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Factors that Shape Outdoor Leaders:
An Exploration of Outdoor Leadership Development Methods and Themes

By

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Abstract

Through my years of experience educating people in the outdoors I have continued to grow and improve my skillset. The definition of effective outdoor leadership is complex and not completely settled, but the methods by which leaders become effective are even less clear in the literature. In this paper I outlined my complex personal path of experiences that led to my leadership abilities today. I reflected on challenging experiences, mentors that guided my way, and moments of sudden understanding; I analyzed those experiences to develop themes that I believe were (and are) essential to my own development as a leader. Themes discovered were (a) mentorship, (b) challenge, reflection, and opportunity, (c) training and skills development, (d) observational learning, and (e) community and socialization. I concluded by comparing this framework of themes to a leadership development program that I instructed – the Outdoor Leadership Development Series at the University of Wyoming. This paper is valuable as a framework for understanding the many and varied processes that transform novice leaders into excellent ones.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Outdoor leader effectiveness, and the choice of tools used to increase that effectiveness, tends to be reliant on context. Context will dictate training objectives, and thus training plans, for outdoor leaders; for example college outdoor programs, professional guiding companies, and adventure therapy companies will have unique plans to develop their novice leaders (Marchand, 2011). Though extensive research has answered questions about the traits exhibited by exceptional or effective leaders (see Chapter 2), little research has been published on the building blocks that organizations use to develop their leaders and in what contexts they might be utilized. Richardson, Kalvaitis, and Delparte (2014) also made this assertion, and suggested two methods for developing the teaching skills element of outdoor educators. Marchand and Russell (2011) demonstrated that within the outdoor behavioral healthcare field (aka “wilderness therapy”), trainings for new leaders varied widely in their length and content. There is a need in the outdoor leadership field to identify and understand the training and development components – building blocks – that combine to create effective leaders. One way to accomplish this is through an examination of experiences.

I began my personal outdoor leadership journey around age 15 – about 11 years ago – and contributing factors to my development began earlier. Through the lens of my personal history from novice to professional outdoor leader, I intend to outline and clarify the most important methods that programs or people might use to train outdoor leaders. This research will include detailed personal narratives, followed by the application of literature that is applicable to the situation. The objectives of this research are to:

1) Use personal leadership experiences to make connections to modern concepts of leadership development.
2) Develop a framework of coherent building blocks that may lead to the development of effective outdoor leaders.

First, I will outline the literature that relates to developing an operational definition of an effective outdoor leader. Then, seven personal experiences will be described in detailed narrative form, and themes will be synthesized using this narrative, literature, and insights from individuals involved when possible. Names and other identifying details will be changed to the extent that the essence of the experience is not lost.

Limitations

Given the highly personal nature of this research, there would be no reasonable way to avoid bias; there are many ways that bias will likely appear. First, each experience analyzed is my own, and therefore subject to the faults that may appear in attempting to recall them. It is possible, if not likely, that my memories of these experiences are incomplete. It has been demonstrated that, unconsciously, people tend to insert new (false) information into memories (Loftus, 2002), and biographical memories are often unreliable (Gardner, 2001). I intend to limit this aspect of bias with two means: a thoughtful reflection on the experience to reduce the chance of important details being missed, and triangulation using conversations with other people involved in these situations, when possible.

Second, the experiences chosen are not necessarily a representative set of experiences in my leadership development. Criteria for selecting experiences included: an apparently clear memory of the occasion with notable details that affect its outcome, whether the occasion stands out in my memory as significant, whether the occasion could be described and analyzed without

incriminating or defaming any particular person or organization, and whether the experience appeared to have notable value to the objective of the research. Thus, experiences that were not included in this research included early life lessons, incomplete or vague memories, many various outdoor leadership experiences in practice, and seemingly inconsequential experiences. This aspect of bias is limited through cautious self-reflection and elimination of unhelpful experiences through the above criteria.

Finally, despite careful examination and reflection it is possible that I have missed important points or lessons from my experiences. It is also possible that I have unintentionally misrepresented an experience, and that a different perspective on the situation may reveal facts that were unclear to me. In an explanation of the various types of subjectivity that may plague ethnographic study, Hegelund (2005) expressed the primary issue with unintentional misrepresentation. The researcher's background may unintentionally blind them to some aspect of their data, but, "if the researcher is competent, he or she will give his or her own interpretation, his or her own perspective to the ethnography, and this is why there is no need to worry" (p. 656).

As explained above, I used a set of criteria for inclusion of personal narratives; one could argue that the data chosen reflects my personal biases, and that my knowledge or worldview impacts not only my interpretation of these events, but also which events are included. That is likely true, but again Hegelund (2005) made a clarifying point about this.

> If we acknowledge that data are to some extent a hybrid of our theories and our sense data, different researchers will obtain different data, and these, in turn, will result in different ethnographies. These different perspectives will give us new ways of seeing the world… (p. 657)

In these ways I have done what is possible to make this work objective when the objective truth is clear and needed (e.g. I had a conversation with someone), and transparently subjective when necessary (e.g. my interpretation of an event). As an examination of personal and cultural experience, my bias is also my strength. My understandings and learning related to my experiences are genuine and thorough, and represent my inquisitive perspective. With this understanding, this research may provide a valuable insight – one of many – into ways in which individuals may support their own leadership development, or ways in which organizations can support an individual's or group's leadership journey.

Chapter Two: Literature Review (Defining Effective Outdoor Leaders)

Before the means and themes of leadership development can be determined, the definition of an effective outdoor leader should be established. Without a general set of outcomes and beliefs about leadership, these lessons or themes would have no direction or final goal, and therefore would be unhelpful. There is no evidence to suggest that outdoor programs share the same principles and goals for their leaders; in fact, there is bound to be variation and diversity between programs (Bauch & Hutton, 2012). But, we can glean guidelines and themes from the literature. This is not a new direction for research; the question of how one defines good outdoor leaders, "has been one of the most sought after and commonly researched questions in the adventure programming field for the past 25 years" (Garvey & Gass, 1999, p 44).

There are many sources that suggest the traits that an outdoor leader should have, or what areas leaders should be experienced in. In simple terms a good leader could be one who understands and implements a variety of skills that include technical abilities, interpersonal skills and relationship building, and risk management (Graham, 1997; Kosseff, 2003; Priest & Gass, 2005, & Raynolds, Lodato, Gordon, Blair-Smith, Welsh, & Gerzon, 2007). Defining leadership itself at more than a foundational level is challenging and debatable; Palmer (2009) makes the point that though various fields may define effective leadership in one way or another, there is a core element of leadership which remains the same. "Leadership, at its core, essentially involves influencing others to act in light of a vision of how best to achieve a shared mission" (p 527). Russell (2012) gives up on making a definition, stating, "…Nailing down a distinct definition of what leadership is and a definite explanation for how and why good leadership occurs cannot be done" (p 31). Russell continues by establishing a working definition, however, which is a good

example of what leadership scholars tend to do in order to simplify a complex concept. This results in some imprecision, but the definition for the purposes of this paper can be further refined in other ways.

Other fields can be tools to refine our understanding of what an effective leader is. Military leadership has been studied using Fielder's Contingency Theory (FCT) (Ellyson, Gibson, Nichols, & Doerr, 2012), which asserts that, "leadership effectiveness is a function of the interaction between the leader and the leadership situation" (Peters, Hartke, & Pohlmann, 1985, p 274). In the field of recreation leadership, Russell (2012) also utilizes FCT as a framework for describing effective leaders. This is reflective of the concepts of the conditional outdoor leadership theory (COLT). COLT, as described by Priest & Gass (2005), is the concept that as the favorability of a situation increases or decreases a leader should adapt their focus towards either relationships (high favorability) or tasks (low favorability).

This also impacts the style that the leader chooses to utilize, which Priest & Gass (2005) divide into autocratic, democratic, and abdicratic. For example, good leaders will notice that a storm is rapidly approaching, will determine that favorability is low because of this hazard, and will respond by focusing the group's attention more on tasks (such as setting up camp) than relationships. They would likely utilize an autocratic leadership style to ensure that the group is safe and prepared; if the storm is far away or the leader wants the group to learn from this experience they might be inclined to use a democratic style. If the group is in a stage of development in which they are capable of making their own decisions effectively, the leader may choose to take an abdicratic approach, allowing participants to take most or all of the decision-making responsibility. The leadership effectiveness is then determined in part by the leader's

response to the situation, which means that good leaders should be capable of making those decisions.

The business leadership field may also provide insights into the traits of an effective leader. Kouzes, DeKrey, & Posner (2013) examined anecdotes of over 5,000 different leaders and developed what they call "The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. The practices are Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, [and] Encourage the Heart [sic]" (p. 6). In another book related specifically to student leadership, Kouzes & Posner (2008) explained each of these practices. These exemplary leadership practices can be summarized as an archetypal leader that leads through actions and deeds, that holds a metaphorical space for vision, mission, and values and inspires this in others, that challenges every decision in order to find the best ones, that empowers other people to make decisions, and that promotes an environment of caring, passion, and celebration (pp. 11-21). Edersheim (2013) states that the three components of effective leadership are organizational identity (where each element of an organization, and its people, should match in identity), external orientation (continuously observant of changes, new ideas, and new opportunities), and integration (ensuring that all needs and goals are aligned and met). Palmer (2009) goes one step further and outlines how leaders, regardless of other traits, must be ethical at three different levels – their personal selves, their means of leading, and the intended outcomes of their leading. This ties ethical behavior into the many traits of an effective leader.

For yet another perspective on effective leadership traits, Minthorn (2014) described traits that Native Americans may perceive as best. These included a holistic commitment to the aims of the group being led, determination to fight for the community or the good of the people, dedication to the people and the cause involved, patience with oneself and others in the

community, and bravery and strength. Burns (2010), while admitting that no single study will be able to profile the many styles and values of leadership of all Native Americans, explored leadership beliefs of the Mashantucket Pequot and summarized their views into ten points, including: service leadership, community involvement, respect and collaboration, observational and continuous learning, cultural participation, and communication and transparency (p. 16). McLeod (2002) summarizes their research into the same subject by stating:

> The Indian views the leader as a servant of the people, and in tribal organizations, all people are expected to act as leaders when their specialized knowledge or abilities are needed at a particular time. When we look at Native leadership, we see this as the core of their leadership concept time and again. (n.p.)

While all of these fields contribute in some ways to our understanding and operational definition of effective leadership, the most functional and useful concepts seem to come from leaders in the outdoor leadership field. Smith & Penney (2010) provided a framework for qualifying outdoor leaders into three categories: effective, exemplary, and extraordinary. The authors argued that *effective* (emphasis mine) outdoor leaders are ones that are situationally aware, able to modify strategies depending on circumstance, and "[Highlight] the values, beliefs, and personal qualities of individuals… as central to the task" (p 25). These leaders are what we might describe as transformational, which Bass (1999) described as empowering, inspirational, and future-oriented. Other authors have confirmed that transformational leadership is a trait of effective outdoor leaders (Brymer & Gray, 2006; Brymer, Gray, Carpenter, & Cotton, 2010; Hayashi & Ewert, 2006), or leaders in general (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Gaan & Gaan, 2014).

Smith & Penney (2010) asserted that the core difference between effective and *exemplary* (emphasis mine) leaders is authentic leadership, which includes leaders being open, honest, and

clear about their intentions and beliefs. Michie & Gooty (2005) use the terms "self-transcendent values," and, "positive other-directed emotions," to describe authentic leaders (p. 441). Finally, Smith & Penney (2010) made the distinction between exemplary and *extraordinary* (emphasis mine) leaders based on their ability to be spiritual leaders, "where [there is] a connection with self, others and the environment, in conjunction with a positive culture [that] is central to that way of being" (p. 26). These are leaders that peers would identify as stand-outs, or truly exceptional leaders. The authors assert that, "[spiritual leadership's] distinctiveness lies in the emphasis that leadership is a learning journey, where leaders experience a sense of calling and feeling of membership and commitment to a greater cause" (p 27). This ability to care for and attend to a greater cause is what the authors argue makes spiritual leadership essential to attain high level leadership. For the purpose of this paper, facets of all three categories of leadership will be combined into the term effective, because this is a useful catch-all term for the outcomes of leader development. In addition, outdoor programs may have varied goals and missions for the development of their leaders, so it should not be expected that all outdoor leadership development programs would have the goal of creating what Smith & Penney (2010) describe as extraordinary leaders.

Determining who has achieved mastery in a given skillset or area of knowledge is challenging. Winch (2010) argued that there are two types of expertise – practical and subject – and that they cannot be understood in isolation. Subject expertise is knowledge and concept based, and a subject-expert will be able to learn new things, combine opinions and studies, and generally be exceptionally knowledgeable in a given academic subject area. Practical expertise relates to the ability to accomplish tasks or skills, "such as carpentry, medicine, engineering, painting, or fishing" (p 1). As with a true definition of leadership, a true definition of an expert is

far beyond the scope of this paper. However, Winch (2010) makes an essential point about the nature of success as an outdoor leader or outdoor program. Outdoor leadership – just like any field in which one could have expertise – includes subject knowledge and practical knowledge; one cannot be considered without the other.

For the purposes of the framework to be outlined in this paper, many components of effective leaders should be combined and generalized in a way that creates themes, and thus guidance. If we accept that effective leaders should have risk management, technical, and interpersonal skills (Graham, 1997; Kosseff, 2003; Priest & Gass, 2005, & Raynolds, Lodato, Gordon, Blair-Smith, Welsh, & Gerzon, 2007), should modify their styles and behaviors based on situational context (Russell, 2012), should include aspects of transformational, authentic, and spiritual leadership (Brymer & Gray, 2006; Brymer, Gray, Carpenter, & Cotton, 2010; Hayashi & Ewert, 2006; Smith & Penney, 2010), and should have expertise in both the subject and practical aspects of leadership (Winch, 2010), then it follows that a plan or metaphorical pathway to train these leaders should pay attention to this wide variety of leadership facets. The various aspects of this path will be outlined through the use of personal narratives.

Chapter Three: A Leadership Journey and Literature Review

In my decade or so of outdoor leadership experiences I have learned a great deal about what it means to be an effective leader. I continue to learn new things each time I bring new people into the outdoors or contribute to the development of a new leader. The below experiences are presented chronologically, and were chosen using the criteria described in the Introduction. Each experience is divided into three parts: a detailed personal account of the experience, integration of literature on the subject, and themes or lessons drawn from each experience. Where possible, informal interviews with people involved in these experiences provide further insight.

Developmental Exposure to Role Models and Adventure

I grew up with a father that managed a university outdoor program. This fact shaped my early life exposure to adventure and to people that I would later consider role models. Though no single experience could express the entirety of the lessons and perspectives gained during this time, one in particular stands out. As a teenager I was given the opportunity to act as an assistant on a first-year student wilderness orientation program; about 18 students were taken to a mountain campus, went rafting, hiked a nearby peak, and participated in a challenge course program.

At one point during these programs I watched as one of the leaders interacted with the student group while emulating styles that they had acquired from the lead instructor – my father. The group faced a challenge (known as a “low element”) called Nitro Crossing, wherein they needed to transport their entire group, plus an open cup of water, across a rope swing from a log onto a small platform. If any person touched the ground, or if even a single drop of the water –

metaphorical nitroglycerin – spilled from the cup, the entire group would return to the start. The instructor noticed that, as is common in some groups, the male students always went first, followed by the female students; this was brought up in a debriefing session, and the group had a moment of realization that had ripple effects throughout the remainder of the trip. Questions were raised about the genuineness of the concern, about the real reasons for the outcome, and about the group's perceptions of power and gender. These were not sexist students – they unconsciously followed patterns that they were used to. The group continued to develop through the remainder of the trip, and they continued to be highly aware of gender when performing other tasks.

I also regularly observed interactions between leaders during my youth – typically young adults that entered their college years with minimal or unrefined skills who left the program several years later as apparently competent and admirable outdoor leaders. I had the opportunity to observe pre-trip meetings, planning, debriefing, trip preparation, and even conflict resolution in action. My observational practice was not measured nor practiced, but images and archetypes exist in my memories of those times. I recall many interactions between my father and his students that in reflection are mentorship experiences. Even today he maintains connections to many of his past students, and in my conversations with them he appears as a common theme in their development.

There are three emerging themes that I see in these experiences. First is the impact of early-life exposure to the culture of outdoor leadership, or to leadership in general. Second is the value of mentorship, which is a common theme throughout these experiences. Third is the value of observational learning, as seen through my eyes as an observer.

Exposure to outdoor leadership culture. There is a culture within the field of outdoor education (broadly defined) that has been easy to participate in but difficult to describe clearly. In my experience, the outdoor leadership culture has its own language, terms and concepts that are commonly understood when communicating with other outdoor leaders. Examples of such language include check-ins, transparency, perceived risk, group dynamics, challenge-by-choice, and the adventure experience paradigm (Priest & Gass, 2005). There are also social rules that guide the interactions between people, such as a willingness to overlook the disheveled appearance of a leader who is sleeping in their truck through the season, or the understanding that leaders must be self-sufficient in the field, or the tendency for hierarchical team systems to act more egalitarian. I have not come across any source that effectively documents this culture, but growing up within it has provided me with a sense that I know it well, and can integrate into each microcosm of outdoor leadership culture that I encounter.

Mentorship by those with experience. Mentorship is a broadly defined concept where individuals are provided support by others who have more experience or perspective. Eby et al. (2013) explained that these relationships are often unique, dynamic, and vary in nature (p. 441), though they have clear benefits that can be summarized (p. 456). Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs (1997) made the case that mentors also benefit from these relationships, though they may have a combination of "other-focused" and "self-focused" motivations for doing so (p. 82).

Eby et al. (2013) performed an extensive meta-analysis on mentorship that included a total *N* of 40,737 people from a variety of disciplines. They assert that there are three specific types of mentoring: youth mentoring – "a supportive relationship between a nonparental adult and a young person" (p. 442), academic mentoring – "where a faculty member provides guidance and support on both academic and nonacademic issues outside the classroom" (p. 442), and

workplace mentoring – “oriented toward helping the protégé develop personally and professionally in his or her career” (p. 442). All three of these may have an impact on the development of leaders, depending on their circumstances. According to the authors, there are a wide variety of benefits to protégés in mentor relationships, including greater career satisfaction, improved socialization, and higher relationship quality (p. 456). Mentorship relationships are clearly beneficial in many circumstances, and across many disciplines.

Many fields have clearly described the value of mentorship, and the need for good mentors. Ritchie (1999) described mentorship in anthropology, stating that, “…working with my professor in the field helped to bridge the *gap between theory and praxis* in my training as an anthropologist” (emphasis mine) (p. 35). Reid, Misky, Harrison, Sharpe, Auerbach, & Glasheen (2011) demonstrated through survey data that academic hospitalists who have mentors are much more likely to be promoted or produce academic publications. They also assert that “in academic medicine, mentorship has been positively associated with promotion, grant funding, job satisfaction, time spent on research, and publication success” (p. 25). In the field of business and career development, Scandura (1992) found that mentorship (in agreement with other literature) was correlated with increased career mobility; this may have occurred due to a repeating cycle of improved performance that leads to new interactions and mentors, which leads to improved performance (p. 173).

Aside from mentorship by supervisors or teachers, peer mentorship can be valuable for personal development as well. Jay (2007) described a successful program of peer mentorship that was intended to bring together students with and without learning disabilities. The students in the program felt rewarded and benefitted by their new peer mentorship relationships (p. 21). In an examination of personal narratives, Preston, Ogenchuk, & Nsiah (2014) came to the conclusion

that there are several key aspects of peer mentorship. These key items included encouragement of peer mentorship through the physical (office proximity, personal interaction), logistical (working together regularly), and "institutional features of the PhD program" (p. 63) that the authors were members of. Other key characteristics were the "freedom to mentor and be mentored… [and] the dichotomous freedom and structure of the program" (p. 63). In essence, the social and academic environment was conducive to the development of peer mentor relationships. These are the kind of relationships that outdoor leaders can develop; in my personal experience, leaders that spend a great deal of time together (e.g. during a summer of field work) tend to build peer relationships which reflect the patterns described above.

Outdoor leadership work can be stressful and time consuming, depending on the circumstance. It is not unusual for an outdoor leader to be in the field, working for 30 days or more in an expeditionary program, or situated in a particular camp environment for the duration of a season (Marchand, 2008). This environment can cause burnout in leaders, often seen as the loss in motivation to continue this kind of work. Bailey, Kang, & Kuiper (2012) found that the work environment and group cohesion are the most important factors that lead to, or prevent, burnout. Mentors have a substantial role to play in helping their staff avoid burnout, in part because they impact the work environment and the development of group cohesion if they are in a leadership role.

In a study of volunteer healthcare workers, Bakker, Van Der Zee, Lewig, & Dollard (2006) found that burnout was mediated in large part by the personality factors of the employees – a conclusion that can be easily compared to outdoor leadership work, particularly outdoor behavioral healthcare. The authors suggested that employees who were generally more introverted should receive more support and guidance, which could be from a mentor (p. 46).

It is interesting how much the research on burnout points towards the benefit of having mentors. Magnuson (1992) stated that burnout is common, and has been for many years; the author suggested that the development process (and the process throughout a season) should include openness, caring, and opportunities for feedback – aspects of leadership development that a mentor can impact directly. Bailey et al. (2012) also supported the idea that administrators should be intentional about building and maintaining relationships among staff members. Based on a study of staff at a summer camp that provided services to people with intellectual disabilities, Ko, Lunsky, Hensel, & Dewa (2012) stated that, “staff need training not only to manage aggression and reduce its likelihood, but also to manage their own emotional responses to the accompanying stress” (p 484). Mentors can support their mentees in goal-setting, learning from mistakes, and becoming more effective delegators (Gero, 1993, p. 34). Burnout is clearly an issue for developing outdoor leaders, and mentors can have a positive effect on preventing or limiting that burnout by providing mentees with skills, experiences, and support.

There are specific ways that mentors and protégés can improve their practices and relationships. Upon studying formal (intentionally or institutionally established; as opposed to informal) mentor relationships, Eby & Lockwood (2005) described many recommendations including “clearer communication…better monitoring and follow-up…better matching of mentors and protégés, careful targeting of mentors and protégés…clarification of roles…greater opportunity to share experiences…and the use of orientation programs” (p. 456). From the perspective of leadership development this would suggest that formal mentorship relationships, when carefully designed, could be a useful companion to more informal mentorship. Eby & Lockwood (2005) note, however, that there are few empirical studies on the true differences between informal and formal mentorship relationships, so there will likely be uncertainty of

outcomes until further research can be performed (p. 444). In a study on quality, quantity, and satisfaction, Xu & Payne (2014) found that the quality of mentorship is much more important than the quantity, and that satisfaction is closely related to quality. The authors conclude that programs should help increase satisfaction for protégés, should monitor satisfaction in order to effectively respond to issues, and should seek to clarify expectations between protégés and mentors (p. 520).

Observational and experiential learning. Humans are profoundly social animals, and we respond to the actions and emotions of others in remarkable ways; our observational learning capacity even extends to our feelings of pain – these feelings can be reduced (Colloca & Benedetti, 2009) or even increased (Vogtle, Barke, & Kroner-Herwig, 2013) through observational learning at a deep mental level. Albert Bandura is perhaps the most influential psychologist and philosopher in this arena. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (in brief summary) asserts that humans learn by observation – a social behavior – and do not necessarily have to perform the thing personally in order to learn it. Bandura (2001) stated, "[People] create styles of behavior that enable them to realize desired outcomes, and pass on the effective ones to others by social modeling and other experiential modes of influence" (p. 22). Bandura associated this with the innate human desire and capacity for survival, and argued that humans utilize their agency in large part through observing others and responding to their observations.

In addition, as my young mind made observations, it began filling with successful stories and images. Those socially constructed bits of learning became tools that could be used to influence my self-efficacy, which has been shown to contribute to future success, particularly if those social concepts can be internalized (Bandura, 1989, p 729-731). This is observational learning in action, which by nature requires observations, social modeling, and self-appraisal.

Self-appraisals in relation to social realities (e.g. the social concepts behind outdoor leadership culture) are complex and, "require an optimistic sense of personal efficacy…because ordinary social realities are usually strewn with difficulties" (p 732).

First Solo Trip Leading Experience

About a year after entering college I was provided the opportunity to lead an introductory backpacking course at a university outdoor program. During the pre-trip meeting a student, pseudonym MJ, entered late and unsure whether they wanted to join the trip or not. MJ decided to register, which we did that evening. The trip was short – we left mid-day on a Friday, hiked to our camp, and stayed there for two nights. It was a small group consisting of myself, two couples, two siblings, and MJ. A few miles into the hike, my primary challenge became clear; MJ was very unfit, had a negative and disruptive attitude, and seemed unwilling to connect with the group. The next day I faced perhaps the strangest challenge I have ever faced as an outdoor leader.

On the morning of the second day, I woke up and started walking away from camp to enjoy the sun rising over the tall peaks. It was a brisk mountain morning that I hoped would bring some energy to our group. Unfortunately, within a few meters of my tent I noticed something disturbing – a hastily dug hole, no more than a couple of inches deep, containing somewhat fresh human feces. A small tree next to the hole hosted a large wad of toilet paper stuffed under its low branches. Reflection on the people in the area revealed a very small list: our group of eight, a couple camped about a quarter-mile away, and a family another quarter-mile from them. The reality was upsetting and clear: one of our group had needed to relieve themselves in the night, had wandered what seemed like a far enough distance from camp, and had been unable or unwilling to dispose of their waste properly.

In a morning meeting I directly addressed what I had found. At the time I was very certain that I had clearly described and demonstrated how to defecate in the woods in a responsible way, but I reminded the group of these principles and of how inappropriate that behavior was. However unlikely, it was possible that this had been done by a different group of people (though it must have been that evening), so I did not put blame on anyone. MJ was silent during that conversation, and appeared very embarrassed. The next day MJ stayed behind while we attempted a nearby peak, and the issue did not come up again.

Reflection. This experience affected my leadership development in a variety of ways, some of which only came through reflection much later in my career. I initially put all of the blame for the situation on MJ because they were disruptive, contrarian, and exhibited behaviors that I translated as lack of responsibility and concern. Though I still believe that it was MJ who left their mess, I also now believe that other factors were at play in the situation, and that if I had paid more attention to MJ's needs or opened further conversation, the outcome may have been better.

Learning through experience is a subject that has been debated and researched for decades, arguably starting or at least catalyzing with John Dewey (1938), a well-known educational philosopher in the early 20th century. Modern adaptations of Dewey's concepts of experiential education – such as the oft-cited adaptation by Kolb (1984) – have been applied to engineering education (Abdulwahed & Nagy, 2009), personal reflections on developing as an instructor (Akella, 2010), entrepreneurship (Pittaway & Cope, 2007), international agricultural programming (Lamm, Cannon, Roberts, Irani, Snyder, Brendemuhl, & Rodriguez, 2011), geography education (Ives-Dewey, 2009), and teacher education (Russell-Bowie, 2013), among many others. A more thorough list can be found in Schenck & Cruickshank (2015).

Kolb's model revolves around a basic cycle of four elements: having a concrete experience, followed by reflective observation, followed by abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. In essence, learning results from having experiences and reflecting on them in a cyclical fashion (Kolb, 1984); this framework has been criticized for being overly simplistic and therefore missing important details, but that may be acceptable in exchange for clarity (Bergsteiner, Avery, & Neumann, 2010). The idea is ubiquitous in outdoor and adventure education, which are often seen as being underneath the umbrella of experiential education (Gilbertson, Bates, McLaughlin, & Ewert, 2006). Despite its ubiquity, Kolb's cycle has received significant criticism and may be ready for a renovation. Many years ago, Hopkins (1993) criticized Kolb's conclusions on many levels, and argued that Dewey's perspectives (though older and less refined perhaps) remain superior. Hopkins writes:

> We are drawn to the question: Why does this matter? Kolb's theory is useful to people. It seems to conform to their experience, seems intuitively sound and commonsensical. Why not ignore its problematicity? The answer, not surprisingly, is complex and requires consideration of ends/means relationships in education, and of the relations between learning and the learner. (p. 59)

Using very new concepts of neuroscience and modern understandings of learning, Schenck & Cruickshank (2015) argued that Kolb's concept of experiential learning is past-due for change, and that at several levels it is fundamentally flawed. In essence, Kolb's theory relies on assumptions that the human brain steps consecutively from one portion of the cycle to another. The authors agreed with the meaning and application of the theory – experience and reflection are beneficial to learning – but argued that the brain works differently and more

dynamically, spending very little time focused on any single part of the experiential learning cycle as described by Kolb.

The system described by Schenck & Cruickshank (2015) includes five aspects: framing, activity, direct debriefing, bridge building, and assimilation. Framing establishes the brain's expectations, and prepares it to engage in particular types of cognition that will be conducive to learning (e.g. verbally or non-verbally expressing to a participant that they should pay attention to communication during an activity). The activity itself attempts to stimulate the brain's motivational systems so that it pays attention. Direct debriefing immediately follows activities, and requires specific questioning or prompting in order to make fresh neural connections between the activity and the framing. Bridge building involves engaging the participant's brain in more complex thinking that ties the activity and its lessons to big picture concepts. And finally, assimilation is the process of internalizing the experience into the person's existence and personal beliefs (pp. 85-89).

Through all of these examples, then, it is clear that reflection – use of the experiential learning cycle in one or another of its forms, is important to learning from that experience. This is true from the observational learning perspective as well, thus tying those two concepts together.

Challenging Experience with Young Students

The second outing organization I worked for as an outdoor leader delivered a powerful dose of reality into my understanding of the challenges that outdoor leaders face. I entered this organization as a relative novice, but with enough experience and knowledge that I could be considered a co-leader instead of an intern. I recall meeting my team and immediately feeling tension within the group – a result of staffing decisions and previous season outcomes that the

staff did not appreciate. As excited young professionals, however, we were driven to provide an excellent experience for our group that would be arriving the next day. The dozen 13-year-old students were mixed gender, came from generally affluent families from various parts of the country, and were characteristically enthusiastic and nervous about their upcoming trip. The plan was to float a nearby river for several days, complete a service learning project in a semi-local community for a week, and then take a seven-day backpacking trip.

It took about a day to figure out that at least of one our students was going to be a significant challenge to manage; the student – pseudonym JR – had a particularly hard time with certain simple tasks, and had trouble with emotions and understanding other people. During the first section of our programming on the river, we had an incident with a student getting caught in a strainer (a collection of branches and tree limbs dangling in the river; strainers are among the biggest dangers of river sports because one can become caught up in them and drown). It was essential that I get to the caught student as fast as possible due to the risk of drowning. Unfortunately, JR was sharing a small boat with me, and their actions directly opposed my efforts to get to shore; JR's actions were certainly not intentional, but were based on an inability to understand the situation or respond appropriately. I paddled hard for the shore, dragged the boat onto the sand, and ran as fast as possible upriver to reach the caught student afraid that I would not be able to make it soon enough. Fortunately, we rescued the student successfully, with only a scratched leg and a lot of panic. These incidents of concern continued throughout the trip, and JR required constant attention. The leader team spent hours each day and evening writing up reports about JR's behavior and the challenges we faced with their behavior.

Upon resupply at the basecamp we learned that JR had been diagnosed on the autism spectrum a few years prior, but JR's father was insistent that this was untrue. As a leader team

we had a difficult decision to make. Several things were clear to us: 1) JR was taking up as much as 4-5 hours per day of our combined efforts, 2) we had no confidence that JR could manage personal or group safety during the upcoming backpacking trip, and 3) we did not have the experience or training necessary to support JR's needs on this trip. With administrative support, we made the difficult decision to keep JR behind from the final portion of the trip. This was upsetting to many people, namely JR's twin sibling who was also on the trip. Though we were confident in our decision, no one in the situation was happy; JR was heart-broken, the twin was angry, the rest of the group was sad despite their own challenges with JR, and the father could only be described as furious.

The debriefing and reflection spent on this situation was long and emotional. It was painful for everyone involved because we felt that we had failed somehow in our inability to meet JR's needs. We were sad that we did not know about this earlier, because we may have been able to add another staff member to the trip in anticipation of meeting other needs. To this day I reflect on that experience each time I have a challenging student, and I ask myself what I can do to support their needs. This experience is one of the first examples of the impacts of challenge and reflection on my development as a leader. This is discussed in more detail later.

Collegiate Adventure Education

After achieving an Associate's Degree in an unrelated field I transferred to Fort Lewis College, an undergraduate liberal arts college, to study adventure education. Through that experience I built a foundation of technical and theoretical skills in the field of adventure education, and added to the things I already knew. I also met one of my mentors there – Dr. Lee Frazier. He taught many of my classes, and I was a teaching assistant for his Philosophy and Theory of Adventure Education course. I bonded with him, and remain friends to this day.

Training and skills development. Several sources have shown value in leadership education at the college level (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 2000). Cress et al. (2001) demonstrated that students in a variety of college leadership programs increased their conflict resolution skills, ability to plan and implement programs, understanding of leadership and desire to share this with others, sense of civic responsibility, and their participation in co-curricular activities, even after controlling for variables such as gender, class, and academic performance. Importantly, the authors also indicated that these programs shared three elements that, "emerged as directly impacting student development: (a) opportunities for service (such as volunteering); (b) experiential activities (such as internships); and (c) active learning through collaboration (such as group projects in the classroom)" (p. 23). My experiences at Fort Lewis College included all three of the above elements, particularly experiential activities and learning through collaboration. Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt (2000) analyzed data from colleges and universities that were provided grant money to expand leadership programming. The authors found that many programs had notable improvement in student leadership, and list many characteristics of the most successful programs, which include self-assessment and reflection, skill building, problem solving, intercultural issues, outdoor activities, student leadership of programs, mentorship, and targeted training and development (pp 17-19). Again, each of these characteristics can be identified in the Fort Lewis Adventure Education program. Self-assessment and reflection were commonplace and often required after significant programs. Multiple courses were focused on skill building, such as rock climbing, whitewater paddling, mountaineering, and backcountry travel. Problem solving occurred each time students were given leadership of programs. Intercultural issues were addressed in at least two courses – Adventure Education 101, and Philosophy and Theory of

Adventure Education (. Each student was also provided tools they needed to develop in a direction that would benefit them; I also had the benefit of mentorship through my professors and more experienced students. Note that mentorship is once again a theme in leadership development.

There are currently dozens of colleges and universities in the United States that offer degree programs in outdoor education, adventure education, outdoor leadership, or a similar field. Examples include Fort Lewis College, Green Mountain College, Prescott College, Plymouth State University (Adventure Education at all), Colorado Mountain College (Outdoor Education and Outdoor Recreation Leadership), Warren Wilson College (Outdoor Leadership), and Georgia State College & University (Outdoor Education). This is one way that a novice leader can progress towards expertise in outdoor leadership, though each program will vary in its content and objectives. For example, the Adventure Education degree program at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado includes this in their mission statement:

> We aim to equip our students with not just technical skills and the ability to lead, teach, and facilitate others, but the ability to think critically, conduct disciplined inquiry, communicate effectively, and to put ideas into action in ways that not only better society but the profession of adventure education. (Adventure Ed. Mission, n.d.)

It would be difficult to argue that a degree in adventure education or outdoor recreation is necessary for the success of an outdoor leader. Outdoor leadership requires experience and exposure among other traits, and a degree is not a substitute for this (Plaut, 2001). Garvey & Gass (1999) found that outdoor programs tend to want staff that have a strong balance of actual experience and formal education (which could include a college degree or education through

programs such as the National Outdoor Leadership School). It is interesting that there is no distinction in this study between a college degree of any sort, and a college degree in this field. The authors noted a growing sophistication in the way that leaders are hired. Considering that this study was done 15 years ago, it seems likely that hiring preferences have continued to change. In 2003, a qualitative study of programs that were accredited by the Association of Experiential Education (AEE) showed that, "over 55% desired college level schooling" (Maningas & Simpson, 2003, p 354).

Academic degree programs in this field have received a notable amount of criticism, in large part because the studies mentioned above indicate that the people making hiring decisions put little value in a candidate's college degree (unless they have no degree at all). Munge (2009), reflecting on research results from Barnes (2004) suggested that the intended outcomes of these degree programs actually match the traits and skillsets that are cited as important in hiring situations. Munge (2009) also argued that universities that provide these degrees are doing a poor job of communicating the outcomes of their programs, which has resulted in a misrepresentation of their value (p. 37).

Yet despite the uncertain nature of the value of a degree in the outdoor field, these programs can benefit their students. I learned a great deal during my schooling, including organizational, administrative, and theoretical knowledge that may be difficult to acquire elsewhere by working a field job. The mentorship that I experienced – and continue to value – was also significant, and I will maintain the connections that I created. In my personal communications with Lee, my mentor from the program, he outlined several of the points that he thought were valuable about it. Mentorship, opportunities for experiences, critical thinking skills, and informal connections and learning were all things that he identified. He also said that we

cannot underestimate the value of peer interactions in a group of developing leaders. Lee's perspective is likely biased in preference for college outdoor leadership education, but he confirmed several important themes that I had previously identified.

A Profound Training Experience

Several years ago I worked as an instructor for a well-known outdoor education company – pseudonym PO – for a season. PO administers 10-day or longer trainings for all of its staff each season; new instructors take the full training, and returning instructors take a shorter training. My training was led by two people, one of whom was someone I had known for a long time, though in a limited capacity (I would call him a role model – one of the outdoor leaders I was exposed to early in life that shaped my views on leadership). At the time of this training I was personally competent in the outdoors and had many outdoor leadership experiences under my belt. Despite this, I had an emotionally charged period before this training, and I was not mentally prepared for it.

On the third day of training the group was discussing water purification with student groups, and I responded unprofessionally to an assertion someone made. Without noticing, I had been doing this occasionally for the past couple of days. The instructor that I did not know – AL – confronted me and told me what he saw happening – something I appreciated; unfortunately their interaction with me was profoundly unprofessional, insulting, and uncaring. In specific terms, they were loud, aggressive, and did not respond to my statements or thoughts. This was a powerful shock to me as I recognized my failures but struggled with my perceptions about the way in which the feedback was given, and it took several days for me identify what I felt about myself, my instructor, and my experience.

The learning was not over, however. Two days after this incident, I had fully developed an upper-respiratory infection and was struggling physically. I went to my sleeping bag immediately after dinner to rest as the remainder of the group scouted a nearby lake, and was woken up shortly after with a shock: “We need you to come up the trail right now with a tarp, stove, and sleeping bag. We are treating a person for moderate to severe hypothermia; their partner is missing in the lake.” A couple had been casually canoeing in an alpine lake, and extremely high winds capsized the boat; the person we found had been able to swim to shore, and did not know where their partner was. Search and rescue was called, a hasty search was initiated with no success, and we spent a sleepless night by the lake as powerful wind thrashed our tarps and blew away everything not nailed down. We stayed by the lake for a day before moving on – there was nothing more we could do. The man had drowned in the lake. We continued the training and though we had a moment to process the eerie death a few miles away, we still had to face the challenge of powerful wind and anxiety. Several days later we hiked back to the trailhead in one push, late at night; walking past the lake that we knew contained a body was a feeling that I will never forget.

Many years later, I have new perspective on my experiences on that training. First, my beliefs about communication, conflict resolution, and appropriate leader behavior were formed and cemented. Second, the combined experience of dealing with the challenges of relentless wind in the alpine and personal illness changed my perspective on personal and student challenges and how they can benefit or harm us. And third, the experience of working with a search that resulted in the death of a person humbled me; the natural environment has no feelings or intentions. My perspective is that our relationship to the environment – the outdoors – is built

on two things: the universally uncaring (yet benevolent) nature of exposure to the elements, and our perceptions and beliefs about those elements.

What not to do – exposure to poor decisions. Through my painful interactions with my trainer I became more aware of the needs of others, and of the impact my actions and words can have on them. This has become clearer as my role has shifted from outdoor leader to outdoor leader trainer and mentor. There have been many instances of what I perceived as poor decisions made by other leaders; it would be unusual if every leader I observed made perfect decisions. Through time and reflection, each of these has taken on new meaning and value. After discussing this with the other trainer in a personal communication, my perceptions of the situation have changed and grown. The fascinating nature of mistakes is that they are always available for further review; while such a review can be uncomfortable, it can also be beneficial.

Challenging experiences. The concept of learning through pushing beyond one's comfort zone is not new, and can be found described in various ways in many different places in the literature (Brown, 2008; Estrellas, 1996). The comfort zone idea is closely tied with the concepts of optimal challenge, optimal arousal theory, and flow. In summary, stepping out of one's comfort zone, in an optimally challenging environment, with an optimum level of arousal or stimulation (which leads to flow), may lead to positive learning experiences.

My trainer (the one I knew already), in a personal communication, said that "we couldn't have picked a better training tool," and "it was a great tool because it was real life, though of course the end doesn't justify the means." He was referring to both the rescue and the environmental conditions that challenged us so powerfully. He mentioned a set of "pros and cons" of the situations, which resonated with my own experience. The cons we discussed: that we were somewhat distracted, that the situation was perhaps too intense, and that due to simply

attempting to survive, our learning was limited. The pros were substantial: identifying and challenging mental fortitude (or lack thereof); challenge to our campcraft (e.g. managing camp tasks while dealing with emotional and environmental problems); a real-life demonstration of what a response team looks like (e.g. incident command system); the rescue contributed to our group identity, so it was a unique element of our group; and it supported the growth of the group's leadership, teamwork, and especially active followership. He also stated that the drowning was a formative experience for him as a leader, and quoted Kurt Hahn (founder of Outward Bound): "The passion of rescue reveals the highest dynamic of the human soul" (retrieved from Kurt Hahn Quotes, n.d.). As it turns out, Kurt Hahn provides a clear connection to our experience: "I regard it as the foremost task of education to insure the survival of these qualities: an enterprising curiosity, an undefeatable spirit, tenacity in pursuit, readiness for sensible self-denial, and above all, compassion" (retrieved from Kurt Hahn Quotes, n.d.).

It came as a surprise to find that there is a sizable amount of literature that is skeptical of the positive effects of pushing students beyond their comfort zones, or of ensuring that students face optimal challenges. Leberman & Martin (2003) argued that instructors should be cautious about assuming that all situations that push comfort zones will benefit participants the most, and that reflection is an important element of ensuring that challenging experiences become learning experiences. In one study, Durr (2009) found support for the idea that optimally challenging experiences produced superior outcomes for participants in challenge course programs, but urged instructors to think critically about their true effects. Brown (2008) stated:

> If discussion prior to an activity focuses on the concept of 'stretching one's comfort zone' it is highly probable that being 'in' or 'out' of one's comfort zone, becomes by default a measure of the 'effectiveness' of an activity for learning. By

> inference, if you are in your comfort zone you are not learning, if you are out of your comfort zone you are learning. (p. 4)

Brown supported this assertion with an examination of literature from Piaget and others, and came to the conclusion that though adventure educators should not be intentionally *adding* stress or *increasing* (emphases mine) perceived risk, students can and do benefit from adventure experiences. Brown also cited Davis-Berman & Berman (2002), who argued that instructors tend to lack training in managing true anxiety, and should focus on building relationships that rely on trust and emotional safety (e.g. comfort) as opposed to artificially pushing students outside of their comfort zones. Estrellas (1996) also opposed the idea of adding unnecessary stress to an adventure situation, and argued that it likely doesn't increase positive outcomes to do so. Unfortunately, this leaves an open question – how much stress is necessary?

The literature is clear that challenging experiences – especially when they are effectively framed, facilitated, and reflected upon – are beneficial to the learning and growth of participants. The same conclusions can be drawn about outdoor leaders, and it that has proven true in my own experiences developing as a leader, most notably during this training experience. The challenges that we faced were difficult at the time and painful to process, but they also changed me in wonderful and interesting ways.

Chapter Four: Summary and Application of Themes

To this point, this paper has been a sequence of experiences and events, and reflection on the value of those experiences. Each person's life and experiences will be different, so it would not be possible (nor advisable per se) for another person to replicate my experiences in the pursuit of development as an outdoor leader. However, it is possible to condense the lessons learned through my experiences into an example leadership development program that could jump-start the career and experiences of a novice leader. This is an examination of such an example.

Summary of Themes

Mentorship. The guidance provided by mentors can have lasting impacts to both mentors and mentees. Mentorship was a common theme at some level in nearly all of the experiences described here; whether it comes from a supervisor, teacher, professor, or other leaders, mentorship is a valuable aspect of one's leadership development. Even years after an incident, a mentor can bring new learning to a willing protégé.

Challenge, reflection, and opportunity. As we know from the principles of the experiential learning cycle, in order to extract learning from experiences we must a) have experiences that are worth examining, and b) reflect critically on those experiences. Experiences worth examining are generally at some theoretical optimum level of challenge, which varies based on each person and situation. An important aspect of this is the opportunity for failure at those experiences. Most of my personal narratives are examples of how a system of one kind or another failed, how I or my team responded, and how that response was beneficial.

Training and skills development. Along the path of learning to be an outdoor leader, direct training and skills development is necessary. This could be through formal education (e.g. associate's, bachelor's, or master's degree), a particular organization's training program, or through other methods (e.g. guided climbing expedition). The value of each method is dependent on many factors such as the goals of the individual and of the organization providing the training. Certifications are also a potentially important part of skills development, particularly in the field of wilderness medicine, which is often a requirement for employment as an outdoor leader in any extended field-time position.

Observational and experiential learning. A common thread throughout these experiences is the benefit of observational and experiential learning. One doesn't necessarily have to *experience* the pain of injury or the pressure of being an incident commander to learn something from the experience of being involved. By watching and reflecting, we can learn new things or refine old knowledge. When (if) this knowledge is later tested in practice, it has entered the experiential learning cycle and will be evaluated in that way. Our personal abilities are in some ways socially constructed, and are heavily impacted by our feelings of self-efficacy. As novice outdoor leaders have more experiences and more opportunities to reflect and learn from those experiences, they will tend to improve their skillset over time. The experiential learning cycle is therefore an important partner to observational learning.

Community and socialization. Each narrative involved many people – communities of people that work together, play together, have conflicts, and build social and cultural networks. This applied to my youth as I socialized within the outdoor leadership community, to my trainings and education as I learned and developed with other novices, and to each experience that involved mistakes in judgment among others. Outdoor leadership is an inherently social

skillset, and thus is impacted by the social systems that form the outdoor leadership culture. The outdoor leadership field has its own discourse that is necessary to understand.

Application of Themes: OLDS as an Example

The Outdoor Leadership Development Series (OLDS) is a free program in its sixth year operated by the Outdoor Program (OP) at the University of Wyoming. OLDS includes about 12-14 students that have a range of experience and academic levels – from freshmen who know very little about the outdoors and leadership to graduate students who have led outdoor trips in the past. There are few requirements for participation; primary qualifications include an interest in outdoor activities, a willingness to learn and share, and commitment to the program. Students are selected through an open application process; this includes submission of a resume, written responses to supplemental questions, a cover letter, and a letter of recommendation. The majority of applicants are then interviewed and narrowed down to finalists based on their fit with the program (primary qualifications above).

The program runs for an academic year. In the fall, students meet once per month to learn about foundational outdoor leadership concepts, attend a three-day backpacking trip during which they attain their Leave No Trace Trainer certifications, and shadow at least one trip operated by the Outdoor Program. In the spring, students take a two-credit academic course in outdoor leadership, assist leaders on an Outdoor Program trip, attend a weekend backcountry yurt trip, and design and implement a small-group, seven-day backpacking trip to Utah.

The components of OLDS represent several possible building blocks for leader development, and is an interesting example for that reason. OLDS also acts as a building block in and of itself for the training of future Outdoor Program leaders – several of the OP's leaders are

former OLDS students. There are several possible ways that OLDS currently meets the above themes for leader development.

Mentorship. OLDS provides many opportunities for mentorship, all of which are intentional. First is the mentorship that students can get from other students. OLDS students come from a variety of backgrounds, and all will have something to offer their peers in terms of knowledge or experience. The effect is probably greatest between the least and most experienced members. Second is the mentorship of the instructor of the program. The instructor is a graduate assistant or pair of graduate assistants from the OP, and they spend a great deal of time with the students both individually and as a group to provide them with the tools and experiences they need to grow. This person is generally experienced in the field, and has perspective and resources to share. The last primary source of mentorship for OLDS students is the community they become a part of. OLDS students are members of the OP community, the University of Wyoming community, and the local outdoor community. OLDS exposes these students to each community and provides them opportunities to grow within those communities.

Some of this mentorship is formal and specific. For example, at the completion of the students' Spring Break expedition each of them has a personal debriefing session with the course instructor(s). This is used as time to help the student reflect on their experiences, make new intellectual connections, and apply these concepts to future endeavors. Much of the mentorship provided is informal, however, and relies on a learning environment that is open to criticism, feedback, and questioning.

Challenge, reflection, and opportunity. Students in this program are challenged in a variety of ways, culminating in perhaps their greatest challenge – designing and implementing a backpacking trip to a location that they likely have never been (the desert). They receive direct

instruction in how to perform the various tasks that are necessary, and then they complete these tasks in small groups of five or six participants. The experience is intentionally designed to allow students to be prepared enough to avoid disasters, but leaves room for learning opportunities. Occasionally issues arise, and those issues are often handled by the groups themselves, rather than the instructor. For example, this year one OLDS group's leader became ill before the trip and could not attend; the group rallied together, chose a new leader, transferred information, and continued to implement their trip. A different group faced what they felt was failure by leaving their trip early due to participant illness; they analyzed their choices, picked one that seemed most reasonable, and were able to reflect on that experience later. One student, in a post-trip debrief, said, "It was really challenging, and that's the point."

It is important to the success of the program and the development of each OLDS student that they are provided opportunities to fail. Their expedition is a good example of this, but they face this possibility elsewhere as well; in class they are required to lead the others through various activities and initiatives, outside of class they are required to lead a group such as a club in a series of games and programs that meet a variety of needs, and each of these experiences is presented as an opportunity for learning.

At several points during the OLDS program, reflections are gathered from the students. This includes written papers on their achievements, successes, and failures, a group debriefing after the backpacking trip that they implemented, individual debriefing sessions, and a final project and reflection of the entire program. Students are exposed to the experiential learning cycle early in the program, and are encouraged to utilize and embrace its concepts.

Training and skills development. OLDS students are required to attend evening learning sessions on technical skills (e.g. navigation, campcraft, cooking, knots), and also

complete an academic course: ENR 2800: Introduction to Outdoor Leadership. This is an example of targeted training and skills development. In the course they learn a variety of concepts related to outdoor leadership such as conflict resolution, group development, expedition behavior, diversity and inclusion, and problem solving, among others. They are asked to lead programs both for their classmates and for community members to practice their skills. In addition, they are provided with training to become certified as Leave No Trace Trainers, and are given the opportunity to receive wilderness medical training for free or at reduced cost (Wilderness First Responder or Wilderness First Aid). These certifications and skills will provide them tools they will likely need in future outdoor leadership programming.

Observational and experiential learning. There are two primary methods by which OLDS students can practice observational learning: a shadow of an OP trip, and an assist of an OP trip. When students shadow a trip they are essentially participants, treated no differently than the other participants. Their task is to observe the trip leaders and reflect on the leaders' successes and difficulties throughout the trip. Ideally, this results in a low-pressure learning process for the students. When a student assists leaders on a trip their tasks include supporting the trip leaders in the planning and implementation of the trip, and they are expected to lead participants in some way that is suited to their abilities. This is both an experience to reflect on as well as an opportunity to observe trip leaders in action.

These students are also required to lead games and activities within the class, and on various outings. This requirement adds more opportunities for experiential learning; they experience situations that they have likely not faced before, and learn from them through the experiential learning cycle.

Community and socialization. OLDS students are integrated into the culture of outdoor leadership, even if they may not realize it until later. As members of this community they are exposed to the language, rituals, morays, and unspoken social rules that they will need in order to integrate in the future. This is both an intentional process (e.g. bringing guest speakers, connecting students with trip leaders, engaging students in conversation), and an informal one (e.g. providing opportunities to witness and interact with the culture). When students graduate from the program, they can apply to be OP trip leaders, at which point they will fully engage as community members within the semi-professional outdoor leadership field.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Throughout the process of reflecting and studying the various elements that compose the development of an outdoor leader, it has become clear that despite the growing professionalization of this career path there is no distinct path to becoming an effective outdoor leader. My life and path is unique, and each outdoor leader will be able to tell a variety of other stories that range from the hilarious to the tragic. Nor should it be expected that a distinct and solitary path exists; the outdoor leadership field is (perhaps by nature) stubbornly complex and effectively in its infancy in terms of strong research.

Importantly, however, the themes identified here – mentorship, challenge, reflection, and opportunity, training and skills development, observational learning, and community and socialization – can be found at every level of each leader's path. In practical terms, as a leader on a journey of improvement one can identify ways to enhance aspects of one's path that feel deficient. For example, developing leaders can seek out mentorship or challenges, or attempt to engage with communities of practice. Those who run development programs – organizations or people – can use these themes as a framework or guideline to ensure that their participants are getting the diverse set of tools and experiences they need to become contributing community members. Just as individuals do, programs that seek to develop outdoor leaders have a responsibility to reflect on their goals, intentions, and systems in order to identify and address weaknesses.

As a mentor and programmer, this research has changed my perspective on what is truly important in leadership development. In the future I will be more transparent, more understanding, and more cognizant of my impacts on my protégés. The focus for the leaders that

I help develop now has a framework to operate under. As these leaders develop, mentors such as myself need to expose them to opportunities, help them reflect, and guide their journey into the discourse of outdoor leadership. These principles will also be applied to any program that I operate, and any collaborations that I participate in.

My personal journey is far from over, and there is a great deal left to learn. There are more mentors to seek and interact with, there are more protégés to engage with, and there are many more challenges to be had. Nowhere in the literature does it state that a leader is done growing when they have met a specific milestone; professional development will continue, as will our community understanding of what processes turn novices into remarkable outdoor leaders.

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