfilling process of establishing and achieving goals without singling out or stigmatizing individual students as being at-risk.

In their book *Reclaiming Youth At Risk: Our Hope for the Future,* Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1998), claim "the concept of 'at risk', although very broad, avoids blaming the child and points our attention toward the environmental hazards that need to be addressed" (p. 3). They go on to describe the concept of "reclaiming" as to recover and redeem, or restore value to something. Reclaiming environments allow members belonging to a supportive community, which promotes individual mastery, involves youth in determining their own future, and expects youth to be caregivers, as well as recipients of care. The holistic approach of traditional Native American child-rearing philosophies emerged from cultures where a central purpose of life was the education and empowerment of children. The four central values of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity in the circle of courage of Native people are proposed to be the unifying themes of positive educational environments (Brendtro, et al., 1998).

These four themes coincide with the stages of Van Gennep's rites of passage during the transition to adulthood. When needs in each of these four areas are not met, people lose the sense of harmony with self. Environments, which help youth "reclaim" their broken circles of the central values, include attachment to a positive adult role model, and provide experiential, social, "brain-friendly" learning. "Though called by many names- experiential education, alternative education, adventure education, distributive learning, community-based education, career education – all have philosophical foundations that affirm learning is best achieved when it is active, interesting, and relevant" (Brendtro, et al., 1998, p. 99).

According to Brendtro, et al. (1998), students at greatest risk of dropping out of school are those who have never been friends with any teacher, giving credence to the importance of the role of "elders" in rites of passage programs. At-risk high-school students often have the compounded problems of poverty, dysfunctional families, low self-esteem, and a history of despair and defeat in school settings. Effective programs can improve self-esteem, transform attitudes toward school and learning, and guide students away from drug and alcohol addiction (Barr & Parrett, 1995).

Alternative high school, magnet school, and teen parent programs are a few of the programs that are effective for at-risk youth. Characteristics of effective alternative high schools include small size, caring and demanding teachers, and opportunities for choice and individualized curriculum. Community service programs, drug and alcohol programs, curriculum designed for building self esteem, and outdoor education programs were all found to be programs that work for this population. In regard to adventure-based learning, such programs "provide students with the opportunity to work and succeed in a

physically demanding outdoor environment. Schools employing adventure-based learning often describe the practice as absolutely central to their goal of inspiring, motivating, and engendering an interest in learning among youth at risk (Barr & Parrett, 1995, p. 158).

Experiential education and rites of passage programs, aimed at aiding disadvantaged adolescents, provide many of the critical qualities found in successful alternative school programs. Neill (2001) found that disadvantaged young people who participated in an Outward Bound course were highly enthusiastic about the learning opportunities which resulted in increased self-confidence and positive attitudes, feedback which led to improved behavioral maturity, and improved social, communication, and leadership skills. The program focused on developing individual and group skills through exposure to a sequence of challenging experiences to bring about and develop qualities such as perseverance, determination, self-belief, accepting support, improved communication, and community service.

Lan, Sveen, & Davidson, (2004) sought to define affective and cognitive outcomes for at-risk youth who participated in an experiential wilderness program. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized. Participants were above 13 years of age and considered at risk by the referral agency (employment, education, justice, and welfare agencies). Significant long-term effects, reflecting greater self-actualization and decreased hopelessness, were found. Results indicate that there are some benefits gained through the participation in this program, but causation is not identified, nor are the variables that influence these changes including participant, facilitator, and program characteristics.

Experiential programs can teach skills and strategies to help adolescents develop into successful competent adults. As teenagers learn to give order, and a meaningful interpretation, to events that usually produce rage, boredom, or despair through reflection, they are gaining a useful tool that can help them transform misfortunes into goals that give direction and meaning to life (Czikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1997). By creating order out of chaos, young people can learn to control conflict, recognize the needs of other people (including parents), and develop fully authentic life goals. Intense life experiences, both positive and negative, can lead to transformational change. Attitude towards change, locus of control, and commitment to self can be taught as coping skills which help people effectively manage life transitions (Brammer, 1992).

It is crucial that adult leaders of experiential programs possess the belief that every youth has innate resilience. Teachers and mentors who provide caring relationships of compassion and respect, hold positive and high expectations, and let students express opinions, make choices and contribute to the learning community have the power to enable positive development and turn young people from a path of risk to resilience (Benard, 1997).

Implications of the Literature and Concluding Comments

Current literature in the field of experiential education substantiates a need for further research into the outcomes of experiential programs, with particular consideration to qualitative methodologies, which can help determine how these outcomes are achieved and how better to foster the achievement of these positive outcomes in programs. Qualitative case study methodologies are a viable means of contributing to this field of education and personal growth. Davidson (2001) calls for a fresh look at the ways in

which the benefits of outdoor education are determined and substantiated. He also suggests that, "qualitative data allow for the illumination of individual processes of meaning making, and illustrate that they are rarely as simple as increased feelings of well-being or positive self-image" (p. 12).

Hattie, et al. (1997), identified major outcomes in the literature on experiential adventure programs, finding substantial continued gains occurring in participants long after courses. Though positive effects were substantiated, the authors also suggest the need to move from outcomes to theory and process studies in adventure programs. Further development of qualitative research in experiential and adventure programming is clearly called for, helping to clarify not just the results and outcomes that are produced, but also to better understand the ways that these results come to be in order to more effectively plan and facilitate experiences.

In outdoor experiential education, growth and transformation are often stated as outcomes, but the initial effect might not be lasting, and more work is needed to assist students with transference to ensure lasting growth (Cushing, 1999). Research has shown clearly that positive gains are made through the participation in experiential learning programs, and several factors impact the outcomes of programs. Facilitators, or instructors, of programs have a significant impact on programs, though more research is called for in order to better understand which qualities work best and how they can be fostered. Facilitation style is another consideration, as is the ability to aid in transference, the integration of new understandings, into lives of participants. Other programmatic variables, such as length of programs and research methodologies (timing of assessments

post-program; self-reported results), and participant background and personality may also affect outcomes from adventure programs, but more research is needed in these areas.

With these variables and considerations in mind, researches can continue to develop better understandings of outcomes and variables which impact the outcomes of experiential programs. This understanding will help program instructors to more fully realize their potential in positively impacting the lives of participants.

The variables that impact the transformational outcomes of experiential learning programs are interwoven and impossible to separate: participants come into programs with unique personalities that affect one another, the group, and the facilitator; group dynamics and outcomes are impacted by the environment, facilitators, and other participants; the environment is created by all of the players involved as well as the physical setting; facilitation qualities are an aspect of the program curriculum as well as the training and inherent qualities of group leaders; the entire process is integrated and holistic on multiple levels.

Research indicates that that transformation and change can be impacted in programs in multiple fields, including: transformational learning, education and adult education, cross-cultural learning, adventure and experiential education. There have been several exploratory attempts at defining the qualities that affect these changes. The role and training of experiential facilitators, programmatic and curricular factors, and environmental influences all impact the outcomes of experiential programs and future qualitative research designs are called for to further describe and explain how these changes occur.

Transformations can, and certainly do, occur in individuals who are not part of a formalized program or curriculum, though many people will not purposefully set out to put themselves in uncomfortable situations, reflect on the experiences, and apply new insights to make changes in their personal, interpersonal, and societal roles. A carefully planned program, which takes these programmatic, philosophical and other variables into consideration, can help create opportunities that are conducive to transformational learning and personal change, giving people who participate in such programs an opportunity to further realize their personal potential.

Aligned models of adolescent development, rites of passage, and experiential education provide promise for the development of programs which can assist individuals in the successful navigation of the critical developmental period from childhood to adulthood. Though no program can guarantee development, an empathic outdoor adventure education environment allows for the facilitation of positive changes in behavior and how young people perceive themselves and relate to others (Lilley, 1999). Rites of passage help to distinguish significant transitions in an otherwise continuous life course and can guide and contextualize the transition from childhood to adulthood in a coherent and meaningful way (Venable, 1997). Programs that are experiential, have a process of separation, transition, and reintegration, help promote factors of resiliency, and are characterized by caring yet demanding adults will foster positive growth through this transition. Rather than merely helping our young people to survive what can be a difficult and angst-filled period, program leaders and society have the opportunity to create and promote programs that encourage an intentional, conscious progression from adolescence, towards an adulthood of success and the realization of personal potential.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

"The true voyage of discovery lies not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."

(Marcel Proust)

This chapter articulates the critical dimensions I have taken in the design of an original research project. An overview of the research topic and the relevant literature is given, the purpose of this particular study explained, the selection and application of my research design is described, and a rationale for the methodology chosen including research paradigm and strategy as well as data collection and analysis methods is provided. This rationale includes my personal researcher's stance relating to the epistemological and ontological assumptions I bring to the research questions as well as fidelity analysis or verification of these methods. I evaluate the quality / "goodness of fit" of the paradigm and methods chosen for this particular research study and close with a summary of this project and its contributions to the field of knowledge.

Overview of Research Topic

We all learn through experience, sometimes consciously other times unconsciously. For this reason, at its most basic level, "experiential education" is nothing new. However, perceptions of education or training are often comprised of only of the more "formal" or "institutional" viewpoint including such modalities as lecture, note taking, memorization, and standardized testing. Though a traditional academic approach

to education can be valuable, it is primarily a cognitive approach and often addresses only one aspect of individuals' many ways of learning. Further, a current educational focus on high-stakes accountability systems in educational settings holds teachers and students accountable for achievement on these tests, not necessarily for lasting student learning (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). Focusing only on test measures and other narrow accountability systems, will cause for a continued narrowing of curriculum to match these tests rather than the broader vision needed to focus on student learning. Schools and programs must allow students to think, question, reflect, and interact with ideas – to construct meaning in their own worlds. Experiential programming can provide these types of meaningful and relevant interactions between students, their peers, and their environments.

While traditional academic approaches to education focus on intellectual development, experiential education focuses more on the whole person (Kolb, 1988). Experiential activities can lead to a more integrative approach to growth and learning, offering kinesthetic, emotional, and cognitive levels of understanding. Education is a holistic endeavor, encompassing changing and growing understandings of selves, relationships, and world; including academic, extracurricular, and non-academic aspects of which only academic portions are regularly evaluated and used as indicators of learning (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). This integrated approach can have powerful and lasting outcomes for individuals and further affect their relationships with others, both personally and professionally. Furthermore, the integration of all of the parts of self has been shown to help people to overcome marginality and oppression (Putnam Tong, 2000), an additional contribution of the field to individual as well as societal

development. Rather than viewing experiential education programs as "alternatives" to formal education, they have the incredible possibility to serve as models for learning that are different from traditional approaches by which many of us were educated, and can be incorporated within them.

The term "experiential education" has been defined in many ways by various researchers, including: programs offering an integral part of the general school program, but taking place outside of the conventional classroom, involving students in significant tasks with real consequences, (Conrad & Hedin, 1982); a special approach to learning which recognizes the world outside school as a learning environment, placing a high value on direct experience (Buswell, 1982); and as an interdisciplinary approach to personal change, including aspects of the physical, cognitive, and emotional, occurring when people are engaged in a concrete activity and develop new understanding through the activity and reflection, which can then be transferred to affect change in future activities (Cassidy, 2001).

The Association for Experiential Education (AEE) considers the ongoing process of defining the work, values and principles of its members as an important aspect of being a life-long learner and active member of the field. The AEE provides the following definition as a place to begin the conversation: "Experiential education is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values." (2006). Critical themes do exist within the various definitions, and include an active holistic experience which includes the intentional processes of reflection, analysis, and application to future living and learning.

Background of Study

"That experience changed my life!" I often hear people express life-changing, transformative aspects of a travel adventure, immersion program, wilderness trip, or other experiential event. As a life-long learner with an adventurous spirit, as well as a person who identifies herself as an educator, facilitator, coach, counselor, and guide, my curiosity is piqued by this expression. I intend to play a role in helping to create and facilitate experiences that are positively impacting, and potentially transforming, to others. My curiosity leads me to wonder and feel empowered by the possibility that I may be able to discover aspects about these types of experiences and apply new insights to my work with others.

Personally, I have been profoundly affected by several immersion experiences in my life. My purpose in pursuing this investigation is to better understand what types of experiences have the potential to transform lives. I wish to gain insight which will help me to better design and facilitate such "life-changing experiences" in order to maximize the potential of future participants. Further, not only do I hope to learn how better to serve as an agent of change in society by helping others to become empowered and motivated, I also hope to apply these findings to better maximize my own potential and improve my personal quality of life. In my journey to investigate these students and their experiences, I will continue to develop, and transform, my own personal and professional selves.

Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Grounding

The use and placement of theory is unique in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2003). Some of the conceptual framework of this study will come from my personal experience

and training in the fields of education, experiential education and facilitation, and counseling. It is possible that theory may be generated during the study, as in a grounded theory approach, and also may contribute to the lens with which I conduct the investigation. Though I am clearly influenced by the theories I came into this study with, I did not wish to impose a theory and preferred to integrate theory along the way as it served to facilitate the inquiry and analysis processes (Wolcott, 2001). That said, I will provide an overview of some of the concepts that guided my inquiry into this topic.

Constructivism, allowing students to build their own meaning, is one of my guiding educational belief structures. From an educational standpoint, controlling what students learn is virtually impossible; each student takes a different route in the search for meaning. When students want to know more about an idea, they put more energy into learning, but there are some tenets described by Brooks and Brooks (1999) that can influence this constructivist approach to education. Constructivist teachers value students' points of view, recognize and help students attach relevance to learning and daily lives, and structure lessons around big ideas. Experiential educational practices follow similar belief structures, an experience can be provided and intentionally facilitated, but each student will make meaning from it in her/his own way.

The conceptualization of experiential education, and my own experiences, cause me to believe that learning is the integration of physical, mental, and emotional components, and that reflecting on and applying information from experiences is a key way in which people learn. Additionally, numerous social issues inundate educational theory, which in turn impact experiential education theory. Ethical and moral dilemmas,

diversity and social change, oppression, and multicultural perspectives are a few of these (Warren, 1988).

One of the most critical and important components of experiential learning are the people who are providing the experience. A trained and qualified facilitator will be able to not only provide a safe yet challenging experience, but will also be able to lead the experience through a conscious model, guiding participants to elicit growth and learning. This intentional leadership is as much an art as it is a skill set, best honed through practice and experience. Certainly though, conceptual models and skills can provide a framework for successful leadership.

A trained facilitator will be conscious of striking a balance between competence level and risk level in planning and leading an experiential training program. Risk does not only include physical risk, but also emotional and psychological well-being. The "Adventure Experience Paradigm", a model developed by Priest (1985), looks at the key components of a quality experience. According to this model, a high level of competence and low level of risk can lead to a "recreation / exploration" experience with little new learning occurring. Conversely, high risk with low competence levels can lead to "devastation and disaster", not an ideal outcome. Through achieving a balance of risk and competence, a "peak adventure" experience can be created where learning is maximized and growth occurs.

Experiential education practitioners constantly act upon, create, and re-create program theory in order to enhance their practice giving them a more solid understanding of the evaluation of these programs from an insider's perspective (Kolb, 1992). By paying more attention to theoretical patterns, experiential educators can enhance

evaluation and practice. Rather than evaluating programs based on the input and output, it is essential to address what happens within the program, so theory can be built from the ground up (Kolb, 1992).

Focus of Inquiry

This study allowed students who have participated in a six-week immersion program with an international component, to describe aspects of the journey that were significant and life-changing to them. The students who participated in the immersion experience attend Millennial High School in College Town, USA. Millennial High School is described on its district website as "...an alternative high school which features a learning environment based on self-empowerment." Millennial's three-fold goals are: assisting students in developing life skills, increasing self-esteem and confidence, and achieving educational success; providing an alternative educational setting for completion of a high school diploma program; and helping students develop skills and attitudes necessary to succeed in their home high schools.

The students who attend Millennial High School range in age from 15 - 20. The majority of students has previously attended a traditional high school program and, having felt unsuccessful in that environment, has made the decision to attend this particular high school for a variety of social, academic, and personal reasons. Students are required to attend a six-week, entry level program to learn and practice specific communication and life skills before matriculating into the general student body of the school in order to give them a sense of the common language and culture of the school and to foster success in this school environment. Another unique programmatic aspect is that the academic calendar is divided into "hexters", six-week terms to allow for creative,

non-traditional, scheduling of classes such as the entry program and the immersion program which will be the focus of this inquiry.

One of the unique experiences that Millennial High School can provide is the Traveling Scholar Program. Several of these programs have been implemented in previous years through the school giving students academic and experiential opportunities to engage in school work and then travel to various places which have included the Utah desert, a Native American reservation, and Guatemala, Central America. On these trips, students gain opportunities to interact with people, perform service learning projects, and learn in novel environments. At the completion of the program, they return to make presentations to their home school and community. The students on the trip become a cohort, spending all of their time together at the school before the trip, as well as on the excursion, and are somewhat separated from the remainder of the school population, serving as a "school-within-a-school".

This was the third consecutive year that a Traveling Scholar program to Chile, South America had been offered at Millennial High School. Though each program had slightly different lengths of international time and destinations, the content, activities, and key teachers/ leaders remained similar. In order to become a participant in the program, students were required to demonstrate commitment to the trip and their peers in a variety of ways. These included organizing fundraisers, soliciting donations from sponsors, earning service hours throughout the school and community, and attending meetings and pre-trip excursions and events. Many of the students have histories of substance abuse, an added hazard when traveling internationally, so they were also required to demonstrate sobriety and asked to take urinalysis tests several times prior to the expedition.

Though the common literature often refers to students of this nature as "at-risk," I personally will avoid the use of this term in describing these students because I feel it is an unclear and unfair label that cannot possibly portray the variety of intelligences, backgrounds, abilities, and personalities of these students. (Further, I wonder if we would be better off in describing the traditional schools from which these students came as equally "at-risk" of not being able to best serve the needs of all students?) Though I have sparingly used the term "at-risk" in my review of the literature, I do so only to help describe prior studies and findings and to honor the language that has been used by other researchers of similar topics and populations.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this inductive, emergent case study is to understand the lived experiences of a group of high school students who participated in a six-week, experiential immersion program with an international component and to explore how these students made meaning from their participation in the program. I also attempted to better understand and describe the critical components of both the individuals and the program which allowed for growth, learning, and "experiential transformations" to occur. At this stage in the research, "experiential transformations" will be generally defined as positive / beneficial personal and interpersonal changes, which are attributed to participation in an event or series of events.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided my interviews and investigation in order to best understand the experience and how students were impacted through it.

- How is meaning made of a six-week high school immersion program, which includes a two-week international excursion?

- What is the "essence" of the lived experience for program participants? (Description of program and settings, pre-trip activities, domestic and international immersion components.)
- What are the qualities of the students who chose to participate in such a program and what are their hopes and expectations of the program?
- What are the significant aspects of the program that affect change in students?
- What insights, growth, and changes occur for students throughout the immersion experience?

Potential Limitations

As stated by Creswell (2003), providing limitations and identifying weaknesses of a study before it has begun is difficult, but identifying potential weaknesses in study design can be helpful. As is the case in qualitative studies, since as the researcher I am the main "tool" for data collection and analysis, my findings certainly would be open to alternative interpretations. This subjectivity, of the participants and myself, might be viewed by some as a limitation. This, sometimes referred to as subjective, nature of qualitative research, is termed engaged subjectivity by Schram (2003) , considered a helpful use of selective collection and interpretation of information based on a deliberate, personal process. Bias cannot be avoided, in this or other research studies. It can be identified and disclosed so that readers can make their own informed conclusions based upon their own biases.

This case study is bounded by the time, context, participants, and program being investigated. The research is meant to provide an in-depth description of the process and outcomes of a program through the voices of the participants, and cannot be generalized to other adolescent populations or experiential programs. As the investigator of a case

study is a human instrument, mistakes are made and personal biases interfere (Merriam, 2001). Though rich, thick description will be used in order for readers to help make connections to other such programs, qualitative research accepts that we can only provide an incomplete, but hopefully illuminative picture (Shank, 2002). This small, in-depth piece of evidence will provide insight into how this particular group of students made meaning from their trip.

Contribution to Field of Knowledge

Several audiences will find significance and relevance in this study including institutions, professionals, and individuals who are committed to personal and interpersonal growth and development. Public and private K-12 schools, as well as community colleges and universities, might choose to use the information in order to assist students who are transitioning through critical time periods (i.e. between grade levels, entering or leaving a new school) to more successfully navigate these changes. Schools, along with other private and public agencies, might also better understand how best to retain and support "at-risk" students through difficult times. In addition, educational and therapeutic methods and content might be better informed and developed in order to meet the needs of students through both traditional educational (classroom) and alternative programs and settings (study abroad, wilderness expeditions, challenge courses, adventure therapy, etc.) Taylor's (2001) call to integrate opportunities to learn through kinesthetic and other modalities along with helping them to understand and manage their emotions is a potential step in this direction. The opportunity to collect and disseminate evidence towards the positive effects of experiential immersion programs,

effects that cannot always be measured by standardized tests, may help to justify the continued investment in similar such programs.

Professionals (teachers, therapists, coaches, facilitators, guides) will also find this study significant and useful. As people who are dedicated to working with and helping others to learn and grow, it will be useful to understand what aspects of an experience are defined as "transforming" in order to better utilize practices which foster positive change. Additionally, if particular "significant individuals "are described by the participants in the study as having been significant to the process of change, the qualities of these individuals might offer a key to how best we can support, guide, and empower our clients/ students through their own processes of growth and transformation.

Finally, individuals who are committed to their own personal growth and development of personal potential will benefit from the findings of this study as they may gain clues as to how better to navigate change in their own lives. Information on transformational change will prove useful in the development of interpersonal skills and relationships – both personal and professional. Finally, through this inquiry, we might learn more about how to support the process of individuals becoming change agents for society. A study by Loughlin (1994) explored the transformation of consciousness that led individual women to develop a deeper sense of self around women's issues and also led them to become agents of change. Similarly, Miller (2001) found that wilderness expeditions, one of several environments for experiential learning, can affect personal growth, appreciation and respect for the diversity of others, and an improved understanding of and responsibility towards society.

Procedures

Rationale and Evidence for Selected Approach

Research paradigm. Five assumptions, outlined by Creswell (1998), guide my rationale for choice of a qualitative research design to approach my research questions and are detailed below. Ontologically, I believe that multiple realities exist and, rather than seeking one "truth," I wish to understand and report the perspectives and interpretations of the participants.

As I will be closely interacting with the students as a guide, facilitator, and travel companion, my relationship with the participants was very close and interactive. I observed, interacted, worked, and lived with these students on a daily basis for a prolonged period of time.

This model fits the epistemological assumption of qualitative research. As I have personally been profoundly affected by educational and international experiences such as the one being studied, I come to this research question with my own values and beliefs about the positive benefits that can occur through such an experience.

My axiological assumption is that my personal biases and values will be present in the study and are the primary reason for my choice in not only asking this particular research question, but also in choosing to invest substantial time and resources in working closely with these students in such an endeavor.

Rhetorically, the focus on stories, the use of metaphors, and the use of my own voice in the narrative fits the qualitative paradigm, as well as my research questions as I try to understand, discover, and make meaning of the interpretations of this experience through the voices of my participants. Stories play an integral role in many forms of

qualitative research (Shank, 2002) and I want to capture the stories of the participants and the meaning they are making from their experiences and use their words to inductively build a case for the significance of this journey.

This methodology of utilizing open-ended interviews, observations, and document analysis from which to interpret and layer themes and analysis is part of the qualitative process of an emerging design (Creswell, 1998).

Qualitative strategy. Within the qualitative research paradigm, the strategy of inquiry utilized for this particular research question will be a case study. Case studies are prevalent in the educational fields (Merriam, 2001), a key element being the case as a bounded system – in this case, the group of adolescents who will participate in the six-week immersion program at their school. Three special features help to further define the case study in that it is: particularistic, focusing on a particular program and phenomenon; descriptive, providing a holistic and rich description; and heuristic, illuminating the reader's understanding of the phenomenon and bringing about the discovery of new meaning (Merriam, 2001).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) lay out a structure for a case study including the problem, the context, the issues, and the lessons learned, which I will attempt to follow. Case study research has its roots in anthropology and sociology (Creswell, 1998) and is utilized across a variety of disciplines. The case study allows for an in-depth analysis, utilizing multiple sources of data, to understand a bounded system, and insights from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research (Merriam, 2001). Case studies are anchored in real-life situations, result in a holistic account of a phenomenon,

and offer insights to the readers. Case study has proven useful in many areas, particularly in studying educational innovations (Merriam, 2001).

Within the boundaries of this case study, these phenomenological questions will be addressed – what is the essence and impact of the immersion program on the participants, and how do the students make meaning of their experience? "We are interested in seeing how people interpret their worlds, and how we can, in turn, interpret their interpretations." (Shank, 2002, p.81)

Evaluation of quality and efficacy of methodology. As Shank (2002) explains, qualitative research is special, unique, and has its own vision. I definitely have a vision of helping to gather and provide information, time intensive and difficult to collect, about how alternative educational programs can impact young lives. I am willing and able to invest the considerable time and effort that is required for this type of fieldwork, and through the qualitative paradigm I will be able to provide a view of this program that no survey, test, or questionnaire could measure

Qualitative research has strength in the opportunity to get close to people and circumstances. The focus unfolds naturally and has no predetermined course, and is often described as naturalistic (Schram, 2003). I certainly have biases and assumptions about the merits of these types of experiential international immersion programs, but did not have a predetermined hope, expectation, nor even plan for how this story would unfold in this particular case, with these participants

Much of the current research in the field of experiential education has been of mixed design, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Because many of the benefits that are gained through participation in experiential activities are not simple to

describe, it is difficult to analyze through purely a quantitative methodology. The research question posed here is about human growth, understanding, and learning through experiences – variables are complicated, intertwined, and nearly impossible to separate. Not only are the participants impacting their outcomes on the study, but the facilitators and types of programs also impact the outcomes. When assessing the multiple aspects of this type of research, it would be nearly impossible to set up an experimental or a quasi-experimental design to find some "concrete" evidence. It would be unrealistic to attempt to isolate the "variables" (as would be done using a more quantitative strategy) in order to determine which aspects of the program led to which benefits and even if this could be done, the results would probably not mean much in the field of living people, and constantly changing environments. To understand how and why experiential programs benefit people, as this research proposes, a qualitative strategy is essential, allowing for more of an integrated and holistic view of the outcomes and processes at work.

A qualitative approach is the only one which makes sense in this particular research investigation. The purpose of the study is to document and understand how students learn, change, and grow due to participation in a unique experiential program. In order to do this, the paradigm and strategy detailed above make the most sense, and are most likely to help answer the questions posed. Qualitative inquiry requires the researcher to engage in active interpretation, noting and sometimes missing significant pieces of information, building on assumptions, and demonstrating worth through explanatory power (Schram, 2003). My job will be to seek meaning in the information I am collecting in order to provide an explanation and interpretation into the beneficial outcomes of this program.

Particularly in the field of experiential education, there is a need for providing some of the details about how and why changes are occurring, and not just whether or not they are doing so. Though adventure activities have been found to develop traits such as self-confidence, interpersonal skills, and responsibility, few of these characteristics can be quantifiably measured. Kolb (1988), among other researchers, calls for qualifiable, as opposed to quantifiable, instrumentation and methods such as observation reports, interviews and written exercises as a possible source of data. With this project, I intended to answer some questions that cannot be answered quantitatively.

Bounding the Study

Time,setting, and actors. During the months of January and February 2006, 17 high school students participated in a six-week, immersion unit at their alternative high school in College Town, USA. Student participants ranged in age from 16 to 20 years of age, the majority of whom were over the age of 18. All had all been students at the school for at least 12 weeks by the time the program commenced. Each expressed interest, was selected to participate in the program, and had to demonstrate her or his commitment through fund raising endeavors and participation in an overnight pre-program experience. Program facilitators consisted of five adults who worked closely with these students in varying capacities, three of whom were professionals at the school, one who is a mental health counselor in the community, and myself. We served in multiple roles of teaching, leading, counseling, guiding, and accompanying students on the trip as well as working with students at their school upon our return. The primary organizer of the trip was a teacher at the school, Bryan, who facilitates the school entry program and created the opportunity of the Chile immersion experience to serve as a "Rite of Passage" for the

students involved. Another teacher and the office manager of the school were involved to varying degrees, and I was brought in to serve as one of the teachers, facilitators, and chaperones on the trip, as well as keeping my research questions as a part of my intention. I had daily contact with the students throughout the six-week program, plus additional contact time before and after the experience, which allowed me the opportunity to know and work with the students on a significant level and also take note of changes that occured within them from my perspective.

The lead-up and pre-program requirements for participation in this expedition unit occurred over approximately five months. Similar expeditions have taken place for the preceding two years at this school; therefore, former participants have given current students some understanding and preconception of what the six-week endeavor might entail. Participants were asked if they were interested in participating in the research and were provided with consent forms. For the few students under 18, parents were also asked to sign assent to participate in research forms. Faculty members, chaperones, and family members were given the options to participate in the study also. Participation, at all levels, is completely voluntary.

Events. For the first four weeks of the actual program, the students attended five classes a day, as an intact group in their home school. This "school within a school" model allowed them to work closely together for an extended period of time before the international aspect of the trip occurred. The final two weeks of the program were comprised of an expedition to Chile with the five chaperones. The expedition included components such as extended hikes, sea kayaking, and rafting as well as service work, and an opportunity to utilize some of the language and cultural skills developed prior to

departure. Upon return, the students gave a school-wide presentation of their trip, learning, and insights and also participated in a "reintroduction" celebration with their families.

Researcher role. In a qualitative study, the investigator serves as the primary instrument for the collection and analysis of data, and must have a high tolerance for ambiguity which allows for adaptation to events and changes in direction (Merriam, 2001). Schram (2003, p.101) creates a nice metaphor of researcher and participants in a fieldwork study as "walking together on separate paths", allowing for the researcher to maintain distinct intentions within the multiple roles she may play. The researcher in a qualitative inquiry analyzes and reports the detailed views of participants, conducts the study in a natural setting to build a complex and holistic picture of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 1998).

Fitting well within the qualitative paradigm, I played multiple roles throughout the process of this inquiry. As well as being a researcher interested in how and what meaning was being made from the experience, I served as one of the facilitators for the four-week classroom component (playing simultaneous roles of teacher, facilitator, and counselor) and also was one of the chaperones for the two-week international journey to Chile. Though I disseminated information and taught some of the content, I did not serve as the teacher in control of the assignment of grades and credit, eliminating the conflict of interest that could be perceived in having a dual role of grader and researcher. There were no repercussions if students chose to not participate in the research, nor if they decided to participate and then later withdrew from the study. Because investigating the effects of a program that I am strongly connected to and a part of puts me in the situation of

conducting "backyard" research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) I employed multiple strategies of verification of the data in order to create reader confidence in the findings.

In order to protect the rights of the human participants, I obtained permission from both the Institutional Review Board from the University and also from the school district. Names and identifying details were masked in order to protect confidentiality of participants, and information is reported aggregately in the summary of the inquiry. Since I served as teacher as well as researcher, I was diligent and sensitive to the ethical concerns of this dual-role. My primary responsibility is to serve the best interest of my students and to keep them safe – physically, mentally, and emotionally – to the best of my ability.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Form of Results

Data collection procedures. As is called for in a qualitative emergent case study, rigorous procedures and multiple methods of data collection were utilized to answer the research questions. Included in these methods, and described further below will be: my participation in the setting, direct observation, in-depth interviewing, and document review including participant writing. The purposeful selection of the site and the participants follows the desire to understand how this immersion experience affected the lives of these young people. This program in particular addresses the needs of students at an alternative high school, in or nearing a time of transition in life (high school graduation). As a person who has been involved at the school for several years as a guest speaker, substitute teacher, and chaperone on previous Traveling Scholar programs (though not to Chile), I am familiar with some of the subtleties and nuances of the school and community culture, which gives added dimension and background to better

understanding some of the information provided by students. I consider this an added benefit to this particular site and population selected.

As a researcher, and a participant in the program, I kept a reflexive personal journal throughout my time working with the students; preceding, during, and after the six-week program. Students were also asked to keep a daily journal of personal thoughts, insights, questions, reflections that they had as they participated in the six-week program. They were asked to write one-page, weekly summaries of their journals to be turned in, allowing them to edit out and select components which they did or did not wish to share. A final written piece was requested upon return to the United States including reflections upon the overall experience and their integration / understanding of it in their home lives. After completion of the program, students who elected to participate in the study were asked if they wished to share other portions of their journal in order to further explain their impressions and critical aspects of the program. Additionally, I conducted interviews with a few additional students as a means of understanding how they continued to make sense of their experience.

Interview participants had an initial interview of 45-60 minutes following completion of the program, allowing the students to share stories and insights about how they made meaning from the experience, how they perceived changes they had made, what they had gained from the experience and how they were integrating their lessons into their lives. This interview was transcribed and preliminarily coded, and then followed up by a 30-40 minute second interview to member check the transcript of the first interview and to add / delete information as requested by the participant, as well as to share insights and interpretations.

The first interview consisted of questions helping to understand the qualities and characteristics of the participant, their reasons for electing to participate in this experience, and some of their initial insights and reflections on themselves, the group, and the experience. Sample questions included: Tell me about yourself and your background. What caused you to want to be a part of this group and this experience? What were your initial thoughts on the program and the group? What did you hope to gain from being a member of this program? What were your expectations / needs of yourself and of the group? What aspects of the program had the most meaning to you? What insights / lessons have you gained that are important to you? What have you learned about yourself from having participated in the program? How have your views (of society, the world, your family, your friends, your personal goals) changed over the course of the program? What insight / advice would you offer to future participants on a trip like this?

Interviews were open-ended and loosely structured, as is often the case in qualitative investigations (Merriam, 2001). The emergent process of qualitative research allowed me to refine and change my questions as the interview process developed and the study evolved. This evolution of questioning reflected my increased understanding of the topic as I gained information through the participants' words and voices.

I also provided these questions in written form, so if students were unable to articulate answers after the first interview, they could choose to think about and/or write about their experience and give me their writing when I conducted the second interview. I coded the written responses in the same way that I coded the transcripts of interviews.

Additional documents / lessons from the class were also used as evidence of change in student work when permission was granted.

Additional participants in this study included the trip teachers and chaperones. After obtaining consent from these adults to participate in my research, I elicited feedback in the form of interviews (following the same protocol delineated above for the students) and/or offered them the option of providing additional information about changes they perceive in the student due to participation in the Traveling Scholar program.

Data analysis procedures. Analysis procedures followed the step sequence described below:

Step One: The process of data collection and analysis was ongoing and interwoven, as is necessary in an emergent qualitative study (Merriam, 2001). The interpretive property of qualitative research was a fundamental aspect of this study. As I observed, interviewed, and described information, I was constantly analyzing and interpreting my findings, building themes, drawing conclusions, and noting personal meaning that was being made. The thinking process utilized cycled between data collection, data analysis, and writing as to allow for the emerging ideas to be utilized in order to gain richer, deeper information in regards to the phenomena in question.

Step Two: A general review of information, notes, memos and field journal entries helped me to continually evolve my thinking and analysis of data (Wolcott, 2001). The creation of diagrams and displays helped me with the reduction of data as collection proceeded.

Step Three: A detailed description of the case and the setting comes from my own personal experience and observations, as well as from the interviews of students. Using data analysis methods advocated by Stake (1995) I utilized categorical aggregation to seek collective instances that provided meaning. As well, I established patterns or connections between categories, and developed naturalistic generalizations that could possibly be applied to future or similar cases.

Step Four: An index coding procedure, as described by Seidel & Kelle (1995), was implemented to organize that data for analysis. The data was indexed into four major topical areas which were named the "what" (description of program and settings), the "who" (participant qualities and expectations), the "how" (programmatic components that may have affected participant change), and the "student outcomes" (intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transformational changes in participants that were attributed to participation in the program).

Step Five: Each of the four index segments were analyzed inductively for major themes, a qualitative strategy for thematic analysis described by Boyatzis (1998) and Moustakas (1994). By focusing on the research questions and the words of the participants, I was able to look for codes and thematic labels. I then attempted to introduce a structure to the themes, by grouping and naming them in clusters, and finally creating a summary to reflect the meaning of the program and the changes students ascribed to it. Integrated summaries were developed as time progressed through the study.

Step Six: The major thematic results from Step Five were brought together as the final conceptual framework for the study.

Methods used to represent and summarize data. A detailed description of the bounded case of this study, including the school, the students, and the program qualities, helps to give context and setting to the study. Findings are presented in naturalistic, narrative form to communicate a holistic picture of the students, the program, and the meaning that is being made. Participant and researcher voices were utilized as meaning was constructed, chronologically through the experience. Quotes, examples, stories, and metaphors were used in order to make the narrative as rich and meaningful as possible, and also to impart a better understanding of the lives and experiences of the young people involved, as called for by Creswell (1998), Glesne and Peshkin (1992), and Wolcott (2001).

Verification. To establish the credibility and trustworthiness of this study, several methods were utilized following the eight verification procedures described by Creswell (1998). Creswell recommends that qualitative researchers engage in at least two of these procedures in any given study, I utilized five.

1. A strength of this particular study was my prolonged engagement in the field. I had several weeks to build trust and rapport with the students as their teacher, chaperone, and fellow traveler. My immersion in the culture of the school and the case allowed me to check for different interpretations, misinformation, and distortions.

2. In collecting and utilizing multiple sources of data, I was able to corroborate evidence, known as triangulation, from interviews, journal entries, field notes, and observations.

3. I make clear my researcher bias, commenting on my own past and present experiences and articulate how my biases likely shape the approach and interpretation of the study. (See Researcher's Stance in Chapter 1.)

4. The use of rich, thick description allows readers to have a strong sense of the bounded case that was studied and described in order to determine which aspects may be transferable to other cases.

5. External auditors, namely my doctoral committee, were utilized to examine my processes and products in order to provide an unbiased perspective on the thinking and rationale being used in the interpretation of the data.

Anticipated Ethical Issues

My multiple roles of chaperone, teacher, and researcher had to be balanced carefully and ethically in order to protect the students and keep their needs and safety as the number one priority. I first and foremost was responsible to the holistic wellbeing and learning of the students as one of their teachers. The students in this program enrolled in an alternative high school for a variety of reasons. Some of them struggled with substance abuse and addiction issues, family conflict plays a role for most of them, some have histories of physical or emotional abuse, some have been in trouble with the courts, and some possess a combination of these reasons. It was imperative that I respect issues of privacy and confidentiality.

I was also cognizant and sensitive to issues that came up during the interviews and conversations that could leave the participants open and vulnerable emotionally. My training in teaching and counseling helped prepare me to handle and be aware of some of these issues. If I was taken off guard, or confronted with an ethical, legal, or safety issue that I was not sure how to handle, I knew that I would be able to consult with the other professionals with whom I was working, teaching, and leading (three of whom are professionals in the school building, the fourth who is a mental health professional in the community and accompanied the group).

Summary

Synthesis of Research Methodology and Design to Address Study Focus

A qualitative research paradigm was the most suitable approach to investigate this study, as the nature of the questions posed sought to better understand how students made meaning of this six week immersion program. Rather than testing currently held concepts, hypotheses, or theories, qualitative research is designed to inductively build them (Merriam, 2001). I was able to describe the program, qualities of the students who found meaning in it, and beneficial outcomes that were attributed to it. This information may help schools, professionals, and individuals to better understand the processes of change and growth that can occur through immersion experiences and how better to facilitate these changes. This may also provide an additional source of information on the benefits and outcomes of experiential programs so that more informed decisions can be made in regards to future planning and implementation of similar experiences.

Though quantitative approaches are often used to identify variables which impact learning, and to determine effect sizes and significance levels of findings, the purpose of this study is to capture the words and insights of students as they made meaning of their lived experience of this particular program. Rather than having variables pre-determined and hypothesis generated, the emerging design allowed the participants and the researcher to co-create a story describing the meaning and significance of their experiences.

Summary of Contribution of Study to Field of Knowledge

Though there has been a recent growth in experiential based training programs, a deficiency in scholarly knowledge regarding the benefits, quality, and effectiveness of

these leadership programs has been found, prompting a need for more research in these areas (Collins, 2001). Much quantitative research has shown the benefits of training and development programs in the corporate world, as well as the benefits of the experiential learning model in the educational and therapeutic fields, allowing space for qualitative studies to provide detailed descriptions and analysis of how some of the innovative blending of these models can produce personal growth and transformation in participants. Helping people to become better people, who in turn will foster better relationships, which in turn will contribute to a greater degree of effectiveness both personally and professionally, and contribute to the building of a better world is a venture requiring, and worthy of, the investment of time and resources. It also requires the development of quality programs and trained leaders who can skillfully and artfully guide this transformative process. This study provides further rationale for the benefits and outcomes of programs that can lead to change.

The application of experiential education in a variety of settings creates further rationale for the multi-dimensional validity of these programs. For example, experiential and adventure programs have been used in college environments to increase retention, orient new students, and facilitate social skills for students who are experiencing a challenging transition in their lives (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2000.) Because corporate organizations are often in similar states of change and transition (with such occurrences as the hiring of new employees or corporate restructuring efforts), it follows that these programs could also help benefit businesses by reducing turnover rates and helping employees assimilate to a changing company culture.

One area of need for personal growth and leadership development that I will continue to pursue is the application of experiential programs of this nature at key times of transition and change in people's lives. Rites of passage or rites of transition are a formalized way to mark and aid transitions in life, and are often cited as analogous process outdoor education courses which have an aim of facilitating transformation in participants (Cushing, 1998). Generally, models for these rites of passage include the stages of separation; the period of learning, experimentation, and reflection; and re-incorporation. Rites of passage mark distinctions in lives, celebrating and facilitating changes in social categories. Found in Jewish, Buddhist, and several other cultures, no standard rite of passage from childhood to adulthood exists in North America (Venable, 1997), leaving many people confused and struggling through these difficult times alone. During these periods of identity shift, people are often more open, ready, and willing to assimilate new ideas and concepts that might help facilitate the transformation they are seeking. Examples of such transition time in our culture include post-high school; college entry, mid-college, and post-college career decision points; mid-career changes; transitions in relationship (divorce, marriage, loss of loved one); and retirement.

Individuals who are committed to their own personal growth and development of personal potential will benefit from the findings of this study as they may gain clues as to how better to navigate change in their own lives. Information on transformational change will prove useful in the development of interpersonal skills and relationships – in both personal and professional realms. Finally, through this inquiry, we might learn more about how to support the process of individuals becoming change agents for society.

CHAPTER FOUR: AN ADOLESCENT RITE OF PASSAGE

(The "What", "Who", "How" and "Lessons Learned" of an International Immersion)

"We cannot teach people anything; we can only help them discover it within themselves."

(Galileo Galilei)

You are invited to witness, through the reading of this story, part of the path of a group of adolescents in their journey towards adulthood. This journey was comprised of personal growth, academic, and service work integrated through an experiential adventure immersion program taking place both in their alternative high school and in Chile, South America. Like any good adventure, this story is comprised of many integrated parts that make it unique. In its telling I will include a description of the program itinerary, a casting of the characters, the plot and critical interactions, and the lessons learned or how the characters were changed through their experience. Sit back, immerse yourself in the story, and perhaps you too will glean some insights into the importance of such a journey.

I set about this journey of my own, this rite of passage towards my doctorate degree, in order to learn more about a personal passion. I was fortunate enough to have been asked to become one of the leaders for a program which matched, almost perfectly, what I had been hoping to study - a program which included a holistic educational and personal growth program with an international component. I sought and received

approval to conduct a qualitative study of the program and commenced my own journey of academic and personal growth.

The following research questions guided my interviews and investigation in order to best understand the experience and how students were impacted through it.

- How is meaning made of a six-week high school immersion program, which includes a two-week international excursion?
    - What is the "essence" of the lived experience for program participants? (Description of program and settings, pre-trip activities, domestic and international immersion components.)
    - What are the qualities of the students who chose to participate in such a program and what are their hopes and expectations of the program?
    - What are the significant aspects of the program that affect change in students?
    - What insights, growth, and changes occur for students throughout the immersion experience?

The "results" section – analysis and findings from this research investigation will be comprised of several pieces. First, I will revisit the bounding of this case study, including a review of my multiple roles of researcher, guide, and participant in the study, to assist the reader to better understand the findings. Next, a summary description of the program and settings involved will comprise the events or the "what" aspect, including the pre-trip activities and the high school and international immersion experiences – delineated by service work, adventure activities, counseling / personal growth work, and academic learning. The "who" section will provide an aggregate picture of the students who were involved in this particular immersion experience as well as a summary of their hopes and expectations of themselves and the program. An analysis of "how"

programmatic qualities worked to affect change in participants will follow. Finally, student outcomes, including intrapersonal, interpersonal, and holistic changes, or "transformations", will be presented and discussed.

Bounding the Study

Time, Setting, and Actors

During the months of January and February 2006, 17 high school students participated in a six-week, immersion unit at their alternative high school in a mid-size university town in the Western United States. Student participants ranged in age from 16 to 20 years of age, the majority of whom were over the age of 18. All had been students at the school for at least 12 weeks by the time the program commenced. Each expressed interest, was selected to participate in the program, and was asked to demonstrate individual commitment through fund raising endeavors and participation in an overnight pre-program experience.

Program facilitators consisted of five adults who worked closely with these students in varying capacities. We served in multiple roles of teaching, leading, counseling, guiding, and accompanying students on the trip as well as working with students at their home school upon return. The primary organizer of the trip and initial contact for the students was a teacher at the school, Bryan, who facilitates the school entry program and created this opportunity of a Chile immersion experience to serve as a "Rite of Passage" for the students involved. Another teacher and the office manager of the school were involved to varying degrees and a mental health counselor from the community joined the group for the international part of the program as well as a few of

the other activities. I was brought in to serve on a daily basis as one of the teachers, facilitators, and chaperones on the trip. I had daily contact with the students throughout the six-week program, plus additional contact time before and after the experience, which allowed me the opportunity to know and work with the students on a significant level and also take note of changes that occur within them from my perspective.

An Itinerary for Adventure and Personal Growth: "The What"

The intention of this section is to provide a brief and summative description of the essence of the immersion program and settings involved. A synopsis of the pre-trip activities as well as both the alternative high school and international immersion portions of the program, including service work, adventure activities, counseling / personal growth work, and academic learning and teaching will be provided.

Pre-Trip Activities

Prior to the actual "for credit" immersion hexter, students were required to participate in several pre-trip requirements and activities in order to demonstrate their commitment to the program and to themselves. Fundraising, service work, and an overnight "retreat" comprised required events which allowed students to demonstrate their interest and commitment in earning the opportunity to participate in the immersion hexter to Chile.

The program was a costly endeavor, and therefore it was important that students felt as though they were investing in themselves, and that the trip would not be a "free ride" nor a mere vacation. Students were asked to contribute $500 each to offset the costs of the program. Though this is a small piece of the total expenses, considering plane tickets, international visas and fees, ferry and bus transports, and adventure activities, to

many of these students this price tag was still unreachable. Students were given opportunities to apply for scholarships, and many of them were "sponsored" by people in the community who wished to remain unnamed. All of them were required to participate in fundraising efforts which began over five months prior to program start and remained an ongoing focus up to the departure date. Some of these group fundraisers included selling peaches and trip t-shirts, washing cars, hosting garage sales, and collecting donations to be auctioned off to community members in an annual chili dinner event.

In addition to fundraising, 36 hours of service work were required from each of the students in order to participate in the program. These service hours included some of the fundraising efforts to help support the program as well as individual projects. The requirement was put in place to encourage students to invest their own time and work into helping better the lives of others, to "get out of themselves", and to prepare them for the work they would be doing in Chile.

In order to prepare better for the intense immersion experience ahead, two months prior to the start of the program, students and staff attended a two day retreat. This was one of our first opportunities to really spend an extended amount of time together, and served as a bit of a "kick off", one of the first official activities for this year's group. It was also a chance for the leaders and members of the group to see how interactions occurred, and gave students a "preview" of the intrapersonal and interpersonal work that would be expected of them.

Students were given opportunities to participate in trip planning and preparation and demonstrate leadership from the beginning. A strenuous hike on the way to the retreat cabin provided an opportunity to assess student fitness and perseverance, as well

as social dynamics in the group. As I hiked with the students, many opportunities were provided for me to observe and connect with students individually. This mini-immersion experience foreshadowed much of what the students could expect for the experience lying ahead for them in Chile. We had our first group "Circle" – a check-in and group counseling experience, part of the school culture that students have experienced many times. They knew what to expect from Bryan in Circle. He has high expectations of them to be honest and real. I believe that, at least unconsciously, this is why many of these students were here. They knew they had some work to do and they believed that Bryan could help them get to their next best place.

Bryan talked about why he does this program and how the trip to Chile would be more than just a school trip; it would serve as a "rite of passage". He defined this as a ritual, a chance for them to move past the "childish" side of themselves (with permission to allow the "child like" to remain) and toward their adult selves. Students were asked to sit alone for an hour and then the circle continued with discussions about fears, anger, sadness, and assorted life struggles that they were facing. The circle closed with the topic of hope and questions were posed, including: "Who do you want to be?" and "What kind of man / woman do you want to be?" Next, we walked down to the river in silence. A final circle for the evening occurred on the river bank under the stars and the students spoke profoundly, from the heart, as they shared insights, hopes and dreams, who they want to be, and how they want to live.

The second day of the retreat was more about experience and adventure. We hiked along an underground river through a cave, talking, laughing, exploring, pushing

past comfort zones and trying something new, a first in what would become a long string of firsts over the next several months.

The retreat served as a preview of the trip to come – a blend of education, personal growth work, and adventure. We would not be together, on an extended basis like this, again until the program officially commenced almost two months later. Bryan would be taking some personal leave / family time before the program, so he would not be a part of our group again until we arrived in Chile. Much work lay ahead for the students until that day arrived and they would miss his presence.

The six week hexter followed a "school within a school" model for the seventeen students involved in the program. Starting on the first day of the term, these students had five classes a day together, five days a week, for four weeks. The program was comprised of almost four weeks at their high school, two more weeks in Chile, South America, and two days back at school preparing for the final presentation of the program to the greater school community. Each of these components will be described further below.

The Alternative High School Aspect

In order to best possibly prepare students to gain the most from the subsequent two week immersion experience in Chile, the "domestic" four weeks of the program included course work that would be experiential and directly applicable to the journey (and hopefully their lives) ahead. Most students seemed much more motivated than the "norm" at this school, at least in part because they would utilize some of their academic work (i.e. Spanish language skills) in the very near future.

First period each day was focused on personal growth and group dynamics, including a Circle everyday to work through group stages and dynamics, personal insight

and potential, hopes and expectations, conflict, struggles with differences in students, and the loss of a student to a positive urinalysis only a week before departure. This time was also allocated for information and preparation for the international immersion ahead including: packing, health, travel safety and responsibility, paperwork, passports, and travel wellness (including physical safety, and differences in food and culture).

Period two consisted of the study of Chilean history, politics, and economics, Third period was Spanish class, consisting primarily of "survival" words, basic conversation, numbers, and travel words. Period four was an academic independent study. Students were given the opportunity of working towards a personal passion. They each gained knowledge by researching a specific content area relative to Chile and the experience ahead, and then by teaching it first to their group of peers and then to various elementary and junior high classes in the district. The day concluded with fitness class, including hikes and working out at a local club. Student fitness levels varied, but most were motivated by the fact that in order to participate fully in the hikes and adventure activities ahead they would need to be prepared.

The group also participated in two challenge ropes courses, one focusing on team building and "low" activities (within a foot of the ground at all times) and the second focusing also on team building and individual growth through the "high circuit" elements (twenty-eight feet from the ground and on individual safety systems). Both courses helped students experience and discuss appropriate risk taking, group dynamics, conflict styles, individual and group accountability, and growth through challenge and adventure. The courses were framed to provide metaphors for the upcoming trip and beyond.

Students had to rely on themselves and one another to solve problems, and keep themselves safe.

With the above classes, discussions, and activities, the time in Colorado passed quickly in almost all of our eyes, and soon our departure date was upon us. Students were required to pack their bags the week before leaving so they would be appropriately geared and ready to leave on schedule. A phone tree was created and activated in order to ensure that all students would be ready and on location when the bus arrived to pick us up at three in the morning. Students were encouraged to take the final weekend to say good-bye to friends and family and prepare for the opportunity of a life changing experience.

The International Immersion

The international travel portion of the six week program seemed to be the "highlight" and certainly the reason that most, if not all, of these students took part in the above mentioned aspects of pre-trip and the academic / school portions of the program. The topics and ideas that were taught, discussed, and practiced during the preparation phases were built upon and exemplified through the days and nights in Chile. These "experiential curricular" components included: personal growth and group dynamics, service work, activities and adventures, and the "academic" immersion into the Spanish language and Chilean environment, geography, and culture.

It would be impossible to try to capture all of the elements and nuances that affected these students and staff in a two week immersion. Breaking it into separate components in order to explain the journey seems to take away from the synergistic, "whole is much greater than the sum of its parts", quality of the experience. With this risk

of offering too simplistic of an encapsulation in mind, I will attempt to describe some of the essential elements that contributed to participant growth and learning.

The complexities of international travel. Over three days passed between leaving Northern Colorado and arriving in our first destination village in Southern Chile. Many "firsts" were packed into these beginning days, giving students opportunities to break out of their norms and "comfort zones", providing new sights, new experiences, and new thoughts. Some of these "firsts" included: flying in a plane, seeing the ocean, taking a ferry, being away from families, hiking to a glacier, seeing volcanoes, different flora and fauna, experiencing a complete reversal of seasons (it was summer in February), different foods and drinks, and sleeping outside under previously unseen constellations of the Southern Hemisphere.

The first three days of physically, emotionally, and mentally challenging travel were intentionally planned with the purpose of "driving out" the American culture and breaking free from aspects of home that might limit students to the full possibility of the experience. In essence, the purpose of these exhausting travel days was "washing them" of friends, habits, school, home, addiction – everything that keeps them from living fully and growing and being the person they want to be; giving them a "clean slate" to start from in the personal growth work that lay ahead for them.

Voyages on buses allowed students to view new landscapes and cultures and ferry rides provided opportunities to see dolphins and sea lions, with students grinning from ear to ear, enjoying the sea air and sunny Southern Hemisphere. Travel days provided students with more opportunities to break away from their perceptions of reality and see the world through new eyes.

A food bug or other virus hit a few of the students and leaders about a week into the trip, causing vomiting in the night, likely from food poisoning – "mariscos" – the lovely heap of mussels served to us the night before. Definitely not a "fun" experience, as I got a mild dose of it myself. This is one of the risks and realities of traveling to another culture and country that also allows for great growth to occur.

Personal growth and group dynamics – the "Circle". Students knew they came to Chile to do some *work* and, even though it was not always easy, they also knew that Bryan would push them to grow and learn. Almost every night, the group came together for a Circle, sometimes lasting over two hours. These Circles were an extremely important aspect of the personal growth work that students achieved through the experience. Talking and listening, students were able to integrate their experiences, emotions, and cognitions so that they could maximize the growth from the program. Though each night the circle topic was different, what kind of adult each student wanted to return as was the ultimate point of all of the circles.

Circle topics during the two weeks in South America included the following: a "highlight of the day" followed by a recap of the "Rites of Passage" talk; an epilogue, "What do you want / hope people will say about you when you die?", followed by, "You know what you want. Why aren't you living it *now*?"; Giving compliments and apologizing; a "postcard moment" followed by an "ah-ha" from the trip; "forgiveness", and letting go of the anger and emotional reactions of the past; followed by, "Now that you've cleared off your plate with forgiveness, how do you fill it back up?"; practice saying "I love you" to another person; giving and receiving love in appropriate ways.

Near the end of the immersion, a "reality check" occurred, as Bryan observed, "some people have a foot in both worlds, thinking of home, friends, addictions – others want to stay here and start fresh". He iterated to them the importance and need to practice saying good bye in life – both to negative situations and people, forgiveness, and also to positive situations, as nothing lasts forever. He challenged them to think about whom they are and want to be, and how to stay true to that, for the final three days in Chile as well as through the transition back home. Bryan challenged them to think about how to keep this journey as a plateau experience which they could maintain, instead of a peak experience which would be followed by a drop upon our return to the United States.

In our final international circle, students were asked to think about whom they had become and how they were different now from when they left home. "You can't be here without finding stuff. You have to name it in order to bring it home. What do you want to take with you? How will you be different? What will you leave behind?" Bryan challenged them to think. Responses were thoughtful and powerful as they were in the majority of the Circles and led them to consider their final presentation and what this trip really meant to them.

In Circles, Bryan returned to some themes, as a means to keep them focused on personal growth: being in the moment; being responsible (100%) for everything in your life (though not at fault); getting over yourself; being your true self instead of carrying around the 'shit' other people give you. He encouraged them to keep listening to their hearts and living in the moment to make this experience as powerful as it could be.

The evening Circles were powerful, the words and thoughts profound. They were an amazing process to watch and be a part of, as all of the students spoke up several times

over the weeks, often sharing deep insights and revelations. As students opened up, grew together, shared vulnerabilities, and let go of assumptions, their growth and maturity was exemplified. Sometimes there were big "breakthroughs" but more often there were smaller insights and new awareness. These small breakthrough moments seemed to add up, and may have provided these students with an experience that they could remember, know was possible, and replicable for the future.

Service work. Though there was not an intentional "religious" connection to the trip, Chile is a predominantly Catholic culture, which helps to explain why both of our service projects there involved work with churches. The first project involved three days of washing, sanding, and painting a church in the small town of Futaleufu. Several people in the community would walk by just to watch, and we were told that we were providing an excellent example of service and work towards others. Most of the students were dedicated to their task, and challenged themselves to do quality work. One young woman was determined to paint the highest parts of the bell tower and two other young men awoke early on the third day to help paint the roof and finish our job. The service work was a chance for students to "get out of themselves" by giving to others, as well as an opportunity for challenging themselves physically, allowing for the emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of growth that often came up in evening Circles.

The following week, we were invited to participate in an art project that would become a part of the main church in Castro on the island of Chiloe. Our students were paired up with Chilean students to work on a panel for a big, stained glass, mosaic window for the church. The day was an example of a wonderful exchange, allowing each student to work individually with a peer from another country and culture, while leaving

a bit of a legacy of which they could be proud. Many of the students spoke of one day returning to Chile in order to see their contribution as a final product.

Activities and adventures. A large part of the immersion in Chile consisted of unique, adventure based activities that provided students the chance to push themselves physically, stretch their comfort zones in new ways, and learn how to take appropriate risks and seek adventure. Part of the intention was to allow kids to see that using alcohol, marijuana, and other substances was not the only means of "getting high" in life. Adventure activities during the two week period included: a kayak lesson; swimming in a river; paddling inflatable kayaks down a Class III section of river and then walking home through fields and hillsides; horseback riding through drastic scenery; rafting on a world renowned whitewater river; a tandem sea kayak tour - cruising along the coast for a couple of hours while dolphins danced in front of us; a visit to a national park where our bus got stuck in the sand; a boat ride to offshore penguin colonies; and a final raft trip on the Rio Petrohue, seeming to run straight from the base of the Osorno Volcano.

Each of these activities allowed students to be themselves in the natural world; smiling as they pushed themselves physically and mentally, breathing fresh air with the sun on their skin, scanning the countryside for different forms of plant and animal life, and playing like young children. Often, it also allowed us to see other sides of their selves and have honest conversations with them about their hopes and intentions in life, as well as what might be holding them back from their full potential.

Academic components. Students were continually immersed in learning experiences during our international journey, though not in traditional classroom or school settings. Several students made every attempt to utilize their beginning level

Spanish vocabulary and continue to learn and practice new words with locals. One student in particular seemed to acquire a semester's worth of language learning in the two week experience as he was so dedicated to learning vocabulary and practicing with native speakers. Chilean environmental, geographical, and cultural lessons were immediate, and students were able to serve as "experts" to one another as they shared information that they had studied independently at home.

Full days and late nights. Part of the power of this experience was that months, or for some people lifetimes, worth of work, learning, personal growth, and adventure was packed into fourteen days. We awoke early, were busy working, playing, and learning through the day, and often finished our activities at 10:00 p.m. before dinner and Circle. With the late sunsets of summer, most nights we did not get to sleep before midnight, only to awake early and start again. One student described how it felt as though she had experienced and grown in the two weeks of the program the equivalent of what could have taken her two years. It certainly seems that students were able to experience in these two weeks, what some people will never have the opportunity to experience first hand.

Preparation for the return home. "Prepare for a culture shock. You are going to go home and fight the tide," predicted Bryan. Not only were students confronted with differences in American and Chilean ways of living upon their return, they had to learn how to negotiate the people in their lives who would want them back where they were – behaviorally and emotionally. Bryan started preparing them for this process in the last several days of the program. "Some people will not be able to understand what you have gone through and how you are different. It won't fit, and they will work to get their old friend back." He reminded them not to forget that they had a group of people here to use

as a support system. "These are the people who support the person you are becoming, and who you want to be. You can call on us."

Before leaving Chile, students were asked to put new insights about themselves into writing. This was the final academic piece and writing assignment, which ultimately turned into their presentations to the school and community. Think about, "What keeps smacking you in the face?", Bryan challenged them and reiterated that this could be the most important time they spent in Chile. "It takes pain and effort to examine your life. Take this time seriously as a gift to yourself."

Re-entry – Families, School, American Community and Culture

Reuniting with families. Twenty hours after stepping onto a plane in South America, and two weeks since we had left home, we were back at Their home high school for the closing circle. Exhausted from the intense experience in Chile as well as the travel home, there was still an air of excitement in the bus as we headed back to town, home, and the families who were anticipating our return. Parents and family members waited in the gym for the return ceremony, reintroducing their son or daughter who was returning home a slightly, or profoundly, different person.

Students walked into the gym in a silent procession and stood in a circle facing one another, surrounded by the outer circle of families and support communities. To give those present a picture of what the last two weeks had been like for the group, students randomly described two or three brief "postcard moments" from the trip. They then turned out to face their families and each student presented their parents with the gift of a bracelet from Chile and said "I love you". Next, students individually spoke directly to their families about what they missed most while away.

The ceremony closed with a final round, giving each student the opportunity to "make a statement", verbalizing what they wanted to be held accountable for and who they are now. Some spoke about what they left behind, realized, and learned. Some described how they were different, who they were becoming, and how they planned on living. Many hugs and tears between students and parents resulted. Most students mentioned some aspect of what we had talked about in the final circle and what they had written in their final papers. There were final group abrazos y besos (hugs and kisses) and, finally, home to sleep in our own beds!

Re-entering school. The first two days, students used to reconnect with friends and family, acculturate to being home, and rest up for the final week of the program. We gathered back at school the following morning and many expressed how strange and surreal it seemed to be with the same people in this culture, knowing that a week earlier we were all together in Chile.

We sat in a circle and students checked in and acknowledged that they were, and would continue to be, "fighting the tide" of old habits, friends, and cultural pulls. They also were reminded by Bryan that the experience was real and they would have the choice to decide on the life that they wished to continue to live. Students discussed topics such as the idea of "Pura Vida", the freedom to be without constraints, and the choice to live purely. Many students also spoke about the role of other people in their lives and how these people seemed either over or under invested in the journey they had made. Students spoke about how difficult it had been to try to explain or put into words what the trip had meant to them, and how it sometimes felt like it had been a dream.

Several students mentioned more positive connections with their families since the return. There were also disappointments in coming home. One young woman was despondent that her dad had not been there for the return ceremony. Others were let down when they realized that other people in their lives had not changed and were continuing unhealthy habits and addictions. Past addictions, drug use, and other relationships were discussed, and many contributed thoughts about how it seemed they had spent the time moving forward and experiencing life, while others around them were remaining stagnant. One student described how she was overwhelmed and felt guilty about how materialistic she had been and how little some of the people in Chile had. Since coming come, she had encountered difficulty sleeping and decided to rearrange her bed so that she could sleep looking away from her closet.

After students finished speaking, Bryan reminded them again that the experience did happen and set them up for their task ahead, the final presentation to the school and the community. He told them, "Everything you saw there is a mirror of you. There was nothing there that you didn't have within you. Stand up for who you are. Reflect back the beauty you've seen. One way to hold onto it is to give it back. Now is your opportunity to come back to this school, this community, to give it and create it."

Students split into groups and worked on creating a picture journal of the trip, making gifts of coin, leather, and lapis necklaces from Chile for each member of the school community, creating a photo presentation to be shown at the assembly, and finalizing their personal papers. I was able to help support students in each of these tasks and had the opportunity to have more one on one conversations with some of them about how they were making sense of the trip, what changes they were experiencing in

themselves, and what they might attribute it to. It was a gentle way for all of us to move back into the school community in small steps.

Presentation to community. The final official aspect of our 2006 immersion hexter to Chile was the presentation to an assembly of the entire faculty, staff, and student body. Many community members and donors who had helped to sponsor the journey and many of the students' families were also in attendance.

Several parents approached the staff after the presentation to thank us for our investment in their children. One parent told me, "We got our son back. He's once again his old self, happy, smiling, and fun to be around." I was flattered when three of the students who had finished their high school careers in Chile asked me to walk with them at "stairway graduation", a symbolic school ceremony to be held the next week.

This presentation gave these young people a chance to step in front of their peers, teachers, and community, and talk about what the trip had meant to them. It was an opportunity to share what they had accomplished and show their change and growth. As Bryan stated to the audience, "We ask you to let these students stand before you and shine. They took risks, they showed up, they showed how beautiful, how talented, and how gorgeous they are. I ask them to say this in front of you so that they can be held accountable for who they are now and for the changes they've made."

One by one, students came up to the podium and read their papers. One student was fully dressed in Chilean clothing and, having cut off all of her hair in Chile, seemed even more of a new person introducing herself to the crowd. Another student, not particularly strong in traditional academics, took it upon himself to memorize his speech entirely. All of them wore big smiles and bright eyes, and spoke from the hearts. During

their presentations, photos from the journey were displayed in the background, giving the audience a small glimpse of the landscape and activities that Chile had held for the group.

After the presentations, photo "thank-you" gifts were made to some of the major donors and sponsors of the trip and Bryan described the gifts that the students had brought back for the school community. "The coin is a peso – it has weight, it is real. The stone is lapis, only found in a few parts of the world, and in both areas it signifies healing and friendship. The leather it is on is also from Chile. These students put together these gifts and we give them to you so that you can also shine in their brightness, because it was significant and it was real."

In summary, the "what", or the events of the trip, consisted of the pre-trip components, the four week "school within a school" immersion at the alternative high school, the two weeks in Chile, and the return home events. Personal commitment was demonstrated by the students through fund raising, service work, and sobriety throughout each of these program aspects, as were academic, personal growth, group dynamics, and adventure / fitness components. The return ceremonies with families and the school community were the culminating events of the program allowing students to demonstrate what they had learned and how they were different.

"There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered." (Nelson Mandela)

A Cast of the Characters: The "Who"

Who were these students and what did they hope to gain from their participation in this program? Well, as can be said for all people, they were each unique and different, each bringing her/his own perspectives, histories, and experiences to the group. They came to the group with unique hopes and expectations of what they would gain through participation. And, as is also true for all groups of people, commonalities exist that may help to explain some common links that led them to choose to attend this alternative high school setting and ultimately become a part of this program. An attempt will be made to provide an overview of the participants in this immersion experience and some of their rationale for participation.

Participant Qualities and Descriptions

It is difficult to describe the "typical" student in this program. They possess varying degrees of intellectual, psychological, emotional, and social development and maturity. Each of these students has a unique story as I learned beginning with our first meeting and over the next several days and months. All share the common ground of being considered "alternative", not fitting the traditional mold and/or not being successful in traditional schools. All share their enrollment in this school of choice and, of course, participation in this immersion experience.

Family experience. Most of the students came from families that do not fit the traditional model of a two parent home, including divorces, remarriages, step- and half-siblings, and single-parents. A few of the students came from affluent families while other students were in need of financial support, or were attempting to support

themselves. Conflicted family situations seemed to be a common theme of stress in the students' lives, contributing to at least part of their "alternative" student status.

Substance use, abuse, and addiction. The majority of these students have histories of "using" (alcohol and other drugs) to varying degrees. A few of the students were smoking marijuana by the time they were twelve years of age, some with their parents, and quickly moved on to other drug use. Most of them use or abuse alcohol and several of them have tried other drugs including methamphetamines, acid, and cocaine.

One of the program requirements is that students are "clean and sober" for the trip. They know they can, and will, be subjected to urine analyses (UA's) at any point until departure. A "hot" UA would result in removal from the program and, therefore, school for the current term. In certain circumstances, serious negotiations were made with students about what they were doing to get sober, along with a strict contract to keep them on target. Issues of "use" came up throughout the program, during the pre-trip retreat, the school based aspect of the program, and while in South America. Particularly near the end of the immersion, several students were beset with the pressure of coming home and facing their prior use and addictions, as well as the social systems that supported their use in the past.

Personal qualities they bring to the program. An amazing array of talents and skills are possessed by group members including the writing of stories, songs, and poems, musical talent both vocal and instrumental, and artistic expression through drawing, painting, and sculpture. Aggregately, they bring assorted other personal characteristics including laughter, playfulness, challenging and thought provoking questions and comments, a willingness to accept others who are different from themselves, and a

genuine desire to learn and improve. A few are very open and direct, while others are timid and unsure of their contributions to the group. They also each have areas for growth such as softening a "tough girl" image, being less immature and dependent, letting go of judging others on appearance, caring about others as much as themselves,

In addition to, or in many cases in tandem with, substance abuse and addiction, many of these students struggle with mental health and emotional issues. These issues include anger management ranging from violence to passive aggression, depression, and previous suicide attempts. Several of the students are on one or multiple medications for mood and behavioral disorders.

Participant Hopes and Expectations

Most student participants share the commonality of joining this group with some type of anticipated outcomes, pre-conceived hopes, and expectations of themselves and the program. Usually, they self-select to be a part of this program based on conversations with either Bryan or other students who have previously attended an immersion hexter such as this.

Within the first week of the academic program, students were asked to journal about why they wanted to participate in this experience and what they hoped to gain from it. The responses included hopes for their personal growth, to learn new things, and to serve. Several students mentioned that their reasons for joining the group were based on friends who had been profoundly affected by previous trips.

Personal growth was described by students in many ways. They hoped for a chance to "recover their self", "be one with self and nature", and do some "soul searching". Several wanted to answer the questions of "Who am I?" and "What's next?"

so they could "move forward with confidence" in their lives. Participants hoped to "learn about the world and other cultures" and were looking forward to the opportunity to "travel", "see the world", and "get out of America".

Service was an expectation and program strength for several students. They looked forward to "helping others in a poorer country" and "giving back". The experiences of friends who had previously been a part of this trip influenced the decisions of some of the students to participate. The trip to Chile "changed his life" and "saved his life". "The way he talked about it" was "awe inspiring".

Expectations of the other members of the group included working together, helping others through service, and building new relationships within the group. Expectations of the leaders were not mentioned by the students in their papers, but based on conversations and observations, many of these students chose to participate because of their relationship with Bryan. Most of them had been in the entry class that he teaches and they had learned that he is an adult who cares and is committed to their health, wellness, and personal growth. They knew that he would challenge and push them, hold them to high expectations, give them boundaries that were safe, and love them.

In attempting to summarize the qualities and hopes of the participants of this program, it can be said that though they were each unique individuals with varied talents, interests, personalities, and levels of psychological, emotional, and social intelligence, they also shared some similarities. These include family struggles, substance abuse, and having not been successful in traditional school environments. They came to the program with hopes to answer some of the "big questions" in life, to serve, to learn about the

world, and to improve their relationships with others and their understandings of themselves.

The Plot – Critical Interactions of Programmatic and Participant Qualities: "The How"

Based on the perspectives of the participants, as well as my researcher's field notes, interviews, and observations, several programmatic qualities seemed to impact changes in participants. These included a strong program purpose and rationale and several important programmatic components with high expectations of students. These components include a program based academic, personal growth, and experiential immersion, and high quality facilitators and leaders.

Purpose and Rationale

Personal growth and development. "Traditional schools try to take everything and break it down into questions and answers – every question is supposed to have an answer. We took this and turned it upside down. The greatest questions are those that don't have answers, so we spend a lot of time looking at these questions: What is your purpose? What kind of man / woman do you want to be? How do you want your life to turn out? All these questions that don't have answers, and aren't asked in traditional school settings." A primary purpose of this program is to give young people in an alternative school setting an opportunity to look at themselves at a critical time period, the transition from adolescence to adulthood, and make some decisions about who they want to be while in an environment of support, encouragement, and challenge.

Rites of passage. This primary purpose of personal growth from adolescence to adulthood is served through the creation of what Bryan considers a "Rites of Passage" program. As he explains. "Rites of passage are missing in our culture; at the age of

sixteen you can drive, at eighteen you can go to war, and at 21 you can drink and you 'get it all', so there is no clear answer about when you are an adult in our culture. There is no clear ritual to define what a "functional adult" looks like. I wanted to develop a holistic ritual process that could serve this need. Kids leave high school and flounder. They need something to hold onto, a reference point to move towards and the motivation to continue growing into adulthood."

Several aspects of this experience served as a rite of passage for the young participants including: the separation from home and comfort; facing physical, mental, emotional, and social challenges; and the return ceremony – reintroducing themselves and giving back to their community through a presentation and gifts. Now they have something to offer.

Creating and implementing this program is not cheap, and the only way it has been possible is through community financial support. Part of this rite of passage is that is about more than the young people involved, our whole community is affected by the changes that result in them. Investing in their lives is an investment in the future, and portions of the community see value in it, as a long term investment in people who will soon become full, contributing community members. There is an "obligation", as Bryan describes it, "that the student will return as a greater person than left home" and he believes that financial support of the program through community members demonstrates the need for the program as a community measure.

Program Qualities

Three major programmatic components encompassed the framework for this journey. Each of these included high expectations of the students. In order to be a

participant in this program, students were challenged to be open and "ready" for a new experience and for change. They were asked to be ready and willing to invest in themselves with time, energy, education, monetary contributions and/or fundraising, and service work. Dedication and hard work was required and demonstrated through academic classes and commitment, attendance contracts, fundraising efforts, pre-trip meetings, and teamwork with parents and peers. Sobriety was a clear expectation, and students were dropped from the program for not meeting this standard. A willingness to take appropriate risks and deeply examine their struggles and successes in order to learn and grow needed to be expressed and demonstrated. An important aspect of this program was the element of choice, these students chose to make a commitment to, and an investment in, themselves. As stated by one student in a return interview, "Nobody can make you learn anything. You have to do it willingly. You have to go with some sort of thought process that you're going to get something out of it."

Holding students to high standards encompassed the three integrated legs of the program which led to positive outcomes. These three components include an academic grounding (cognitive), personal growth work (affective and psycho-social), and experiential (physical) immersion. Each of these will be discussed further below.

Academic. The academic portion of this program was purposeful, with the intention of being directly applicable during the immersion experience. Specifically, the language acquisition and the understanding of Chilean culture, geography, history, and political climate, though taught in fairly traditional ways, were completely relevant to help students acquire a knowledge base that was utilized in the near future. Additionally, students were given the opportunity to investigate additional topics around a personal

passion and directly apply this newly gained understanding by teaching / presenting it to their peers as well as a junior high or elementary class. This also allowed them to become "experts in the field" with their group of peers while in Chile. Probably the most important academic aspect was the potential to help the students see learning as an important aspect of growth, not just a means to a short-term end (i.e. a grade) but as a means to a better life, with the ultimate goal of becoming life long learners.

Social, emotional, and spiritual. An important quality of adulthood is the ability to realize one's interconnectedness with the world. This experience required participants to be socially engaged in classes, discussions, and circles, as well as interacting and living together on a daily basis for the majority of the six week experience. Additionally, students were asked to step out of their cultural comfort zones by interacting with people in another country and language.

As mentioned earlier, the group Circles were an important, almost daily aspect of the entire program. Circles allowed students to express emotions, think about their personal and emotional growth, and also be a part of the process of the personal growth work of others. Many other programs focus mainly on cognitive and experiential growth, and do not provide an intentional opportunity for students to develop emotionally through reflection and communication of their experience.

Additionally, students in this program were asked to complete service hours as a prerequisite and as an aspect of program completion. This was purposeful for them to begin to recognize that they have something meaningful to give and contribute to others, and that there is "something larger than yourself out there". Service was also viewed as

an aspect of personal growth by several students, who quoted Gandhi by saying, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

Experiential. The opportunity to leave home, comfort, and culture, and experience life in an entirely different culture, language, and daily schedule is intended to "free kids from their old frameworks" and to "wash them" or help them to realize that "you're done with whatever you've done before". About three days into the immersion experience, about the time it took to arrive at our first service project, students could really live in this new experience, trying on new roles and letting go of patterns and habits that may not be serving them. A critical aspect to the success of this program is that it is experiential in nature, allowing students to completely break out of their current paradigms of living and thinking and to "jump in and learn skills, take appropriate risks, and deal with their fears".

"It's a lot different when you're there and not just looking at pictures in a book." Students were given the opportunity to experience learning through their own senses and connect it to a knowledge base, experience travel holistically, and experience personal growth through physical, mental, and emotional challenges that they committed to personally.

In attempting to describe which aspects of the program allowed students to change and grow, several of them talked about this experiential aspect. Describing the experience of *going* to another country, to "see it first hand", allowed for "getting away and moving", and led them to becoming "unstuck" in other aspects of their lives.

Having "no distractions or struggles from home", opportunities for "adventures" and "being away", and being "exposed to a different culture" helped these students to see

their lives differently, become "less materialistic", experience authenticity in themselves ("No bull, no facades, no makeup – just me"), and experience "happiness". As one student described upon the return from the experience, "My life was at a halt one year ago, and I have just recently started to move. I am now a wheel with a steady momentum."

Interacting with environment is another critical experiential aspect of this program. As Bryan told the students, "the best mirror is the outdoors, it will reflect back exactly what you give, and is not distorted by another person's interpretations. If you need to look, take a glimpse of the water and see the real reflection of you." Watching the smiles, energy, and play that interacting with the environment brought to the faces, minds, and spirits of these young people, it is difficult to deny the power of the outdoors in helping them come back to their true selves.

The three programmatic components of academic, personal growth, and experiential development created a program which allowed for the holistic development of participants. High expectations and a clear and purposeful program rationale built an environment which allowed students to step beyond where they had been and to see their selves and their world differently.

"We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them."

(Albert Einstein)

High Quality Facilitators and Leaders

Caring adults. Most of the prominent research in resiliency points to the significance of having caring adults in the lives of young people who possess risk factors, and this is a quality that certainly contributed to the positive outcomes of this program. The presence of five adults, who genuinely loved and cared for the success of these young people, was a crucial factor in the success of this venture. The adults established a real connection to, and bonding with, the students.

Role modeling. As students were being challenged to let go of personal habits, patterns and social networks, it was important that they also had something in mind that they were moving towards. In the absence of that new piece of knowledge, they might either stay stuck, or more likely, fall back into the places where they were. For at least the time of the program, students were given the opportunity to see adults who may have been functioning differently from those adults in their home lives, giving opportunities to make decisions about how they wanted to be during these critical moments.

Helping to model healthy support networks, high quality adult facilitators offered these young people a network that could help support the changes they were experimenting with and the people they were becoming, rather than the people they had been. Near the end of the trip, when students were facing the culture shock of returning home to "fight the tide" against people who might want them back where they were and who might not want or know how to support them in their new choice, they were told not to forget that they had a "group of people here" who would serve as those support systems. "You can call on us."

The leaders of this trip had varying degrees of experience and direct time spent with individual students, giving us different perspectives and fresh opportunities for students to "reestablish their identity" and build rapport with an adult. There were five adults working with seventeen students during the international component of the program, an unheard of ratio in traditional schools or even in most adventure education programs. This ratio provided students greater chances of connecting with at least one adult who they may have identified with or seen something that could be provided from that particular adult's perspective. According to Bryan, people who are hurting, looking for something, or wanting to change, often will start to gravitate towards something they want and see in someone else. The healthy supportive adults who were available and had good information to give them, provided a greater likelihood that a young person would find and connect with someone who could "provide the information that they needed to recover to their next best place".

Safe environment and boundaries. The importance of healthy adult guides has several impacts. One, as Bryan explained, is that young people like these are often "in a place of fear and need reference points, or something to recover to". They also need healthy boundaries to be established by adults in their lives, something that many of these students did not have at home. The adult guides were people who had the courage and understanding to tell them, "No, you can't do that!", and "Yes, I love you." "No, you can't talk that way, and yes, I'll still care for you." Effective adult leaders worked to create an environment during the program where students felt safe and comfortable to do the "work" of personal growth. Several students, at one time or another, stayed up late at night, walked during the day, or sat along a river bank to speak with one or more of the

leaders about growth topics that were unique to them, demonstrating their trust and connection to the leaders.

Leaders could not force change for these students. We could only create an environment where students felt safe to explore who they were and who they wanted to become. By setting limits and boundaries, we also were able to guide them safely and give them information about what was and was not appropriate. Many of these students did not come from home environments that set and enforced clear, consistent, and fair restrictions. This was an opportunity for them to experience appropriate boundaries set by caring adults who provided clear explanations.

Summary of Programmatic Qualities that Led to Student Outcomes

Overall, a combination of inside and outside forces helped students in transition to make the changes in their lives to move toward a successful beginning of adulthood. This particular immersion experience led to many growth and change opportunities that will be discussed further in the next section. The personal and interpersonal growth that occurred seems to be a part of many factors. The complete immersion of these young people in multiple aspects of this program created an environment for personal growth and learning to be accomplished.

The program qualities including Circle, service work, academic, and adventure activities throughout the pre-trip, school, international, and re-entry components created a holistic and integrated system for learning and growth. The students who participated brought their own experiences from their "alternative" backgrounds, including differences in family networks, substance use and abuse, skills and talents, and hopes and expectations for the program paired with a commitment to themselves and a willingness

and openness to learn and grow in a new experience. The program itself provided high expectations of these students, a rationale to create an opportunity for students to transition into adulthood, and a foundation of academic, social, emotional, and experiential elements. Finally, the program leaders helped to pull all of these elements together in order to successfully manage the dynamics of the group, as well as the academic, financial, and various travel logistics of such an enormous endeavor. The leaders also had to utilize their skills and experience in order to serve as healthy, caring adult role models who could guide these students through this process.

The Finale - Inward, Outward, Upward!: "The Lessons Learned"

Seventeen young adults step up to the microphone, one at a time, to reintroduce themselves to their school and community which includes peers, teachers, family members, and others who have supported them through this journey. They each are given the opportunity to talk about what they learned, how they changed, and who they have become through their participation in this immersion experience of personal growth. This is part of the final stage of what for them has become a "Rite of Passage".

In defining student changes that occurred through participation in this program, early attempts were made to categorize the outcomes as either intrapersonal, affecting the person's physical, emotional, and mental well being, or interpersonal, affecting the relationships and interactions of the participant. As analysis continued this became too simplistic of a model as many of the program outcomes seemed to transcend either of these categories, moving beyond these aspects of the self. Students described changes in themselves that affected their whole beings, including intrapersonal and interpersonal components. These holistic changes have been labeled "transformational" in that they

gave the student an opportunity to move past the confines of their previous perspectives and experiences. Whether seen as small shifts, or giant leaps, these new insights had the effect of giving students an opportunity to see their lives and their selves differently than they had before participation in the experience.

The following discussion will include some of the changes noted in the students, based on the aforementioned categories of intrapersonal (inward), interpersonal (outward), and transformational (upward) based on interviews and conversations with students, their return presentations, journal summaries, and researcher observations.

Changing Inward

Developmentally, people generally move through stages of independence and intrapersonal growth in order to arrive at stages of healthy interdependence and holistic, or synergistic, dimensions of change. I will attempt to describe some of the intrapersonal changes noted in students through the categories of physical, mental, and emotional indicators that most likely signified deeper changes in students.

Physical indicators of change. Physical changes and differences in outward appearance were varied. Some changes were subtle, and only noticeable in comparing longer term impressions of these students with their previous appearances. These subtle yet profound changes included a sparkle in an eye, more frequent smiles and laughter, and a playful spirit that the fresh air, sunshine, and exercise seemed to bring on. These changes, though difficult to describe and impossible to quantify, seemed to signal emotional and mental changes underneath. Perhaps, the emotional and mental changes contributed to the physical changes. Most likely, all of these factors enhanced the others, creating a spiraling, compounding set of positive growth and change. There were also

some obvious physical changes that seemed to be less subtle, more drastic, and therefore easier to describe.

One student decided to cut off most of her hair in Chile, "to get rid of what was not pure and the memories of it", including drugs and arguments. She had gone through several style phases with her hair since the onset of adolescence, including colors ranging from deep blue to magenta. Cutting it all within an inch of her scalp symbolized for her a "chance to start over, clean, healthy, and pure".

In another symbolic step of taking a risk and making a change in physical appearance, a young woman, usually wearing thick face and eye make-up, showed up for our service project one morning in Chile with her face washed clean. She looked so clear and fresh, and continually received compliments throughout the day on her natural beauty. She struggled to accept the positive feedback, which brought on bouts of tears, signaling her own levels of self-acceptance and worth based on her definition of beauty. She remained cosmetic free for the remainder of the international experience and her confidence seemed to grow with each passing day.

A young female student, who is about five foot two inches in stature and had been struggling with depression, often walked with her head down, almost appearing to be hiding from notice. She did not contribute much to conversations and had a "guard" about her, which seemed effective in keeping people away. She often had a facial expression that seemed negative, judgmental, and unapproachable. Sadly, this outward appearance kept other people, and herself, from seeing her brilliance and potential,as evidenced by her writing, poetry, and articulate conversational abilities. By the end of the trip she seemed to walk taller and spoke with more confidence and less negativity. She

described a turning point on the trip for her on one of our first hikes in Chile. She remembered walking through the wilderness surrounded by nature and beauty, drastic mountains, a glacier, and the waterfalls coming off of it. She described how she "looked up and felt about five feet seven". About three months after the trip, I was hiking on one of the trails that I had introduced the students to before the trip. This same young woman "hated hiking" and was extremely passive aggressive about this particular trail. I encountered her, out in the open space, walking alone, with a spring in her step and a smile on her face. She was open, personable, and exuded the best qualities of her former self.

Several students described how the trip helped them to become more active and more "involved in living". One young man admitted that he had been very lazy and was now looking forward to getting involved in athletics and maintaining his fitness. Overweight and out of shape when the program began, he was determined not to let his level of fitness hold him back from the experiences of the program. Six months after our return from Chile, this student's entire physical presentation is different. Not only does he smile more, look up, and make eye contact in conversations, he has also lost about 50 pounds and is proud of his fitness and health.

Other students became involved in nature, the beauty of the wilderness, and the fun in adventure activities such as kayaking and rafting. They found the motivation to have fun away from drugs with "new motivation and realizations" provided by a "clear mind and new eyes". A young male student who had been struggling with his addiction to marijuana remembered the success of getting his kayak roll after practicing for hours and the pride he felt in being the only one in the group who was successful in that endeavor.

His physical dedication and determination were assets to him that were limited by his prior habits. This student dedicated his summer following our return from Chile to be trained as a rafting guide.

When asked what she would like to leave behind in Chile, one young woman picked a material item that represented a physical change to her, the leather jacket that she wore as "the skin that wouldn't come off." She stated that "it kept things from getting in and it kept things from getting out. It kept me hidden." This student struggled with self-confidence in her physical beauty and capability and realized the jacket was a representation of how she was limiting herself. "I decided I was going to come home and be the strong, capable, beautiful person that I always have been underneath the tainted black object. I decided I was going to come home to bloom into the person that I have always truly been but have never allowed myself to be. Since I've been home I have grown to realize the beauty I have found in the world and am beginning to see the beauty I have found in myself."

Mental indicators of change. More difficult to define, some of the intrapersonal growth in students represented changes in their mental models and perceptions of themselves and their world. A majority of these students had not been academically successful in traditional school environments and struggled with understanding the importance and significance of education. The mental development in students through this program seemed to reflect a new maturity and new perceptions about academics as well as their own mental development.

One academic change was a mental commitment to education that seemed to come from this program. Described as an "awakening", many of these students were

better able to understand and appreciate the longer term investment and values of education. They were able to see education as a means to an end, a point to travel through in order to get somewhere else, an example of non-immediate gratification that would have longer lasting implications. One student described this as an opportunity to "gain real wisdom" through a "different state of mind and outlook on life", and to appreciate "meaningful reflection" and the "power of the mind". Through the experiential nature of the program, students "gained knowledge that they couldn't have learned at a desk".

New perspectives and mental models of self seemed to develop through the course of the program as well. Students described the development of an internal locus of control, allowing them to realize they were responsible for their lives and their choices, and that they had the ability to develop their own sense of happiness and appreciation for the world. "Letting go of control" over others and being "okay, not knowing" what the future held for them were other indicators of mental maturity development. This mental maturity development was also described by students as moving past negativity and opening their minds to positive growth and learning.

Emotional indicators of change. How students were affected emotionally through this process can be described through looking at where students started and what they moved toward as they changed. Emotions such as fear, loneliness, hopelessness, hurt, and resentment seemed to limit and provide difficulties for many of the students as they came into the program. As they looked at how they were changing and described who they were becoming, a different emotional base was established. They described gaining a new sense of passion and inner strength, and the ability to move forward with confidence into their future.

Some of the more productive emotional states that were described included the development of a sense of pride and hope, moving from loneliness to contentment, and developing happiness. A young woman who often seemed the least mature in the group described the feeling of being responsible instead of immature. Another described her inner sense of passion and strength and that it was now developing from a love for herself instead of out of fear and defending herself against others.

Just "feeling", being able to identify and express emotions, was the starting point for a couple of the students. They had been "shut down" emotionally, either due to substance abuse, family histories, or both, and it felt like a major step for them to just express basic emotions such as anger, sadness, or love. Emotions had been tied to obligations or expectations from others. As one young man said, "now I know that I can give my love freely and the only obligation is to receive the love that is given back".

Happiness was an emotion that many of these students did not often experience, and one over which they felt no control. A couple of the students were able to describe how before the immersion experience happiness had been defined by them through their material possessions and their accomplishments. They were able to evolve their definition of happiness into something deeper, more emotional, and less materialistic. "I thought about it when I was down there, because some of the people in the rural areas, like I would look at their clothes, and you could just tell, like things they had had for a long time, but the looks on their faces weren't like 'I'm so upset because I don't have this and I don't have this', they were just generally happy. I thought about it a lot down there."

Two young women talked about pain and hurts that had been inflicted upon them by their families. They struggled to understand how they could make peace with that and move on in their lives. So many of these students had difficult pasts – the majority had dealt with or were currently dealing with drug use, abuse and addiction; some with family violence; most with split homes.

Forgiving others in order to move forward personally was a sign of emotional development for many of the students. Though they struggled with the concept, many were finally able to grasp that forgiving did not necessarily mean forgetting and that by letting go of old hurts, they were able to open themselves up to new growth and positive emotions. As one student expressed, "I've always been really good at bottling up my hurts and negative emotions and all that does is give me an extra weight to carry around, but I've learned to let go and forgive. By forgiving who has hurt me, I'm not saying it's okay, but that I'm not going to carry it around with me. By getting rid of the hurt I can make more room for love in my life."

The newfound ability to feel and express emotions such as love, happiness, and forgiveness allowed students to become more empowered and have a sense of personal control over their lives, they spoke of moving forward and creating what the next phase would hold. The ability to practice on a daily basis, in Circles and in less formal conversations gave them the experience of emotional growth and maturity. Being encouraged to express love and forgiveness in Chile gave them the language and confidence to express it then to a significant person in their life upon returning home.

Changing Outward

"Changing Outward" describes how the internal shifts and insights in students led to interpersonal growth and development, impacting their social networks and improving relationships with others in their lives. Students were able to move from a place of feeling dependent on others, through the need to establish independence, and towards an appreciation and understanding of the mutually beneficial state of interdependence. This interdependence was defined by several of the students as becoming more helpful, caring, and selfless, and finding a balance between helping others and helping oneself. Another student made the connection that if he became more loving and respectful, it was likely he would become more loved and respected. "I learned to give what I want back." A young woman passionately spoke about how she hoped to "shine the light for others" so they could see the power and possibility in their own lives. She hoped to let her "soul dance out loud and let others see how wonderful it feels".

These students were able to experience and describe the importance of getting past looking at their lives as isolated from the lives of others. "To be full of life and love, I can't be full of myself", said one student. Another explained, "I want to be a helping, caring person and learn to put other people's needs before mind, because nothing productive comes out of caring only for yourself."

The primary, inner circle, relationships of adolescence, namely with parents and family members, seemed to be where the most profound changes were felt. Several students were able to describe a new sense of acceptance and tolerance of, as well as a deeper connection to, family members. The experience of service helped one student connect with her mother, "I understand my mom on a whole new level because my mom

is always giving people her time, and I really never understood that before". Speaking of the impact of the reconnection ceremony with parents, another student explained, "Some of us may not have ever shared thoughts with people we have loved before. Being able to communicate how you feel and what you want, or what you're going to do with your life." Several students expressed a newfound closeness to, and appreciation of, their parents and family members after having had this time and experience apart from them and the opportunity to learn more about themselves.

Many other changes were noticed in and by students that have the potential to positively impact relationships in their lives. One student spoke about how his interactions with others had improved and how he was learning to be non-judgmental, making more informed decisions using information from his head and heart as opposed to previous methods of making judgments based on shallow first impressions. Others spoke of how they want to be more vulnerable in relationships, by allowing people in rather than protecting themselves out of fear, giving and receiving love more freely, building new, and strengthening old, relationships, and being more willing to end negative relationships to make room for new positive ones. A student explained how, through the trip, she became "aware of [her] tendency to push people away and hide behind big vocabulary". From her awareness came her commitment to start being more vulnerable and willing to make mistakes.

Again, forgiveness, was mentioned; the ability to take responsibility for one's own actions and accept others for who they are, letting go of mistakes, and not holding grudges. "Patience to me, means that I listen before speaking and allow time for others. It also means getting past instant gratification, which will take me far in life. Accepting

people for who they are and not trying to change them also plays into patience, which goes into the biggest lesson I have learned; I can forgive. I can take the responsibility for myself to have the patience and acceptance for the people that I love the most and forgive them also."

Changing Upward...Experiential Transformations!

Most changes are not too easily categorized and separated. Encompassing multiple aspects of being, these changes are difficult to define and impossible to quantify. They include growth, maturity, and subtle transformations. Students described such things as the impact of "living in the moment" and how the experience they gained would give them the confidence to travel in the future. Several described the program as a "beginning" to the next phase of their life, feeling relieved to be able to put some parts of their pasts behind them, and not only new insights into themselves, but the ability to recognize and honor parts of themselves that were integral to who they always have been. "What I got out of the trip is simple, a better understanding of many things, a greater appreciation of all things, and it brought out many things I think I've had in me all along."

"Changing Upward" helps to define the holistic changes described by students; a combination of intrapersonal and interpersonal growth and learning, leading to positive changes in overall ways of perceiving and living. Many of these upward changes were attributed by the students to their participation in this international immersion experience. As some of these areas of growth and learning seem to be complete paradigmatic shifts in ways of thinking, living, and interacting I have termed them "*Experiential Transformations*", defined as holistic, beneficial personal and interpersonal changes and

differences attributed to participation in an event or series of events. These transformations have the potential to not only help people grow through their life struggles, but reach a state of *transcendence* described by a student as "being changed forever". "This trip was an awakening!"

Self awareness and clarity. "Throughout the course of these 2 weeks I was able to take a real look at my self for who I really am. What I mean by this is that I was not influenced by my family, friends, or drugs and alcohol. I was fully myself. Having clarity like what I experienced is hard to come by, but when it does come by, huge developments in growth are often seen." New self awareness and insight allowed students to gain maturity, perspective, and vision for their futures as well as to know and value their authentic selves. Mentioned was an ability to let go of control and establish a better sense of self-clarity, of "who I want to be and what I want to do." Several mentioned a desire to stay "centered and balanced", keeping a "strong mind, body, and soul". Being away and challenged to explore the physical, emotional, and social aspects of themselves was not always easy but seemed to pay off in personal growth as students found "new and improved characteristics within". "It felt like I grew two years in two weeks."

Sobriety. Though sobriety was a known requirement for participation in this program, until I started working with the students I was not aware of the grasp that drugs had on their lives and how important sobriety was becoming for some of them. A few examples stand out clearly in my mind of the changes that becoming sober through participation in this program signified for these students.

Near the end of the Chile experience I noticed that one young, usually bright, smiling, student was pretty straight faced, sad, and edgy. When I asked her about it, she

told me she was bothered by a bad dream she had awoken from the night before. In it, her boyfriend was tweaking (using acid) and cheating on her. The only two things that felt stable in her life right now were this relationship and sobriety. Her dream represented losing both of these, and she was struggling with the fear of what going home might hold for her.

Another student had smoked pot with his parents since he was ten. Now, at the age of eighteen, he wanted to stay clean. He was able to use the "sobriety" requirement of this program to Chile to keep him from using for several months. As the trip end drew nearer, I noticed his whole personality and presence go more "flat". He was neither as engaged nor as energetic about the experience or the group. He admitted that he had been thinking and dreaming about getting high almost every night. He was not sure how he would maintain his sobriety faced with his old patterns, friends, and family upon his return.

His return presentation to the community spoke to the holistic change that quitting pot presented to him. "On the Chile trip, I had a clear mind and saw things with new eyes and I liked it. I found a new, fun time away from drugs and I will never forget my experiences. I now know I finally found the motivation to put down the pipe and walk away forever. I have had to leave a lot of things and people in my life behind me and still have a lot of work to do toward that, but I know it is possible now. I thought hard for two weeks and filled my head, making it hurt, with thoughts. The time with a clear mind helped me realize a lot. There are also many things the circles made me ponder and realize. This is the new beginning to my life and a relieving end to the old. I feel the trip was one of the best things that has ever happened to me. It has changed my life forever."

Maturity and self confidence. "For me this trip was not about learning and acquiring these new things, but realizing they were inside of me all along." Several students mentioned that the trip gave them the confidence to trust themselves and that they have what they need to be successful within them already. The trip allowed them to uncover strengths and develop skills. A new sense of gratitude and appreciation for life, an understanding of the concepts of choice and responsibility and a genuine desire to "live life to my fullest potential" were other described changes that pointed to a greater sense of maturity upon return from the program. Additionally, an understanding that "true happiness is not about stuff" pointed to a new mature view of the world for several of the students. "I'd always identified myself through my accomplishments and possessions – those are what I always thought set me apart from others. But being immersed in a foreign culture, naked of all those things that kept me secure, helped me realize that they do not define me." Another student similarly stated, "With so many examples of humbleness, unselfishness, hospitality, and kindness surrounding me for two weeks, I couldn't help but realize these things over and over again. In the big picture of things, it's not about me. And I've never been more grateful for the people or anything I've ever owned in my life."

Growth through discomfort. "One thing I learned while I was in Chile was that many times in life we have to be put in uncomfortable positions in order to learn and grow." Though an immersion program including two weeks spent in Chile, South America may sound full of only fun and excitement, there are certainly many aspects of international travel which can lead to anguish, frustration, tears, and conflict. Extended amounts of time with the same people creates interesting group dynamics and challenging

personal growth work, added to immersion in a different language, culture, and society, as well as being away from home, family, friends, and usual schedules much stress and discomfort arose throughout the two weeks abroad.

The fields of experiential and adventure education often teach the concept of the "comfort zone" and the importance of growth through stretching one's limits and pushing out of one's comfort zone. This was an awareness that was gained by many of the students upon reflection. "People tend to get stuck in the patterns of their daily life, in which we all find comfort. For me my trip to Chile gave me a chance to break away from this sequence of comfort. I was able to discover new and beautiful things in this world. I strongly believe that international travel is one of the best ways to gain wisdom."

One of the most profound metaphors to describe this growth through discomfort came in a journal entry that a student gave to me to read as we prepared for the international departure.

> "The water in my new shower gets really hot, extremely quickly, But for some reason, doesn't stay hot long enough for me to sit in the shower for a decent amount of "thinking" time. Like at my mom's house. So when I try to sit and find the stars in my mind, my journey is interrupted by the coldness that is growing in the water. The coldness in the water is comparable to the coldness that I feel lately around many things. It's really frustrating, because once you've found that water temperature that you like and feel is balanced and not quite, but close to perfect, the water turns cold. Conveniently or inconveniently viewed... as the situation may vary. It could be that the coldness is viewed as inconvenient because you were comfortable and warm and there were no plans made around moving out of that warm or not for yet awhile. Or maybe, it is in fact convenient because it was time to stop sitting in the comfort, in the safe warmth, and get up and do something. Something better, something different. And if that something turns out to be a negative something, at least you know that there will be more hot water in an hour or so."

Transition from teen to adult. A student who repeated this immersion program reflected on why he was returning to the program, "Last year I had my eighteenth

birthday down there and felt like I was changed into a man. This past year I have done some growing and I am a completely different person than I was last year. I am excited to go back in such a different mental state." A reflection from another student after the trip mentioned this transition as well, "My mind, body, soul, and spirit feel the most balanced and centered that they ever have. This balance will help me with the transition from a teenager to an adult healthfully; the balance of gaining positive and ending negative relationships at the same time; the balance of being close to friends and family, but being able to move away and start a new life; the balance of confronting problems and dealing with them to forgive, and most of all I have to balance a pure life. PURA VIDA!"

Pura Vida. The term "Pura Vida" (the literal translation is "Pure Life", but the meaning can be much more profound) is a common Latin American expression that the students picked up from one of the raft guides. It became the "saying of the day" after one of the river excursions, and seemed to translate into a slogan for the trip. Several students connected to the idea of living a "pure life" whether that signified pureness from substances, from drama, and/or from other things that were keeping them from living the life they wanted to live. Many mentioned it as a part of their presentation to the community. As explained by a female participant, "The words 'Pura Vida' were gratefully shed to my ears meaning a pure life, pure beauty and joy. I realized this is what life is all about, and how I want to live it. I now live with a clean soul and the ability to give everything my full passion. It is everywhere, not just in Chile. Pure life is what you make of it. Not drugs, not alcohol, but laughing, and being able to stand on your feet and not know exactly where you are going, but being okay with that." In an interesting parallel to "rites of passage" ceremonies in other cultures, a few students actually had this

phrase tattooed on their bodies upon their return home as a means of solidifying the journey and the commitments they had made to themselves through the process.

Growth through the journey.. The final circle in Chile was framed as an extremely important reflective opportunity to help students describe and commit to the changes they had made in themselves and the person they wanted to return as. As Bryan told the students, "You can't be here without finding stuff. You have to name it in order to bring it home. How will you be different?" Each student was asked to talk about what they would leave behind and what they would take with them.

A synopsis of these themes also helps to describe the overall changes and transformations that these students made. Some of what they were "leaving behind" included: excuses, drama, fear of loving and being loved, old patterns, putting only others first, worry, letting self down, being selfish, a jacket – worn as a "second skin" representing protection, fear, ignorance, childishness, complaining, laziness, control of things, closed mindedness to parents, old mind frame, addictions, negativity, and pushing people away. A summary of what they hoped to remember and take with them from Chile included: a relaxed and open mind, opened eyes, openness to beauty, being in the moment, thoughtfulness, becoming that strong capable person, appreciation, understanding, patience, loving, helping, caring, new beliefs, importance of relationships, overall appreciation, understanding of different cultures, know people more, skills towards interdependence, love, responsibility, passion, gratitude, motivation to work and begin anew, humility, and tolerance.

A Conceptual Framework for Experiential Transformations

This final section of the results will summarize the lessons learned and help to provide a conceptual framework of the study to help explain how this program worked to create what I have termed experiential transformations. Rather than viewing the progression as linear, i.e. intrapersonal changes led to interpersonal changes which led to transformational changes, I see the process as more interwoven and organic. Intrapersonal and interpersonal changes preceded one another at various times and circumstances and sometimes they occurred simultaneously. The interplay of the multiple components of the program helped bring students into situations which challenged them to grow inward, outward, and upward. For some students these shifts were miniscule, for others they were dramatic, but each of them grew through their participation.

I came into this study with my own experiences of having been profoundly affected by several international experiences, and excited to learn more about how such programs may lead to lasting impacts. Through analyzing the data from this research undertaking, I believe an important aspect that led to profound changes in the participants of this program was the interplay between the cognitive, emotional, and physical components of almost all of the aspects of the program. The pre-trip, high school, and international aspects of the experience included academic, personal growth, and adventure activities. The participants had expectations of learning and growth in all of these areas and came to the program with open minds, commitment to sobriety, and committing to full participation cognitively, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. The adult facilitators also led the participants in a holistic manner serving as teachers, counselors, and providing students with unconditional positive regard, a safe environment

for growth and learning, healthy role modeling, commitment to the students, and an understanding of the processes and developmental stages involved.

This framework can be represented by a Venn diagram of three circles (see Figure 1). One circle represents the academic and cognitive aspects of growth and learning that are provided by traditional schools and educational frameworks. This growth was provided in the program through classes and instruction in Chilean government, politics, geography, and biology. Students also studied the Spanish language in a classroom setting as well as being given the opportunity to utilize and practice speaking while in Chile. Additionally, each student selected a topic of interest for an independent study and became the "experts" for that area. All of these academic components were directly applicable and relevant giving the students the opportunity to experience education as not just a means to a grade, but as an opportunity for life long learning and holistic development.

A second circle in the Venn diagram represents the emotional, spiritual, and social components of learning and personal growth. Equally important to their academic growth, program participants were continually challenged to identify and express their emotions in the circles, think, and talk about their lives, families, identities, struggles, and success. Among other feelings, students learned and practiced expressing love and forgiveness which served to bridge many of them to healthier emotional states. Additionally, students were asked to contribute to the lives of others. Service work gave them opportunities for meaningful contributions and connections to the world and other people beyond themselves and their prior circles of influence. Through participation in this program, students also developed interpersonally as they socially engaged with peers

in class discussions, circles, travel, and service projects. Intrapersonal and interpersonal growth is represented by this area of development and learning.

The third circle of the diagram represents experiential, physical growth and development. An obvious example of this would be the physical development gained through the fitness components of classes including hikes and visits to a fitness club. Additionally though, students were able to experience new adventures such as ropes courses, kayaking, rafting, horseback riding. They worked physically at fundraisers (washing cars) and service projects (painting a church) and were given opportunities to experience new roles of leadership and skill attainment through this work. Students saw Chile and their topics of academic learning with their own eyes, walked on glaciers and through forests, spoke the language with native speakers and experienced with their own senses what otherwise might have only been partially taught through lectures and text books. Program participants physically left their comfort zones of home and familiarity in order to expand their bodies and senses fully in a new environment.

Each of these circles of learning and growth have well founded histories of practice in academia, counseling / therapy, and physical development. The interplay of them is where, I believe, their power is intensified exponentially. Any two of these three fields can overlap to create even more profound and specific areas of learning. For example, educational and emotional-social-spiritual learning creates the field of psycho-education, typically academically based with personal growth outcomes through the study of psychological topics. Academic and experiential fields give us the realms of experiential, outdoor, and adventure education. Emotional-social-spiritual development

paired with physical-experiential learning has formed fields of adventure therapy that are producing results in myriad forms.

Not well founded in the literature is the interplay of all three of these fields. I believe this program did just that, combining knowledge, skills, pedagogy and practice from the three aforementioned "overlap" fields. Psycho-educational, adventure-therapy, and adventure-education fields all comprised the six-week experiential and international immersion program that was participated in by this particular group of adolescents. My supposition is that the interaction of these areas of growth and development is what gave the program the power to provide opportunities of inward, outward, and upward growth for the students involved.

I have attempted to answer my research questions through detailed description and analysis of the essence of the lived experience, significant aspects of the program that impacted students, qualities of the students and their hopes and expectations, qualities of the program and leaders that impacted change, and the actual changes, growth, and insights that occurred through participation in this program. I have also provided a description of a possible conceptual framework that encompasses the findings of this study, and the aspects of the program that allowed it to be significant for the students involved. The holistic interplay of multiple dimensions of learning and growth helped to create an environment where experiential transformations could occur. The honoring of multiple forms and modalities of learning allowed students to reach more of their personal potential through this experience.

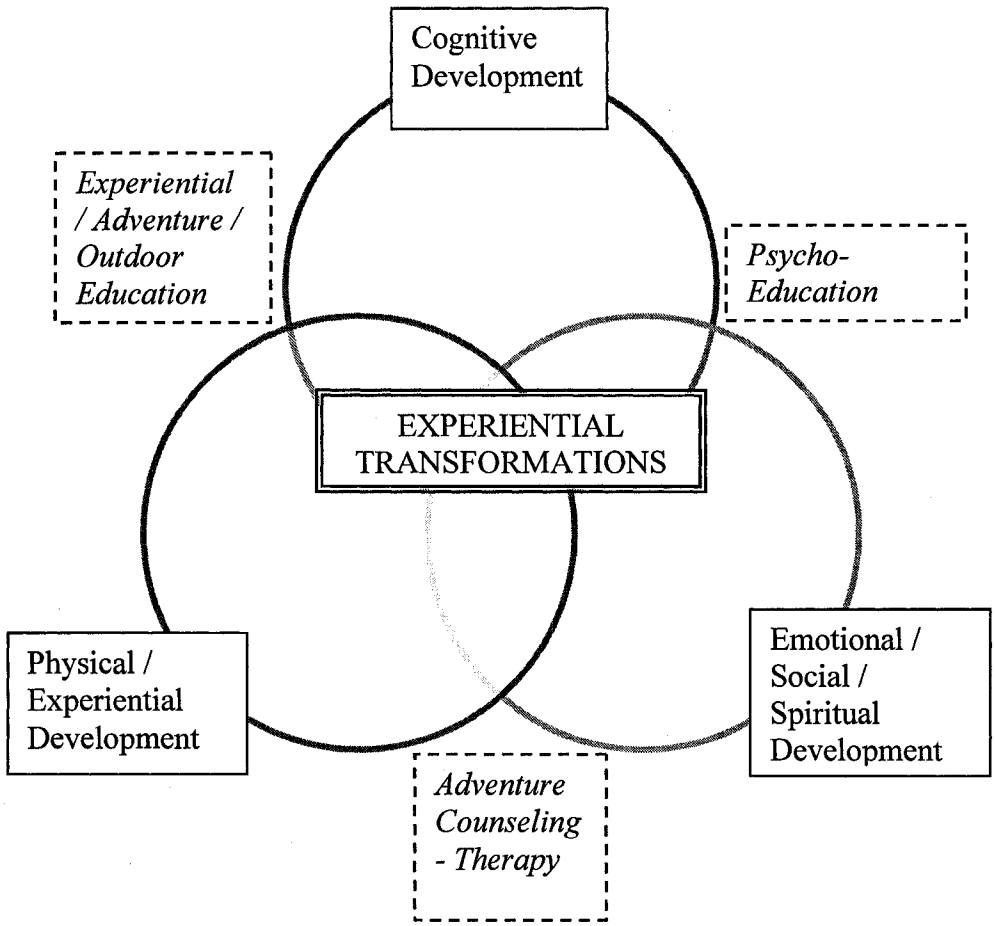
Though not a longitudinal study intended to discover the lasting qualities of these changes, it appears from this data that this program provided students with the

opportunities to experience at least short-term changes that could serve as a reference experience which students may one day draw upon and repeat. The final chapter will provide a summary of the study, revisit the major findings, relate this research to the findings in the literature, and discuss the implications and significance of this project.

"Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened." (Dr. Seuss)

Figure 1.

Interaction of fields of growth and development that can lead to "Experiential Transformations".



CHAPTER FIVE: THE LESSONS LEARNED

"The journey not the arrival matters." (Michel de Montaigne)

This has been the story of a group of seventeen late-adolescents who participated in a six week experiential immersion program through their alternative high school. The program, set up to serve as a rite of passage to assist these students in their transition toward adulthood, allowed them to participate in personal growth work, adventure travel, language and cultural immersion, and service to others. The full experience consisted of pre- trip efforts, four weeks of domestic "school within a school" immersion preparation, two weeks immersion in Chile, South America, and reintegration components upon return to the United States.

This qualitative research study sought to describe the program, the students involved, and the outcomes attributed to participation. Changes in participants which were attributed to participation in the experiential program have been termed "inward", "outward", and "upward" to describe the intrapersonal and interpersonal changes, as well as the encompassing and holistic "Experiential Transformations" which occurred. Experiential transformations were defined through this study as holistic, beneficial personal and interpersonal changes, attributed to participation in an event or series of events. The purpose of this final chapter is to summarize the study, revisit the major

findings, relate this current research to the findings in the literature, discuss the implications for current theory and significance of this project, provide implications for future action and recommendations for further research, and offer final thoughts and conclusions about the program and outcomes studied.

Summary of the Study

Overview of the Study

This study focused on an international, experiential education program and the alternative high school students who participated in it. Serving as a rite of passage, the program focused on intellectual, physical, emotional, and social growth. While traditional academic approaches to education focus on intellectual development, experiential education focuses more on the whole person (Kolb, 1988). This study allowed students who participated in a six-week immersion program with an international component to describe aspects of the journey that were significant and life-changing to them as well as allowing me to describe the critical programmatic components which allowed for this growth and learning. Program participants included seventeen students from an alternative high school, ranging in age from 15 to 20, with various levels of intellectual, psychological, emotional, and physical development. The program consisted of pre-trip requirements, a four week domestic school component, a two week international journey to Chile, and an intentional reintegration into their home environments.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this inductive, emergent case study was to understand the lived experiences of a group of high school students who participated in a six-week, experiential immersion program with an international component and to explore how

meaning was made from participation in such a program. I have also attempted to better understand and describe the critical components of both the individuals and the program which allowed for growth, learning, and "experiential transformations" to occur.

Research Question and Sub-questions

The following research questions guided my interviews and investigation as I sought to better understand how students were impacted through their experience.

- How is meaning made of a six-week high school immersion program, which includes a two-week international excursion?
    - What is the "essence" of the lived experience for program participants? (Description of program and settings, pre-trip activities, domestic and international immersion components.)
    - What are the qualities of the students who chose to participate in such a program and what are their hopes and expectations of the program?
    - What are the significant aspects of the program that affect change in students?
    - What insights, growth, and changes occur for students throughout the immersion experience?

Review of the Methodology

Research paradigm and strategy. Experiential education is "holistic, pluralistic, fluid, inclusive, and has 'meaning,' and these conceptualizations require an expanding and critical view of appropriate research questions as well as research methods" (Henderson, 1993, p. 53). A qualitative paradigm and case study strategy framed the progression and emerging design of this study. Creswell's assumptions (1998) guided the choice of the qualitative paradigm matching my belief in multiple interpretations of reality, the inclusion of my personal values and beliefs about the research topic, and the

focus on using the stories and the voices of participants in my inductive analysis and interpretation of observations, interviews, and documents.

Within the qualitative research paradigm, the case study strategy of inquiry was utilized for this particular research question. A key element being the case as a bounded system – in this case, the six-week immersion program and the group of adolescents and adults who participated in it. Three special features help to further define the case study in that it is: particularistic, focusing on a particular program and phenomenon; descriptive, providing a holistic and rich description; and heuristic, illuminating the reader's understanding of the phenomenon and bringing about the discovery of new meaning (Merriam, 2001). Lincoln and Guba (1985) lay out a structure for a case study including the problem, the context, the issues, and the lessons learned, which I attempted to follow. The case study allows for an in-depth analysis, utilizing multiple sources of data, to understand a bounded system, and insights from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research (Merriam, 2001). Case studies are anchored in real-life situations, result in a holistic account of a phenomenon, and offer insights to the readers. Case study has proven useful in many areas, particularly in studying educational innovations (Merriam, 2001).

Data collection procedures. As is called for in a qualitative emergent study, rigorous procedures and multiple methods of data collection were utilized to answer the research questions. Included in these methods were my participation in the setting, direct observation, in-depth interviewing, and document review including participant writing. As a researcher, as well as an adult participant in the program, I kept a reflexive personal journal throughout my time working with the students; preceding, during, and after the

six-week program. My extensive immersion in the field allowed for in depth observations and conversations with participants as well as multiple perspectives and more complex understandings of the various qualities of the program.

Students were asked to keep daily journals of personal thoughts, insights, questions, and reflections that they had as they participated in the six-week program. They were asked to write one-page, weekly summaries of their journals to be turned in, allowing them to edit out and select components which they did or did not wish to share. A final written piece was requested upon return to the United States including reflections upon the overall experience and their integration / understanding of it in their home lives. After completion of the program, students were asked if they wished to share any other portions of their journal in order to further explain their perspective on the critical aspects of the program. Additionally, I conducted interviews with some students, as a means of understanding how they continued to make sense of their experience.

Data analysis techniques. Analysis procedures followed the step sequence described below:

Step One: The process of data collection and analysis was ongoing and interwoven, as is necessary in an emergent qualitative study (Merriam, 2001). The interpretive property of qualitative research was a fundamental aspect of this study. As I observed, interviewed, and described information, I was constantly analyzing and interpreting my findings, building themes, drawing conclusions, and noting personal meaning that was being made. My thinking process cycled between data collection, data analysis, and writing as to allow for the emerging ideas to be utilized in order to gain richer, deeper information in regards to the phenomena in question.

Step Two: A general review of information, notes, memos and field journal entries helped me to continually evolve my thinking and analysis of data (Wolcott, 2001). The creation of diagrams and displays helped me with the reduction of data as collection proceeded.

Step Three: A detailed description of the case and the setting comes from my own personal experience and observations, as well as from the interviews of students. Similar to a data analysis method advocated by Stake (1995), I utilized categorical aggregation to seek collective instances that provided meaning. As well, I established patterns or connections between categories, and developed naturalistic generalizations that could possibly be applied to future or similar cases.

Step Four: An index coding procedure, as described by Siedel & Kelle (1995), was implemented to organize that data for analysis. The data was indexed into four major topical areas which were named the "what" (description of program and settings), the "who" (participant qualities and expectations), the "how" (programmatic components that may have affected participant change), and the "student outcomes" (intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transformational changes in participants that were attributed to participation in the program).

Step Five: Each of the four index segments were analyzed inductively for major themes, a qualitative strategy for thematic analysis described by Boyatzis (1998) and Moustakas (1994). By focusing on the research questions and the words of the participants, I was able to look for codes and thematic labels. I then attempted to introduce a structure to the themes, by grouping and naming them in clusters, and finally by creating a summary, "the lessons learned" to reflect the meaning of the program and

the changes students ascribed to it. Integrated summaries were developed as time progressed through the study.

Step Six: The major thematic results from Step Five were brought together as the final conceptual framework for the study.

Major Findings

This summary of the major findings will include an overview of the critical programmatic components, participant qualities, and outcomes that were attributed to participation in this program. Generally, they are discussed as the what, the how, and the inward, outward, and upward growth of students through their participation in this program.

An Itinerary for Adventure and Personal Growth: "The What"

Four major units comprised the experiential education program. These were the pre-trip requirements and retreat, the three and a half week school based program, two weeks of international travel, and the reintegration aspects upon return from Chile. Each of these four units was an immersion experience and the curricular components were fairly consistent. Education was holistic, including physical, cognitive, social and emotional aspects of challenge and learning. Throughout the program students were asked to focus on personal growth and group dynamics, service to others, physical adventure activities, and intellectual development. The reintegration portion of the trip gave students an opportunity to symbolically declare their learning and growth through the trip to their families and school community. All of these components led to the trip fitting a rites of passage model with stages of separation, transition, and reincorporation.

A Cast of the Characters: The "Who"

Participants in this program were students who chose to attend an alternative high for various social, academic, emotional, and other reasons which had limited their success at their previous traditional high schools. The majority of students came from "non-traditional" family backgrounds and many had prior histories with substance use, abuse, or addiction. Students had varying levels of intellectual, psychological, social, artistic, musical, and other competencies and, though deemed "alternative", represented a wide range of talents, skills, and experience.

Students were intentional about their rationale for participation in this program. Many of them had hopes and expectations of anticipated program outcomes. These included personal growth, soul searching, service to others, a transition toward adulthood, the opportunity to travel, and a chance to answer the question of "Who am I?" These anticipated outcomes may have led to the actual outcomes that were perceived by students and attributed to participation in the program.

The Plot – Critical Interactions of Program and Participants: "The How"

A strong program purpose and rationale, high expectations of students, and several important programmatic components worked together to create an environment and program where transformative outcomes could take place. This program was created and intended to serve as a purposeful journey towards adulthood, a rite of passage, for the young people involved. Each aspect of the course, pre-trip, high school, and international, consisted of a full immersion and holistic experience. The program included academic, personal growth, and experiential components to provide for multiple dimensions of learning.

High quality adult leaders facilitated the programmatic aspects and guidance of students during the program. These leaders provided unconditional positive regard for the students, served as role models, and formed a safe atmosphere with healthy boundaries to create an environment which nurtured trusting relationships and allowed for healthy experimentation and growth.

Inward, Outward, Upward: "The Lessons Learned"

Student changes were described by themselves through journal entries and at their return presentation for the community. They were also observed by me and other significant adults in their lives. The outcomes are described linearly here, inward changes preceding outward changes and leading to upward changes, yet the process was actually more organic and synergistic than this. Developing personal confidence in students led to more effective group interaction, at the same time that doing service work and functioning in the group, helped students to achieve inward growth and self assuredness, and all of the insights and learning led to areas of transformation. I envision the process as two intertwining spirals. As students gained inner clarity and confidence, one spiral directed inward and focused on personal growth and wisdom. As students grew to become more interdependent, the other spiral broadened outward connecting them to other people, cultures, and language. This in turn improved their closest relationships at home as well as helped to clarify their connection with the world. One spiral funnels upward and inward, the other spirals upward and outward, and both lead toward new states of thinking, living, and being.

Inward. Physical, mental, and emotional differences help to describe some of the intrapersonal changes that occurred. Some example of physical differences include

improvements in levels of fitness and interest in physical wellness, changes in demeanor such as more frequent smiles, eye contact, and improved posture and stance, and students who cut their hair, removed their makeup, and changed their dress style to reflect their more natural selves. Mental indicators of growth included an increased awareness and sense of maturity displayed by words and actions, a renewed value of education as a means towards life-long learning and not just for a grade, and an appreciation of the wisdom of others, as well as their own, through a global perspective. Emotional growth occurred for students as they were continually challenged to express emotions in healthy ways, a task which was not often practiced for many of the young people prior to this program. Getting in touch with their emotional selves allowed students to identify and express sadness, hurt, resentment, and anger. This, in turn, allowed them to move past these states as they learned to become more happy, loving, and forgiving.

Outward. Interpersonal development, or "outward growth", also developed through participation in this program. Students recognized a greater sense of interdependence, that their meaning in the world went beyond just themselves and they were connected to other people, as one girl put it, "I learned I needed to get over myself – it's not all about me". Some also began to realize the value in becoming more loving and respectful toward others, giving and receiving love, and serving others. In learning to forgive people in their personal lives students worked toward becoming less judgmental and taking more personal responsibility. Several of the students who had built protective walls and defense mechanisms learned to develop an appropriate sense of vulnerability as they built deeper connections with others. Additionally, communication skills were practiced and improved, both in English and in Spanish. The perspective gained through

travel helped to establish the importance of a global community and the interconnectedness of all people and societies.

Upward. Upward growth, realizing more of their power and potential, was demonstrated in each of the students through their participation in this program. These holistic changes were termed "Experiential Transformations" and were defined through this study as beneficial and empowering personal and interpersonal changes, which are attributed to participation in an event or series of events which include the interplay of cognitive, emotional, and physical components. The qualities which were deemed transformational changes included increased senses of self awareness and clarity, experience and commitment to sobriety, developing maturity and self confidence, and an appreciation of growth through discomfort. Some students identified that the program had served for them as a transition from their teen years toward adulthood. The term "Pura Vida" was used to identify a fresh outlook many of the students gained on self and life, fresh, natural, pure. Growth through the journey was also expressed as students identified what they hoped to remember and take with them from their time in Chile.

Remarks made in a final international circle helped pinpoint some of the ways in which the journey had transformed them. These included a relaxed and open mind, opened eyes, openness to beauty, being in the moment, thoughtfulness, believing in and becoming a strong capable person, new appreciation for people and things, understanding, patience, loving, helping, caring, new beliefs, importance of relationships, understanding of different cultures, know people more, skills towards interdependence, love, responsibility, passion, gratitude, motivation to work and begin anew, humility, and tolerance.

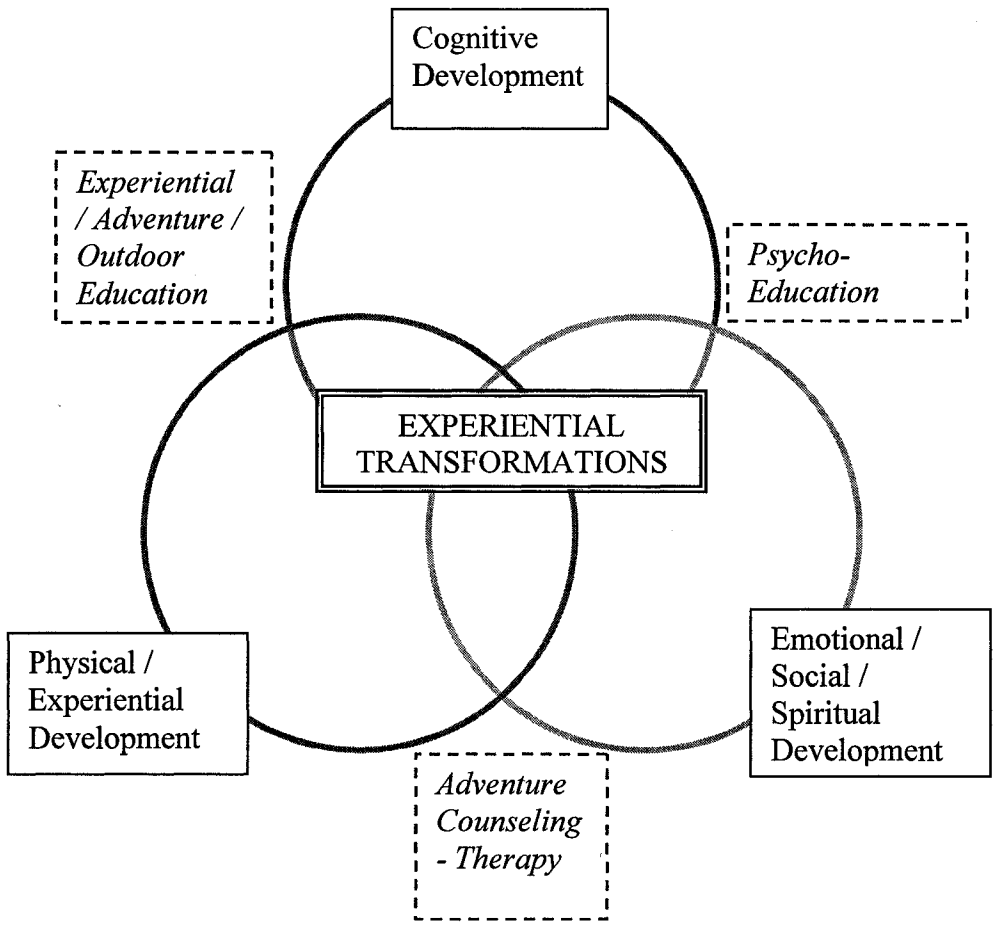
A Conceptual Framework for Experiential Transformations

The data from this research undertaking shows an important aspect that led to profound changes in the participants of this program was the experiential interplay between the cognitive, emotional, and physical components of almost all of the aspects of the program. The pre-trip, high school, and international aspects of the experience included academic, personal growth, and adventure activities. This framework can be represented by a Venn diagram of three circles. The cognitive, emotional, and physical experiential aspects of this program, represented by each of the circles create important overlap zones, psycho-education, adventure / experiential education, and adventure counseling / therapy (see Figure 1).

Though certainly these are aspects of many experiential and educational ventures, this intentional blend of components is not well founded nor discussed in the literature. The interplay of all three of these fields may be an important area of future investigation and programming. This program combined knowledge, skills, pedagogy and practice from multiple fields of learning, allowing for holistic growth and development. Based on this study, and my own experiences, I believe that the relationship between these three zones throughout this immersion experience is what allowed profound inward, outward, and upward changes and transformations to occur within the participants.

Figure 1.

Interaction of fields of growth and development that can lead to "Experiential Transformations".



Findings Related to the Literature

Experiential Education

This full immersion program seemed to possess programmatic aspects that included multiple sub-sets of the field of experiential education. Due to the focus on personal growth, results from this program aligned with outcomes from previous studies in the fields of experiential education, outdoor education, and adventure therapy. As is suggested by the literature, full immersion in experiential programs creates a sense of flow as people become engaged in the physical, cognitive, and emotional aspects of activities. This immersion can assist in people becoming more open to discovery and learning opportunities (Butler, 2000).

Personal growth programs are intended to positively impact general psychological well-being (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2000) and though not necessarily designed as therapy, they may have the similar intentional aim of producing results through experiential adventure activities. Similar to adventure therapy, this program served as an active and experiential approach to personal growth within a group setting, utilizing an activity base and employing real and/or perceived risk (physical and psychological) as significant agents to bring about change (Gillis & Gass, 2003).

The importance of facilitators to the outcomes of experiential programs was discussed in this study and is supported in the literature. As explained by Scott (1998), leaders who understand the process of reflection and make connections to cultural meanings are required for transformation to take place; the adult role includes functions of both mentor and instructor. One of the critical pieces in a reflective experiential

education process is the role of "elders" who lead the process of reflection, direction, experience and affirmation. The role of educator in experiential programs becomes that of facilitating the learning environment and supporting the learner in problem solving, growth, and development as individuals bring their own life stories and perceptions to the experience (Allison & Pomeroy, 2000). A shift in a facilitator's understanding of the term 'education' is necessary to look at transformative properties where education is seen as a reflective process, requiring learners to reflect on the significance and meaning of their own life based on their personal experiences (Scott, 1998). The facilitator's role is one of energy, creativity, and vision (Bunyan, 1994). The program studied here seems to support all of the above findings on the importance of the people filling the leadership roles in experiential ventures as this trip was certainly a product of its leaders.

Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards (1997) undertook a meta-analysis based on 1,728 effect sizes from 96 studies on the effects of adventure programs on an array of outcomes. Findings in the meta-analysis indicate that adventure programs had greatest immediate effects on leadership, academic performance, independence, assertiveness, emotional stability, social comparison, time management, and flexibility. These categories fit into the qualitative findings here. Participants gained a stronger sense of self-reliance and control in both the meta-analysis and this present study. Empirical evidence indicates that adventure education programs are effective means for enhancing adolescent self-concept, among other outcomes suggesting much potential for further development and incorporation of such programs (Neill, 2000).

Adventure education and Peak Experiences

Developing the idea of Abraham Maslow, who described "peak experiences" as tremendous moments of meaning and life-direction (Hoffman, 1990), the Adventure Experience Paradigm, a model developed by Priest (1985), looks at the key components of a quality experience. According to this model, a high level of competence and low level of risk can lead to a "recreation / exploration" experience with little new learning occurring. Conversely, high risk with low competence levels can lead to "devastation and disaster", clearly not an ideal outcome. Through achieving a balance of risk and competence, a "peak adventure" experience can be created where learning is maximized and growth occurs. The program researched here seemed to achieve this balance, creating a peak experience by pushing students out of their comfort zones, physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally, while providing enough information and boundaries to build competence and manage risk in each of these areas.

Transformational Learning

Similar to experiential education theories, but focusing more on cognitive than physical practices, transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997) seeks to guide people to awareness and change through the cognitive process of critical reflection. Transformational learning practices help to develop autonomous thinking, allowing learners to make their own interpretations rather than act on the knowledge and experience of others. This process can guide individuals to an awareness of their frames of reference and assumptions, which then can be challenged and transformed through critical reflection (Mezirow, 1997).

Students in this program were asked to think, speak, and write about what they were feeling and experiencing throughout the program. The use of reflective thinking, the concept of transformation, and the role of supporting relationships are common to the fields of transformational and cross-cultural learning (Lyon, 2002) and align with concepts that promoted positive change in this experiential education program. The importance of critical reflection to change and growth was also supported through the findings of this study.

Ecological Psychology

Blocher (1974) lists seven important environmental elements in nurturing human growth and development. These are active engagement in the learning environment, mild disequilibrium or challenge of task, a supportive network of positive relationships, examples of slightly more advanced functioning or performance (modeling), receiving clear and accurate feedback, application and testing of new concepts, and opportunity for reflection and integration of new learning. Each of these conditions seems to match and has been met through this particular experiential immersion program.

Blocher's model (1974) describes opportunity, support, and reward subsystems which comprise a learning environment. Opportunities with adequate levels of involvement, challenge, and reflection stimulate engagement of the learner and integration to occur. Structure and support systems provide relationship networks of empathy and caring to enhance growth. Feedback and application are aspects of the reward structure which allow for both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. This model integrates with the international program to Chile. Students were challenged physically, socially, emotionally, and mentally and asked to reflect on a daily basis on their learning

and growth. The program created a support network comprised of students, program staff, school faculty and staff, and student families. This support network was called upon throughout the program stages. Program staff gave students open, honest, and caring feedback on their functioning in the group and individually on a regular, daily basis. Students were asked to apply their new learning in presentations to peers, family, and school groups. Intrinsic and extrinsic awards were gained through participation including sobriety, personal growth, improved relationships with peers and family, the opportunity to travel internationally, and gains in academic success.

Banning and Burfeind (1993) use the ecological perspective, focusing on the relationships between learners and education environments, to understand why ropes courses work. The Blocher model of opportunity, support, and reward subsystems is compared to the ropes course experience, suggesting that challenge ropes courses work because they meet the seven learning conditions set out. This conceptual framework could likewise serve to better understand how and why experiential immersion programs, such as the focus of this current study, achieve positive developmental outcomes.

Developmental processes must be intentionally triggered and encouraged by the environment for full potential of growth. Nurturing an optimal interaction between adolescents and their learning environments, a dynamic equilibrium or ecological balance, will allow for maximum growth to occur (Blocher, 1974).

International Settings

One area which has not been deeply considered in the field of experiential education is the use of cross-cultural or international settings as environments for learning and changing behavior (Kraft, 1992). This study provides further documentation

that international experiential programs can serve as the impetus for change and growth. Throughout the experience, participants were asked to stretch their comfort boundaries and the international setting was an ongoing source of opportunity for this disequilibrium. The culture shock that can be experienced during an overseas experience, or often on the return to one's home, is one example of how a novel environment can impact growth. International travel experiences can become transformational, resulting from an unexpected and disorienting experience (Elias, 1997).

Kraft (1992) points out that the international setting has many of the same characteristics of the wilderness setting that impact transformation. Travel experiences have the potential to impact one's world knowledge, subtly change an individual, or provide a true perspective transformation through a disorienting dilemma (Roberson, 2002). In addition to change in the environmental setting, linguistic, cultural, religious, political and multiple other cues lead to a level of culture shock. These changes provide further means for program participants, as did the students in this study, to experience growth and change through discomfort, leading toward a "peak experience". This study provides further rationale that the successful navigation of various stages of culture shock from an international experience can lead to life-changing learning experiences.

Rites of Passage

Anthropologists have studied rites of passage in various societies which are intended to achieve more than just transition, but the transformation into the next stage or role in life (Maddern, 2000). Van Gennep (1960) describes rites of passage throughout the lifespan in various world cultures. His often cited triparate model of these rites of passage include the rites of separation (preliminal), rites of transition (liminal), and rites

of incorporation (postliminal). Kessler (2000) describes a rite of passage as a structured, guided process to help young people become conscious of their transition, gain and utilize tools to assist them during separations and transitions, become initiated into the next step, and then to be acknowledged by the community of adults and peers for their courage and strength through the process.

The program I studied follows such a model, as students were first separated from their school, peers, families and home communities, leaving familiarity for the unknown. Next, they were immersed into a new culture, language, setting, and daily schedule where they could be unsettled and were asked to work through stages of personal growth and awareness. Finally, they were reincorporated into their home settings through an initial welcoming ceremony with their families as well as a formal presentation to the greater school community.

American adolescents are asked to transition from childhood to adulthood without the psychosocial, community, support that exists in some cultures, and often turn to drugs and alcohol in order to transform into their "new" adult role and personality (Mason & Collison, 1995). During times of transition, adolescents may feel that they do not fit in – no longer a part of childhood, not yet ready for adulthood. Withdrawal from ordinary life, shattering of old connections, and healing and restoration are the three stages of creation defined in Jewish mystical tradition (Kalmansohn, 2004). By helping teens contextualize their in-between experience with an ancient cultural model, they can know they are on a journey that is a part of a greater experience, leading to the possibility of change and healing.

Service Learning

An additional and important programmatic aspect related to this program and its transformational outcomes is service learning. Service learning, an experience-based movement which emphasizes active over passive, producing over consuming, and students as solvers of problems rather than the problems themselves is a powerful contemporary movement that is impacting and transforming the lives of individuals, classrooms, and schools (Kraft, 1992). In contemporary society, the transition to adulthood rarely involves a meaningful work experience, though young people respond in remarkable ways when asked to engage in something real, where they feel they are needed (Kielsmeier, 1989).

As students prepare for, experience, and reflect on a service project, they are empowered to make decisions, participate in society, and incorporate learning (Everest, 2001). Service learning experiences can expose students to new challenges and possibilities, and lessons and memories gained can influence attitudes and thoughts well past the initial event (Johnson, 1996). Service learning benefits schools, communities, and young people by engaging them in community service and political activism (Boss, 1999) and contributes to the power and transformational potential of an experiential program. As service components were a part of the pre-trip and international components of this particular experience, they certainly were an integral and powerful aspect that led to some of the transformational outcomes.

Adolescent Risk and Resiliency

Resilience, a term used to describe qualities which foster successful adaptation and transformation despite adversity, can allow people to develop social competency and

skills, autonomy, a critical consciousness, and a sense of purpose (Benard, 1995). Experiential curricula, such as that utilized in this program of study, create challenging, even uncomfortable, experiences which can build resiliency, expand comfort zones, and lead to positive change in adolescent populations. The protective factors of resiliency despite risk can be grouped into the categories of caring and supportive relationships, positive and high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation (Benard, 1995). Again, the program this research endeavor investigated provided students with supporting relationships, high expectations for success, and opportunities for meaningful participation, and thus may have served the role of fostering resiliency in students who could be deemed "at-risk".

Environmental change, including change in the living environment and withdrawal from non-supportive models, was found to be the underlying key in a longitudinal study of how some individuals managed their lives well, despite exposure to several risk factors (Ronka, Oravala, & Pulkkinen, 2002). New environments and roles motivated lifestyle changes, as did the opportunity to be good at something. Students here had the opportunity to be removed from non-conducive learning and living environments for the duration of this program, and the literature supports that this also may play a role in future success.

Implications for Current Theory

As described above, the findings of this qualitative case study fit into multiple fields of the current literature. Program qualities and outcomes described fit into and support areas of experiential education, adventure education, transformational learning, ecological psychology, international programs, rites of passage, service learning, and

adolescent risk and resiliency. The integrated nature of all of these fields of study also leads to some implications for theory in multiple arenas.

Educational Theory

According to Maslow (1964, p. 204), "the far goal of education – as of psychotherapy, of family life, of work, of society, of life itself – is to aid the person to grow to fullest humanness, to the greatest fulfillment and actualization of his highest potentials, to his greatest possible stature... to become actually what he deeply is potentially." He continues with propositions that education must be seen as helping every individual toward this goal, as a life-long process, which is certainly not confined to the classroom. This aim of education describes the process of transformation that can be possible in immersive experiential education programs such as that described here. In this case, current educational systems could benefit from developing and supporting programs which incorporate aspects of this experiential immersion program.

Experiential activities can lead to a more integrative approach to growth and learning, offering kinesthetic, emotional, and cognitive levels of understanding. Education is a holistic endeavor, encompassing changing and growing understandings of selves, relationships, and world. This view includes academic, extracurricular, and non-academic aspects of development of which only academic portions are regularly evaluated and used as indicators of learning (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). Schools and programs must allow students to think, question, reflect, and interact with ideas – to construct meaning in their own worlds. Holistic educational programming can provide these types of meaningful and relevant interactions between students, adults, peers, and the environment.

Transformation and Transition

The findings of this study suggest that international, experiential immersion programs have the potential to serve as transformational learning experiences. Turning point experiences, a construct which describes a moment in life where a person is susceptible to change, viewed either as positive or negative, have been researched by many individuals to understand moments when opportunities have led to changes in people's lifestyles, self-concepts, and roles (Ronka et al., 2002). Change can be incremental, happening gradually, or extreme, such as a paradigm change, involving a changing of beliefs and values about how the world works (Imel, 2000). Transformative learning experiences will often straddle the borders of psycho-therapy, education, and spiritual practice, as individuals have the opportunity to expand their consciousness and experience therapeutic results (Elias, 1997).

Often, the transition between adolescence and adulthood offers turning points in risk development (Ronka, et al., 2002). In a longitudinal study, Lewis, Ross, and Mirowsky (1999) sought to determine which factors led to a sense of personal control in life. Findings indicated that a sense of personal control increases as age increases between ages of 14 and 22 and are also correlated to cognitive skill development and intelligence. The capacity to acquire and apply knowledge helps young people to comprehend, manage, and direct their life.

The behavioral changes of adolescence, including biological, psychological and social processes all impact what is determined to be a successful or unsuccessful navigation of puberty. Understanding developmental theory and processes that mark the transition to adulthood, paired with events which define an exit from adolescence can

lead to further understanding of risk and resilience throughout life. A key component to healthy identity development, particularly central in late adolescent development, is reflecting on experiences and options in life (McLean & Pratt, 2006). The term transition-linked turning points, is used by Graber & Brooks-Gunn (1996) to characterize the concept of turning points overlaid with transitional periods of change over a life course. The international immersion program studied here allowed for students to reflect on a significant experience which may have served as a turning point during this time of adolescent transition.

"All transitions – in earth, in ourselves – produce great energy. If we are able to stay focused and remain flexible, these forces can allow us to withstand and overcome nearly any obstacle. From the depths of crisis comes the possibility of transformation – for as long as the journey continues" (Kalmansohn, 2004). The experiential immersion program of this study provided students opportunities to acquire and apply knowledge. This knowledge could directly apply to their state of adolescent transition and their transformation into new adult selves. A key factor in this program was the fact that both processes of transition and transformation were held equally in creating an experience for the young people involved.

An Ecological Perspective

Blocher (1987) defines ecology as a "multidisciplinary scientific endeavor aimed at understanding the delicate and dynamic interactions between organisms and the many aspects of their environments." He further defines the field of human ecology as an endeavor toward understanding factors that sustain life and ensure survival, but also those environmental factors that sustain growth, allowing humans to reach their full potential.

Developmental human ecology, then is premised on the idea that healthy growth and development results from an optimal and dynamic balance between inner biological and physiological structures as well as outer forces of the social, cultural, and physical environment (Blocher, 1987).

In modern societies, most individuals experience discontinuities when social and cultural forces do not align with biological processes of maturation. Blocher (1987) notes that drinking age, driving age, voting age, and school-leaving age are some of the cultural milestones that may not match or harmonize with maturational processes to provide an orderly sequence of developmental tasks and challenges. He contends that counseling has a social function of helping individuals to bridge major discontinuities to attain higher levels of human development. The creation of special learning environments may help people to acquire coping and mastery behaviors to bridge these discontinuities.

Blocher (1987) identifies three crucial elements which compose a learning environment. The first of these is an "opportunity structure", defined by a range of situations which allow participants to try out new behaviors which may lead to success or control in the environment. In the six-week immersion program described in this study, challenge course participation, domestic and international travel and adventure, service work, and group leadership roles were all examples of this range of opportunity. A second element to the environment is the "support structure", consisting of a network of positive and caring human relationships, and an availability of cognitive frameworks and strategies to provide ways of approaching challenges and problems. The adult facilitators of the group provided levels of warmth, encouragement, empathy and support, and many of the group discussions and Circles helped to provide the cognitive frameworks that

these students needed to move forward in their lives. Example topics include forgiving, giving and receiving love, and effective resolution of conflict. Students were guided and supported with managing stress, meeting challenges, and accomplishing tasks. The "reward structure" is the final component of a learning environment which is made up of intrinsic or extrinsic, material or psychological rewards and a clear contingency structure which sustains motivation. Rewards for participation in this immersion program included opportunities to travel out of the country, increase self-esteem, gain personal vision and insight, and become a part of a supportive and empowering community. Clear, dependable contingencies of sobriety checks, fundraising requirements, active participation, high academic standards, and students' existing notions and expectations of program outcomes provided students with reasoned belief that their effort and hard work would indeed yield these rewards. These three ecological principles of a broad opportunity structure, a network of supportive relationships and a source of effective cognitive strategies, and opportunities to earn significant rewards define what Blocher calls a "potent learning environment". The intentional creation of immersion programs with this ecological structure in mind may help people of all ages move closer to their next higher level of development.

Significance of Study

Several areas of significance have already been mentioned and will be revisited here. The program described and interpreted through this qualitative study seemed to have powerful outcomes on the lives impacted. The learning environment, facilitators and support systems, personal growth, academic, adventure and service components of the program all were integral to program success. Significance of the results relate here

primarily to the institutions of learning and future program professionals hoping to impact lives in potentially transformational ways.

Institutions of Learning

Any educational program which wishes to better serve their students in higher levels of growth and development might consider the implementation of an international immersion experience. This program impacted the students involved in ways that go beyond traditional academic measures of grades and test scores. In determining how meaning was made, not only were students interviewed and observed to document growth and outcomes, but I was able to spend a significant time in the field, as a part of the program, in order to give an in depth description and analysis of the aspects of the program that seemed to make it work. Learning organizations, both public and private schools, serving k-12 through university and adult populations, must break out of the traditional cognitive based academic structures that are only reaching some of the students, in a narrow range of ways. Students are in need of programs which allow them to grow holistically, to ask questions of who they want to be and how they want to operate in their homes, peer groups, society, and world.

Institutions which wish to expand their ability to reach students at multiple learning and developmental needs might consider whether they are balanced in offering curricula that is experiential, includes service work, and is oriented toward cognitive, physical, and social and emotional development. Additionally, other organizations that focus on the mental health development and overall wellness might consider whether experiential based immersion programs could be an asset to change and transformation in their populations. Particularly programs which focus on times of life transition, such as

adolescence, young adulthood, career changes, or other life changes may be more able to assist participants as they navigate through their life changes by offering an experiential immersion such as that described here.

Creation and implementation of such programs could be a means of fostering resiliency in populations at risk. Particularly appealing is that all students can benefit from such factors to aid them in their future, whether considering traditional or alternative school populations, and therefore could be focused on all adolescents in a school or community, not just those deemed "at risk". If schools, parents, and communities can help to foster these traits in young people, all in our society will benefit from a healthier and more productive generation. Schools and communities which work together to improve overall success can in turn become a self-fulfilling process of establishing and achieving goals without singling out or stigmatizing individual students as being at-risk.

Though the short term cost involved of creating and implementing such endeavors might seem unreasonable at first, a long term perspective really must be taken. The initial investment would pay off in societal contributions such as a globally educated and thoughtful work force, community members who see the value in service and giving back, and people who are motivated to work and learn and grow rather than content at coasting through life on the efforts of others. We must take a look at the whole picture and find ways to invest in these programs, not only for the students involved, but for the growth of our entire society.

Professionals

Additionally, professionals who work with learning and development such as teachers, therapists, facilitators, guides, coaches will find significance in this study. In evaluating outdoor based experiential training programs, Wagner and Roland (1992) found significant differences in effectiveness and awareness in groups depending on the facilitator. Obviously, not all well meaning adults are capable and knowledgeable enough to be successful in this type of work, and there are multiple layers of counseling, teaching, leading, and facilitating occurring throughout the program. Some important considerations for the professionals who intend to run such programs follow.

Understanding program purpose and rationale. Understanding and supporting the purpose of the program is critical to leaders. They need to understand that this is not just an educational trip, from an academic standpoint, but also encompasses emotional and social growth. This particular program served as a rite of passage to assist through a developmental transition, and if another such program were implemented, it would be important for the leaders to understand the theory and background of rites of passage in order to be more intentional about implementing all of the stages. Particularly, the last stage of reincorporation is sometimes forgotten, leaving participants struggling to make the meaning from their experience fit back into their "every day" lives.

Understanding and experience with adolescents. An understanding and appreciation for developmental theory, for adolescents or whatever population is being targeted, is also important for professionals as they are serving as guides for the successful navigation through a time of transition. This study showed that effective leaders must understand the process that adolescents are moving through, provide

students with a "roadmap", and help move them through developmental stages to get "unstuck". Leaders must possess enough information and experience to help guide teenagers through this transition, and give them the information they need at a given point, which could be about past trauma, sobriety, or educational options. When teenagers feel connected to a caring adult who has information for them that they are open to, they are able to more successfully navigate the processes of change. Successful group leaders must be able to watch and work with the group dynamics and processes as well as the individual needs in the group, as each member is different.

Maturity, though seemingly an obvious quality in a leader, is not necessarily found in all "adults". Some leaders, regardless of chronological age, have too much of their own personal growth work to do, or simply try too hard to be seen as a "friend". The need for adults who are understanding and supportive of adolescent issues, and are not still concerned themselves with being socially accepted, to facilitate these adventure and personal growth programs is critical. A maturity difference between leaders and program participants is a key factor, along with being perceived as relevant and approachable, in one's ability to lead or facilitate a group (Hurtes, 2001). Supportive adult relationships are often found to be the most effective factors in bring about positive change (Ronka, et al., 2002).

Broad range of training and expertise. Skills and practice in educational, counseling, and experiential theory are additional components that professionals in this field would want to understand and utilize to be as successful and competent as possible. Rather than focusing on a narrow and specific field of expertise, it seems that leaders for these types of program are best suited to draw from a broad range of theory and practice,

giving them a wide perspective of student needs and personal expertise. Change agents, people who deliberately try to bring about change, are usually associated with organizations, but educators may also assume a change agent role in working with learners (Imel, 2000) and a deeper understanding of change and transformational theory and how it affects the learning process might help facilitators become more purposeful in individual change facilitation.

Effective facilitators of personal growth, "rites of passage" programs for adolescents will create programs and environments that will give students parameters they can fit within. These parameters will include safety, personal and interpersonal boundaries, high expectations for the students to live up to, and support systems to help them stay on the track they choose. Information, experience, and genuine caring about young people are additional qualities that help identify quality program leaders. This study increases the evidence of the importance of having effective leaders and facilitators for experiential immersion programs. What makes an effective leader is more than a list of qualifications and quantifiable traits. It is a blend of personality, training, dedication and understanding of the program, the population, and the processes. It is also about one's personal life experience and openness to learning, change, and transformation.

Implications for Action

Similarly to its areas of significance, this study leads to implications for action toward future program development as well as for professional practitioners who choose to lead such programs. As experiential programs become increasingly popular, it will be important to be able to assess the quality of the variety of programs and the people who lead them. Below are a few considerations which may be used in the development of

future immersion programs and leaders as well as for the discerning consumer to evaluate which programs might be most promising and suitable for similar types of outcomes as were found here.

Future Program Development

Conscious blend of multiple components. In the development of future programs that wish to model the program described here, it is important to remember that several components were blended in a conscious attempt to provide a holistic experiential venture. There were aspects of adventure, cognitive challenge, social and emotional development, and service learning throughout the program. Additionally, one of the key ingredients was the two week international component which allowed participants to physically be removed from their home environments, be completely immersed in a culture and language different from their own, and gain a global perspective through first hand experience.

Other populations. The fact that this was a public school program sets the precedence that it is possible, albeit with much fundraising, community support, and hard work, for less privileged students and schools to provide experiences like this. It would be incredible if more students from the United States, from diverse cultures, economic levels, and school systems could have the opportunity for such a transformative experience during the important time of adolescent transition. For some students, a program such as this might be the impetus to stay in school and avoid drop-out status.

Additionally, I believe this program could serve as a model for the period of time directly following high school graduation, perhaps it could be considered a "year thirteen" experience. This is another transitional time when young adults are not yet

decided on what their next step should be. Though many go to college because it is the 'next thing to do', it is not always a clear and intentional choice, often leading to not taking the educational endeavor seriously. Instead, many students use it as an expensive means to party, soul search, and question their next steps. If we could provide, and help to normalize, an experience to give these young adults opportunities to see more of the world, ask and answer questions about themselves, serve others, and learn a new language and/or culture, not only would we be enriching their educational experience, but also helping to turn this transition into a more productive and forward moving time. Those students who then returned to attend college might be more mindful of their purpose, saving themselves (or their parents) much money that might otherwise be wasted in flunking, or partying, out.

Understanding of population needs. In developing this program, it was important to take into consideration the process of adolescent development and some of the core issues of this specific population, which included drug and alcohol use, functional family issues, and future educational opportunities and choices. Likewise, it will be important for future programs to consider the populations they intend to serve and any specific issues to that population. By preparing an intentional and specific design, a program will be more likely to generate transformative outcomes instead of what might be termed incidental outcomes that could, or could not, come through participation in a more general program.

Program leaders / facilitators. As mentioned earlier, it is critical that the right people are found to serve as leaders of these programs. Just as the most effective leader will not be able to succeed without the proper tools and environment, the most ideal

program and setting with amazing resources cannot stand alone. The outcomes of experiential programs are truly a function of both the programmatic components and the critical leadership of the people. Leaders must be chosen who not only understand, but are passionate about, the purpose and rationale of the program, the specifics of the population, and unique needs and hopes of the participants. They also must possess the educational expertise, skill, and theoretical base, paired with an ability to naturally blend the personal connections of a teacher, counselor, guide, mentor and friend.

Community support. There is a critical need for support from community, both socially and financially, in providing intensive experiential immersion trips. At this point in time, a public school who is encouraging personal growth work through international immersion is perceived as 'doing things differently' and it is important that the community understands that different can be quite beneficial. As the primary leader of this particular program described, "You're not going to be able to say, 'At the end of this experience kids can read at a .8 grade point higher.'" He also noted that there has to be long term perspective on the returns and outcomes. A quantitative study or measure, such as the standardized test used in many schools to measure progress, may not be able to pick up subtle yet powerful changes in students. This leader has been involved in these programs for over ten years, and according to him it is important for advocates and financial supporters of such programs to remember that, "It's a long term investment and [people] need to recognize and see that in six weeks you may or may not be able to measure subjective change, but in six years, clearly lives are changed."

Clear program purpose and rationale. Rather than opening such programs to whomever is available, or can afford to participate, an intentional process of "recruiting"

participants will impact success rates. It is important to be able to know and articulate the intentions of the program and what people might come to gain through participation. Holman and McAvoy (2005) applied means-end theory to understand the connection of experiential program outcomes and program attributes. The means-end approach holds that people will choose services or products based on anticipated outcomes. I believe this approach also applies to the program in Chile. At least some of the students in this program committed to participation with the hope of gaining outcomes of personal growth and "initiation" into the adult world. Similar to other product marketing plans, future programs need to consider what outcomes they are aiming for in attracting participants who desire those outcomes. A clearer vision of the endpoint can make growth and learning more readily achievable for participants as well as hold programs to their own standards of purpose.

Environmental considerations. From the ecological perspective, dysfunctions that obstruct development are best understood and dealt with in the environments within which they occur (Blocher, 1987). This approach would lead us to not only create positive learning environments within the functional unit, the family, of an adolescent, but also would include the overall relationship with the individual and the community. Though programs which remove adolescents from environments which are limiting their potential is one possible venue to success, creating programs which include multiple community aspects may help alleviate some of the stress and resistance when programs terminate and participants are expected to reintegrate new selves into old systems.

Intact functioning groups, such as school cohorts, work teams, or family units, might have more to gain through group participation in such a program. This would also

help to prepare for and eliminate some of the struggles and culture shock that can occur upon reintegration to a community or group upon return. All members of the group will have a shared experience and a better understanding of the powerful growth opportunities that occurred. No amount of conversation or explanation can account for, nor replace, direct personal experience of the phenomena.

Feminist directions. Because of my own interest in feminism and social justice, as well as my experiences in being a "girl who does (traditionally) boy things" (i.e. rafting, traveling, camping, other adventure experiences), I believe an interesting lens for future program development would be how experiential programs can serve specifically as opportunities for navigating the transition from girlhood to womanhood. This program seemed to allow its female participants to break from the societal confines and definitions of femininity toward a better understanding and appreciation of who they could become. Some examples include the young woman who quit wearing makeup on the second day of service work, another who finally removed and left her leather jacket - that she wore as a protective layer, a "second skin" – in Chile, and another who cut off all of her hair in Chile to remove the remainder and reminder of what was "unpure" (in reference to her earlier use of drugs). Coupled with a curriculum that gave them a cognitive understanding of gender issues in American (or other home) culture, immersion experiences could allow for deep and meaningful awareness of self-imposed limitations based on gender. An intentional approach to help empower adolescent girls as they move toward womanhood could provide even more powerful and lasting impacts.

The issue of gender bias in schools has been a topic of interest for several decades now, and single-sex classrooms have been a popular and studied suggestion for creating

"equitable environments" for both sexes. Gender issues will also be found in experiential education settings, similar to traditional classroom atmospheres, and single-sex programs could be considered as appropriate mediums for personal growth opportunities (Hurtes, 2001). Because gender issues are also dominant in other cultures, an immersion into a country where females are marginalized to even greater degrees might allow young women to develop their feminist perspective and awareness through direct as well as vicarious experience.

Challenging young women to experience, and reflect upon, their full selves, not based on societal expectations, might allow them to broaden their perspective and potential. Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz (2006) found that girls became 'empowered' when they "engaged in the kind of reflexivity that enabled them to challenge a femininity based on girls' looks and approval from boys". These girls chose between being deemed 'normal' by the cultural majority and seemed more comfortable living at the fringes and doing 'boy things'.

In regard to adolescents in alternative school environments, these teens often are already considered 'different', and living on the margins of society. They may therefore be less likely to hold onto societal conceptions of what it means to 'be a girl', and young women from these non-traditional settings could be more likely to embrace and learn from an experiential program such as the immersion experience in Chile.

Practical Implications for Professional Practitioners

Support, caring, and positive regard. Obviously, it is critical that professionals who deliver such intensive programs as the one described here must not only love what they do, but also love who they do it for. The relationship between participant and

provider is even more important when the program has a purpose and rationale to serve as a rite of passage, an opportunity for personal growth and the possibility of transformation. Many people can serve as an adventure guide, the professionals described here are different. They are genuinely invested in the success and well-being of their charges. Such positive regard must be sincere, honest, and conscious. The question of "what is best for the learner?", instead of "what is best for me?", must be a constant presence in the mind of the leader. This support and caring allows the professional to empower the participants, giving them enough information that, when it is over, they can believe that they did it themselves.

Understanding theoretical underpinnings. The understanding of the theoretical principles and basis for the program, in this case the rites of passage model, is also important for an effective leader. Particularly when a program has such an intentional purpose, it is key that the curriculum and events are planned and move forward with the model in mind in order to best serve the needs of the student. This theoretical grounding also might include experiential and transformational theory and practice, a key shared element of these being the intentional focus on participant reflection and helping the participants find relevance to their own lives.

Managing individual needs and development and group dynamics. As seen and described here, the role of the professional practitioner is multi-fold, encompassing skills, knowledge, and expertise of various fields. Additionally, a skillful leader of experiential immersion programs must learn to balance carefully the ability to focus on the needs and growth of individuals within the group, as well as dynamics and functioning of the group overall. A tricky balance, not easily achieved, the awareness of this dual role can help the

leader to facilitate both personal growth and leadership development, knowing when to work with an individual one on one, and knowing when to work with a group issue.

Self awareness and knowledge of strengths and limits. Finally, and quite importantly, an effective leader needs to have knowledge of her own process of growth and learning. Each leader has different skills and talents, and knowing one's areas of weakness, when to ask for help, when a situation or event is beyond the space of their expertise, can not only be important, but life saving, especially when it comes to adventure travel and activities that have an element of risk. Not only physical risk must be mitigated, but also emotional, psychological and social risk which can put participants in unhealthy or harmful situations. The role of serving as a leader of such a program can be personally challenging, exhausting, scary, and risky. That said, it can also be incredible, growth producing, touching, empowering, and life-changing.

Intentionality. Successful programs can happen by coincidence, but more likely they are the circumstance of intentional programmatic components and intentional group and process facilitation. Leaders who are deliberately about their training, practice, and performance will be more likely to provide programs with successful outcomes. When leaders are clear about the aims and rationale for a program, the educational and theoretical backgrounds being used, and their treatment of individuals and group dynamics, they are able to provide a holistic learning environment which may lead to transformational outcomes.

Recommendations for Further Research

Of course, every program, regardless of how similar it may seem to another, will have its own unique story, because no two programs can be alike. Environmental

consideration, programmatic concepts and components, time, space, place, and personalities involved work together to create an impossible to replicate situation and experience. For these reasons, I feel that a qualitative study was the best way for me to portray the program and experience here, as well as help to understand how meaning was made through it. Though several areas for further research have already been alluded to, I will provide some concrete suggestions for future researchers who are interested in similar topics. In regards to further research, the investigator's lens could certainly look at different populations of similar programs, different questions which could be asked, and studies which may provide further confirmation of outcomes, or the importance of implementing experiential programs in the future.

Different Populations to Consider

As mentioned previously, all female or all male programs may produce different types of outcomes or specific types of outcomes toward a perspective such as feminism. Additionally, the facilitators who lead such a program would be a very interesting topic as study, as the five who led this particular trip brought a unique blend of perspectives and skills to the students. Another interesting consideration would be to look at programs whose participants were at different ages than the ones in this study. Ranging from adolescence to late adulthood, these populations would likely make meaning of their experience in many different ways. Considering the age range might also lead one to look specifically at groups passing through different life transition points, including pre and post-university, career changes, changes in marital or family status, or retirement considerations.

This study looked at students coming from a non-traditional, or alternative, school setting. A slight variation on population could be to look at a similar program occurring in a more traditional school environment. Alternatively, participants of the same age range who are not currently students, perhaps they have quit school, or are somehow engaged in the court system would provide a unique comparative study. Of course, this program was voluntary for the students who attended, which could be extremely different form other programs that are a requisite, either through a mandated school program or as some sort of court sentencing. I imagine that each of these populations would provide an entirely different set of observations, learnings, and outcomes for both participants and researcher.

Different Questions to Ask

In addition to the possibility of changing the research population lens, a different perspective of research question might also be taken. Of course, the paradigmatic change to a quantitative methodology could be a direction some might choose, trying to label and quantify types of changes or intensity of changes that occur through the program. For example, dropping out of high school was found to damage the sense of self control that develops in adolescence, and results from a study by Lewis, Ross, and Mirowsky (1999) suggest that programs to keep teenagers in school will help them to develop a lasting sense of control in their lives. Since it would be impossible to find a comparative group in a qualitative study, a quantitative researcher might attempt to find a control population with similar qualities in order to determine whether or not such a program can affect high school completion rates. Similarly, issues of sobriety might be studied quantitatively using a control group or pre and post test methodology.

Personally, I find the qualitative paradigm to provide plenty of new questions of its own. Rather than looking at the entity of the program, it could be valuable to focus primarily on the changes and outcomes that were, in this case, identified primarily by the researcher and the participants themselves. Following up with interviews and perspective of parents, other family members, peers, teachers, and other adults in the community might provide a richer and broader view of how this program impacted the young people involved.

How do these experiences affect the facilitators who lead them? What compels professionals to dedicate so much personal time and energy to such an endeavor? How do students maintain their outcomes over time? How does the program affect further education perspectives and career choices? How do participants remember the experience months, years, and/or decades afterwards? What other experiences and life changes do participants attribute to their initial participation in this program? The list of interesting questions that could shed further light on the potential importance of experiential programs is limitless.

Gaining Further Confirmation of Outcomes

Did this program serve as a "turning point" for the students who participated in it? How can we ever know for certain? An obvious need is for more studies, whether qualitative or quantitative, of similar programs and populations. Ronka, et al. (2002) found that personal significance, the promotion of change in an individual's development path, and the acquisition of new meanings all contributed to whether or not a transition or life event was considered a turning point. Also, often only after time has passed can the event be recognized as a turning point.

It seems as though the question of sustainable change, and transformation, could best be addressed in retrospect through longitudinal studies. It would be wonderful to follow-up with these same participants, interviewing them years from now in regards to how they believe the program impacted them. This type of longitudinal study would provide enlightening information, but with something as organic, interconnected, and multi-faceted as human development, I would say it would be nearly impossible for anyone, including the participant, to know for sure a direct cause and effect about almost any life happening. Still, helping to learn what participants attribute to their "turning point" moments would be valuable information for people who hope to intentionally create such experiences for others.

A common question in the literature is, how effective are experiential programs and how long do the effects last? Though the answer to this question will vary with each program and participant, the effects of an outdoor based experiential training program may actually increase over time, rather than decrease, especially when participants continue to practice skills learned in the program (Wagner and Roland, 1992).

Asked of one of the key leaders of this trip how he perceived the lasting impacts of the program on kids over the years he has been conducting trips, he asked back, "how do you gauge human potential?" He aptly challenged back, "to try to know what it was and get the essence of it, it takes a little away from the essence of what it is." It is difficult, at best, to judge what parts, what aspects, of the program make a difference and when the difference will show. This leader agreed that the type of change described by these students is difficult to sustain, and again he argued that sustainability was "not exactly the point. [Change] is real for a moment. But, what can you bring back? When

you change, your world changes. They brought back new perspectives that will always be with them."

A student who had participated in the program for two consecutive years questioned his own integrity when he, after the first year, spoke about how he had changed so much, and subsequently fell into old patterns and trouble with school and the law. A very profound and mature realization came to him part way through the second trip. He stated that he knows what he says *is* genuine - he *has* changed, and he knows how he wants to be right *now*. He might mess up again, but he knows what he wants and can get back on track – he has changed permanently, just from experiencing the new reality, even if it takes awhile to get there permanently.

Final Thoughts and Concluding Remarks

"As I committed myself to this trip, I heard everyone say it was a life changing experience. But I thought to myself... 'How could one trip change so much about one person?' After going on this trip I have learned a lot about myself, and a lot about life. I now know that one trip *can* change a lot about one person."

Most of the following paragraph comes from a conversation with Bryan, the trip's primary planner, fundraiser, defender, and leader. I spoke with him about trip outcomes and impacts on students, and will include and paraphrase a few of the thoughts he shared. Changes and transformations are difficult to name and describe, and they are impossible to measure. Each kid gets something different from the experience depending on what they want and need. The changes are so diverse and the students, all of us, are constantly growing as human beings. Change is slow when it is lasting. Part of the benefit of these programs is they give kids opportunities to see and be differently – it becomes a

benchmark and then they have to learn how to re-create that experience at home. This trip helps to teach kids what it is like to be better, and once kids know better, they become obligated to do better. It definitely takes time to take effect. "We help to give kids a new 'normal' – healthy relationships, boundaries, fun, passion, academics, service. We teach them that life does not have to be the way it has always been for them. We show them, 'this is how healthy people draw healthy boundaries', 'this is how you can have fun', 'this is how you can live your life with passion', 'this is how you can be academically connected to your world', and 'this is how people can interact on a social level and give back'."

My Personal Insights, Beliefs, Inspirations from Study

Did this program provide students with lasting changes? Definitely not all of the participants had 'quantum leaps' or breakthroughs. The outcomes and experience was different for each student who viewed it through her own eyes, his own needs. I believe that this program was also about going away, breaking out, letting go, and growing up. We asked students and ourselves to get uncomfortable, to struggle, to let go of old roles, expectations, and habits, in order to move toward getting healthy and "unstuck". Most, if not all, of the participants experienced true happiness at least once during the journey. Most exclaimed, "Pura Vida!" at one point while abroad. Students, and staff, were given opportunities to look into ourselves and find moments of clarity, balance, and awareness. We were also provided opportunities to look out of our selves and provide service to others while building a sense of interdependence and connection within our group and a greater global community. Were these lasting changes? I doubt any of the students, nor myself, will ever fully forget their participation in this excursion to Chile though it may

be impossible, even for them, to know how what may seemingly be a little shift in awareness will impact the future.

The voices of the participants in this program provide a suitable and powerful ending to this story. The following quotes are from presentations to the greater school community:

"The Roads Scholar trip to Chile was the most amazing experience of my life this far. I've learned so many new and valuable lessons that I can now actively apply to my life. And what may otherwise have taken years I was taught in only 2 short weeks. Going on this trip gave me the opportunity to step back and take a look at my life."

"Going to Chile with this school was both fun and life changing. It helped me to realize who I want to be and what I want to do in life."

"This is the new beginning to my life and relieving end to the old. I feel the trip was one of the best things that have ever happened to me. It has changed my life forever. Not only will it change my life, but I believe it will improve me personally from all I have seen and experienced."

Three days after we returned from Chile, with no prompting or request, a student offered to share her poem with me. I found it an amazing display of talent, vulnerability, and insight. I also see it as an example of some of the transformations that can take through life, as well as through programs such as this. Below is an excerpt from her writing.

> "February the 15th
>
> It is amazing how much personal growth a person can experience in a couple of years. In one year. In a couple of months. In one month. In a couple of weeks. In one week. In a couple of days. In one day. Yesterday.
>
> Change can come on so fast and all so slow at the same time. Sometimes it seems like the things in our lives will stay the same forever (and with some things

we want them to stay the same forever). But these things can change in an instant. I used to take that idea for granted. But I never forget it now.

Sometimes I forget how far and long this path has been. But I remember everything.

I remember a year ago.

How dependent,
How sad,
How pathetic,
How insane,
How ugly,
How rejected,
How lonely,
How dead,

I felt.

I remember February the 15th a year ago. When they took me to the ER; And then hours later to the "other" hospital. I remember being scared. I remember being mad, mad that I was still breathing. I remember hopelessness.

I remember getting better.

And remind myself that I get better still, on a daily basis.

This 15th of February, I will be able to lock away the memories of returning home from Chile, South America. I will be able to recall the faces of the people I helped, the lives I helped to improve.

Beautiful landscape, beautiful knowledge and wondrous experiences.

I will be able to remember

How independent,
How joyful,
How proud,
How sane,
How gorgeous,
How accepted,
How accompanied, and

How alive I felt while embarking on a life changing journey through a different country and to the different sides of me I haven't yet seen."

Can a trip change a life? I know several journeys have had powerful impacts on my life and so it seems did this trip impact the lives of these young people in significant and even "transformational" ways. Working and living with the seventeen participants in this program for over six weeks allowed me to see multiple aspects of them; their strengths and struggles, their hopes and worries, their positive qualities and their limitations. From my perspective, yes, a trip can change a life, and this international

experiential education program certainly seemed to have some powerful, and lasting, impacts on the students who participated in it.

"The place which may seem like the end may also be the beginning." (Ivy Baker Priest)

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent Form for Parents and School Staff

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: Experiential Approaches to Personal Transformations: Outward Journeys and Inward Adventures

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Nathalie Kees **CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Brandy Hodgson

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? We would like to better understand the benefits of participating in the six-week, "Roads Scholar" experiential immersion program to Chile, at Centennial High School.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? As one of the leaders of the trip who is also working towards her PhD at Colorado State, I (Brandy Hodgson) will be interviewing students, staff, faculty, and families about their experiences and perceptions of the trip. My advisor will also be working with me on the study

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? We hope to better understand and describe how students make meaning from their participation in a six-week experiential immersion program with an international component. We wish to better understand and describe the critical components of both the individuals and the program which allow for growth, learning, and positive personal and interpersonal changes.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? Observations and document collection will take place in both the classroom and the international settings throughout the six-week Roads Scholar program, no additional time or work will be involved for you during this aspect of the study. The interviews will be conducted upon return to Fort Collins take place at the school or at another agreed upon site and will be completed by April 30, 2006.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in two interviews, which will be audio taped and later transcribed:
First, we will conduct a 60-90 minute interview to talk about your experiences with the program.
Second, we will schedule a second interview of 45-60 minutes with you to share the information and ideas from the first interview transcript and allow you to change or add anything to it.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? There are no known reasons to not take part in this study. If you are connected to a student who is participating in this immersion program (teacher, staff, or family) I would value your thoughts and perspectives.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researchers have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks. The possible risk of you being identifiable in the write-up of the report exists. In order to minimize the risk of identification, we will use pseudonyms, change other identifying information, and report data aggregately rather than individually.

WILL I BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There is no known benefit in participating in this study, but we hope to provide more information on the benefits and personal growth opportunities that can occur through participation in the program. The findings may help to elicit future and continued support and funding for similar such programs.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE? There is no cost for participating in this study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?
We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials, we will use pseudonyms to protect your name and identity. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep you name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key. You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child, or you pose a danger to yourself or someone else.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY? If your son/daughter is removed from the program, chooses to not continue participating in the program for any reason, or chooses to withdraw consent to contact his/her parents you may also be removed from the study.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? No compensation will be provided for participation in this study.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH? The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS? Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigators, Nat Kees at Nathalie.Kees@colostate.edu or Brandy Hodgson at bhodgson@lamar.colostate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Meldrem, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? Your participation is greatly appreciated and could influence the future of programs such as this.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing __ pages.

_____	_____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study	Date
_____	
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study	
_____	_____
Name of person providing information to participant	Date
_____	
Signature of Research Staff	

Appendix B: Consent Form for Student Participants

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: Experiential Approaches to Personal Transformations: Outward Journeys and Inward Adventures

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Nathalie Kees
CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Brandy Hodgson

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? We would like to better understand the benefits of participating in the six-week, "Roads Scholar" experiential immersion program to Chile, at Centennial High School.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? As one of the leaders of the trip who is also working towards her PhD at Colorado State, I (Brandy Hodgson) will be interviewing students, staff, faculty, and families about their experiences and perceptions of the trip. My advisor will also be working with me on the study

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? We hope to better understand and describe how students make meaning from their participation in a six-week experiential immersion program with an international component. We wish to better understand and describe the critical components of both the individuals and the program which allow for growth, learning, and positive personal and interpersonal changes.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? Observations and document collection will take place in both the classroom and the international settings throughout the six-week Roads Scholar program, no additional time or work will be involved for you during this aspect of the study. The interviews will be conducted upon return to Fort Collins take place at the school or at another agreed upon site and will be completed by April 30, 2006.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? If you choose to participate, you can elect to participate in any or all of the following. Please initial next to the items you choose to participate in:

___1. Be observed in the classroom and international setting
___2. Submit journal summaries and/or other class documents for study purposes
___3. Participate in two interviews, which will be audio taped and transcribed:
First, we will conduct a 60-90 minute interview to talk about your experiences with the program.
Second, we will schedule a second interview of 45-60 minutes with you to share the transcriptions and ideas from the first interview and also allow you to change or add anything to it.
___4. With approval, I would like to interview your parents / guardians in regards to you and this experience

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? There are no known reasons to not take part in this study. If you are a student participating on this immersion experience we would value your thoughts and perspectives.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researchers have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks. The possible risk of you being identifiable in the write-up of the report exists. In order to minimize the risk of identification, we will use pseudonyms, change other identifying information, and report data aggregately rather than individually.

WILL I BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There is no known benefit in participating in this study, but we hope to provide more information on the benefits and personal growth opportunities that can occur through participation in the program. The findings may help to elicit future and continued support and funding for similar such programs.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE? There is no cost for participating in this study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?
We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials, we will use pseudonyms to protect your name and identity. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep you name and other identifying information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. For example, your name will be kept separate from your research records and these two things will be stored in different places under lock and key. You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child, or you pose a danger to yourself or someone else.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY? If you are removed from the program, or choose to not continue participating in the program for any reason, you may be removed from the study.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? No compensation will be provided for participation in this study.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH? The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS? Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Brandy Hodgson at bhodgson@lamar.colostate.edu or Nat Kees at Nathalie.Kees@colostate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Meldrem, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? Your participation is greatly appreciated and could influence the future of programs such as this.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing __ pages.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study | Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant | Date

Signature of Research Staff

Obtain your parent's permission ONLY if you are under 18 years of age.

PARENTAL SIGNATURE FOR MINOR

As parent or guardian I authorize _____ (print name) to become a participant for the described research. The nature and general purpose of the project have been satisfactorily explained to me by _____ and I am satisfied that proper precautions will be observed.

Parent/Guardian name (printed) | Minor's date of birth

Parent/Guardian signature | Date