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The Culture of Mystics

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Abstract

This study explores how Outward Bound uses Joseph Campbell’s *Hero’s Journey* as an implicit framework enacted by narrative paradigm theory to generate that holistic character development, specifically how this framework generates a culture of mysticism amongst staff to support their role as mystic in a students hero journey. Using observations from personal experience on Voyageur Outward Bound School expedition, a shadow ethnography of Voyageur Outward Bound School 50th anniversary events, document analysis and in-depth Outward Bound staff interviews, the author develop a illustration of an effective model of character development in the framework of the *Hero’s Journey* through educators acting in the mystic role as exemplified in Outward Bound. This illustration draws attention to the role of narrative paradigm theory role in organizational culture resulting in the definition of a alternative educational frameworks. As a result the use of Joseph Campbell’s *Hero’s Journey* as an implicit framework generates that holistic character development by generating a culture of mysticism amongst staff to support their role as mystic in a students hero journey.
Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Facing the last couple miles of the trail, running off minimal sleep with more bugs bites than one could count and the aches of having spent the last 6 hours carrying a 70 pound canoe and pack in the muddiest conditions one could imagine, all we could was feel aggravation. However instead of stiffening with defeat, we all took a moment, and, suddenly we saw the daunting task of finishing the Grand Portage not as impossible but something that would require grit, compassion and teamwork. Realizing in that moment, that finishing the Grand Portage was not just about how well we could carry a canoe but instead reaching into the depths of our character. How was it that we had the ability to reach this level of character development and employ it? During a 22-day expedition in Superior National Forest with Voyageur Outward Bound School, I not only observed but also experienced a powerful journey of character development process amongst a group of seemingly “thriving” 18 to 21 year olds. This article investigates how Outward Bound uses Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey as an implicit framework to generate that holistic character development, specifically how this framework generates a culture of mysticism amongst staff to support their role as mystic in a students hero journey by utilizing narrative paradigm theory.

Character development is the cultivation of positive traits that help people to thrive and contribute to society. In 2001 congress allotted $50 million for President George W. Bush’s character education program (Goldstein, 2001) in response to recognition that school’s were no longer providing the necessary structures for kids to develop those vital non-cognitive skills which are key indicators of long term success. However funding has since been eliminated and “many educators who believe in character education in principle, still feel that they cannot afford (literally and/or figuratively) to expend limited resources on character education” (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005, p. 3). In addition, not everyone is convinced that our current character education practices are the solution. According to Susan Black, in Character Conundrum “Kids seldom practice what their schools’ character education programs preach” (p. 29, as cited in Thompson, 2002, p. 11). Schools and many other programs currently use tradition didactic practices to provide character education. However that is the irony, character cannot be educated or standardized, character has to be developed. Development is cultivated and experienced, just as the hero in the Hero’s Journey develops the abilities to confront obstacles with not just his cognitive or physical abilities but character skills.

In order to understand how schools can best implement develop character in children and adolescents, I focused my research on the practices of the leading character development program, Outward Bound. We begin with a literature review of current character education practices and the pitfalls along with the historical success of Outward Bound programming and their relationship to the Hero’s Journey. In order to argue that the problems of character education in the United States can be resolved through the use of the Hero’s Journey as exemplified in Outward Bound experiential education programming. This argument is supported by a qualitative study of personal experience, observation of Voyageur Outward Bound school 50th anniversary events and in-depth staff interviews. This analysis provides the basis for the conclusion that an effective model of character development can be found in the implicit

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1 A nine-mile portage trail that leads to the mouth of Lake Superior in Cook County, Minnesota.
framework of *Hero’s Journey* through educators acting in the mystic role as exemplified in Outward Bound by utilizing Walter Fishers narrative paradigm theory.

**Review of Literature**

**Character Education**

The research on American K-12 in-school character education program pedagogy and philosophy demonstrates that “character education has a long and distinguished but, at times, problematic history” (Sojourner, 2010, p. 2). Within the limits of this paper it is not possible to report on the full scope of those issues and history of character education.

Researchers, practitioners and scholars dating back to Aristotle have defined character with varying levels of agreement (Sojourner, 2010, p. 2). Consequently there result there is an extensive variety of definitions of “character education” vary by history, geography and ideology (Allport, 1933, p.44). For the intentions of this paper, we will define character education as a deliberate effort to cultivate of positive traits that help people to thrive and contribute in society.

With the revival of the character education movement, the pressing question is not if character education should be taught but how it should be taught. As (Kohn, 1997) explains in his critical observation of character education programs that, “if we want help children and adolescents grow into good people, who utilize their full potential for good then we have to change the way the classroom works and feels.” We cannot expect immeasurable traits of characters to be developed in the same way we teach cognitive skills that can be measured. The approaches of Outward Bound educational framework to, “emphasize high achievement through active learning, character development and teamwork,” are much more applicable to the concept of character development. Outward Bound methodology is rooted in experiential education practices and as I will analyze, these practices directly support the *Hero’s Journey* framework, which is enacted through the narrative paradigm theory.

**Outward Bound**

Outward Bound, founded in 1941 by educator Kurt Hahn, is a non-profit educational organization and expedition school. Research shows that Outward Bound programs find long-term success in helping students develop important values. (Goldenberg, McAvoy, Klenosky, 2005, p.144). Outward Bound’s mission is to: “Change live through challenge and discovery” presents a lofty goal. Nevertheless, research indicates students are impacted in the manner that the mission states (McKenzie, 20023, p. 9). With almost 75 years of success, it clear that Outward Bounds mission delivery, foundations and facilitation are highly effective. Victor Walsh and Gerald Golins, former Outward Bound instructors, have conducted the most significant work on the topic of mission delivery. It is considered the most thorough model of the processes Outward Bound uses to date.

generally accepted framework for adventure education programs, and proposed instructors are one of five key course components influencing student learning. The enactment of that model is based in experiential learning practices. While research supports that instructors are key to course, there is currently no research on how the organizational culture of Outward Bound impacts that.

While there is no documentation of the Hero’s Journey in Outward Bounds history and current practices of experiential education, through my own Outward Bound experience, instructor interviews and observations I discovered this implicit framework and can be supported by the narrative paradigm theory.

Experiential Education

Experiential education is based on an instructional technique of learning that puts more emphasis on the fact that real learning only happens through experience. Experiential learning combines the active aspects of learning to the concrete experience, abstract concepts and reproach with the sole aim or purpose of engaging all the available learning style (Kolb, 2014, 13). John Dewey, who is considered as the father of modern experiential learning, initially wrote about the numerous benefits of experiential education in 1938. He was broader social purposes that help one become effective individuals member of the society. He pointed out that, “there in an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education”. He went on further to note that just focusing on the content alone, the teacher or lecturer would be denying the students an opportunity to develop and enhance their own opinions based on their interaction with the information.

Several scholars have pointed out that the importance of experiential learning such as, Cyril Houle who pointed out that “education occurs through the direct participation with the events in life.” Lenor Borzak also explained the importance of experiential learning a being a direct experience with the notion that is under study instead of just having discussion about possible experience with the concepts.

Davis Kolb, the father of organization behavior, defined experiential learning as, “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience, knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (Kolb, 2014, 45). Kolb and fry went ahead and developed a learning experience cycle to show how learning occurs. This includes, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and experimentation. Experiential education in my study of Outward Bound can be applied in term of the Hero’s Journey.

The Hero’s Journey

Joseph Campbell, the scholar most readily associated with modem interpretation of mythic themes, argues that “myth carries the human spirit forward, offering symbols, themes and images that enable and support growth and transformation, in contrast to other kinds of stories and experiences that cause fear and limit growth” (Campbell, 1949).

The Hero with a Thousand Faces by Joseph Campbell explore the monomyth, the theory that the
most significant myths that have survived thousands of years and geographic locations share a ‘fundamental structure.’ Campbell summarizes the monomyth or more commonly referred to as the. “Hero’s Journey.”

“A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man”(Campbell, 1949, p. 24).

The purpose of the Hero’s Journey as Campbell said is to “The ultimate aim of the quest must be neither release nor ecstasy for oneself, but the wisdom and the power to serve others.”(Book, 14) This common mythic structure is seen today, such as in the movie Star Wars famous for it’s mythic structure and timeless journey. A key aspect of the Hero’s Journey is Carl Jung archetypes. The concept of an archetype was develop by Carl Jung, he believed that there are universal patterns, that we are all born with he titled them the collective unconscious. This unconscious is shared by all the humanity and there are archetypal roles in that collective unconscious. For the intentions of this paper we will define the hero role as, “those who transform themselves or their societies through a search for identity and wholeness.” They can do this through internal reflection or through outward action.’ (Robins, 2005). We will define the mystic role as “a former hero who now serves as the sage advice-giver to the next hero.” (Robbins, 2005) As example of these roles from Star Wars would be Luke Skywalker in the hero role and Obi-Wan Kenobi as the mystic role. (Robbins, 2005) Mystics in myth may be heroes themselves from a different quest who now impart the knowledge they have gained to the next generation of hero.

The implicit use of Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey as that generates a culture of mysticism amongst staff to support their role as mystic in a student’s hero journey in Outward Bound can be examined to enable to transference to school settings.

Narrative Paradigm Theory

The narrative paradigm theory concept/idea was developed by Walter Fisher and which was one of the oldest form of communication in relation to storytelling. Based on the arguments put across by Walter, any meaningful communication is done through story telling. The narrative paradigm mainly focuses on the fact that human beings are by nature narrative and they tell stories in terms of how they view the world and that their values and emotions are considerations forms the basis of our belief and behavior. Moreover, the narrative paradigm further explains that human beings rely on telling stories so as to learn or reinforce values. Communication forms the basis of our behavior and hence the narrative paradigm is very important when trying to analyze
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the nature of communication. Fisher’s narrative is guided by two main principles of coherence\(^2\) and fidelity\(^3\). (Boje, 2004)

The role of narrative paradigm theory role in organizational culture resulting in the definition of an alternative educational framework.

Research Questions

R1: How does Outward Bound uses Joseph Campbell’s *Hero’s Journey* as an implicit framework to generate holistic character development?

R2: How does this framework generate a culture of mysticism amongst staff to support their role as mystic in a student’s hero journey supporting narrative paradigm theory?

Methods

Over the course of six months I was a complete participant in Outward Bound course, I shadowed staff members at two different 50\(^{th}\) anniversary events and conducted interviews with former and current Outward Bound staff. To uphold standards of qualitative procedures I immersed myself in the culture of Outward Bound (Tracy, 2013). I received Human Subject approval through the IRB at Southern Methodist University and approved data collection procedures were followed. The following provides background information on organizational sites and subjects, and discusses data sources and methods of analysis.

Research Participants and Site

Data for this study was collected at two main researcher sites with the Voyageur Outward Bound School (VOBS) in Minnesota with bases in the cities of Ely and St Paul. Voyageur Outward Bound school, originally Minnesota Outward Bound School (MOBS) was founded in 1964. Summer and winter expeditions are run out of Homeplace in Ely, MN. They have programs for women’s only courses, veterans, adults, teens, adventure at-risk youth, veterans, families and schools. In April of 2010 VOBS re-launched their urban programming in the Twin Cities with a base in St. Paul they serve schools, non-profits and colleges.

My expedition took place in Superior National Forest, with my shadow ethnography of the VOBS 50\(^{th}\) anniversary events that included a fundraising experience of the Outward Bound signature “Personal Challenge Event\(^4\)” at Hidden Falls State Park in St. Paul and the 50\(^{th}\) anniversary celebration at Nicollet Island Pavilion.

\(^2\) An effective communication happens when the consent that has been communicated makes sense to the listener and coherence is the standard in sense making of a narrative. Factors that contribute to effective story delivery include; Similarities between the stories, structure of the narrative and the integrity of the characters.

\(^3\) It has to do with the reliability of the story that is been told. It’s shaped by whether the listener accepts or rejects the story that is been narrated.

\(^4\) The Personal Challenge Event (PCE) occurs at the end of an Outward Bound course and is comprised of different physical activities that vary depending on your course area. It is effort. It not meant to be competitive but a opportunity for students can experience their growth from the course. (Bound, 2008, p. 4-15)
I studied both male and female Outward Bound staff that were currently or had formally worked for any United States Outward Bound base. The staff was either currently or previously responsible for in-field instruction, coordination, logistics, directing and staffing.

Data Sources

Data was gathered from complete participation in a VOBS expedition, shadow ethnography of VOBS 50th anniversary events, in-depth interviews staff interviews, and organizational documents to form the basis of the analysis.

Complete Participant

A primary source of data was a journal of head notes and reflections and a group journal (Kumar, 2002). I began writing reflections starting 24 hours before I left for my course, to reflect on the steps I had to take to be able to attend an expedition. I spent 22-days in Lake Superior National Forest learning how to paddle, portage and rock climb with five other expedition team members and my two instructors. Unless there was structured journal time, it was impossible to take down any field notes beyond jottings or head notes, each day was very rigorous and we could spend upwards of 12 hours a day traveling to our next site (Pell, 1999). However, I have been able to receive a copy our expedition team journal, where the team leader for that day recorded our route, mileage and general happenings of the day.

Play-Participant – Shadow ethnography

I shadowed Outward Bound stuff during the 50th Anniversary Events that included VOBS 50th anniversary events that included a fundraising experience of the Outward Bound signature “Personal Challenge Event” at Hidden Falls State Park in St. Paul and the 50th anniversary celebration at Nicollet Island Pavilion. During the course of both those occasions I took field notes and reflective notes (Anders, 2010). I was in the unique role of first being identified as researcher but with follow up of having been at student just that summer at VOBS.

Being a play participant allowed me to fully involved in the weekend activities from paddling the safety boat during the PCE with program director, to assisting with set-up for celebration but I also could separate myself better than I could as a participant but not only being able to take more consistent field notes but also I could ask more explicit questions about what I was experiencing (McLean & Leibing, 2007). The shadow ethnography allowed me to make connections across multiple frames of what I was seeing and gather a better “big picture” frame (Gill, Barbour & Dean, 2014)

In-Depth Interviews

The second primary source of data was the formal interviews. I conducted 16 staff interviews, 8 of whom were women and 8 of whom were men. Each participant was at least 22 years of age, Caucasian and the time spent working for Outward Bound ranged from six months to
 Almost 20 years. Three of the interviews were conducted via telephone. I utilized an unstructured interview structure, which allowed more emergent understandings to surface, and what data would be informative (Carolyn & Palena, 2004). I always began interviews with the question of how they became involved with Outward Bound and I also had a grand tour question on (Spradley & McCurdy, 1989) of asking participants how the culture impacted instructor methods to get a broad view of the “terrain” and if there was any discussion of the Hero’s Journey.

I was granted access to a copy of the Outward Bound Instructor manual. I was also able to attain the book Roots, which is an exploration of the expeditionary learning’s roots in the educational philosophy of Kurt Hahn. I also purchased a copy of the “Voyageur Outward Bound School Readings Book,” which is a collection of quotes into different categories ranging from challenge to compassion. It was utilized everyday in an evening ritual (Hull & Taylor, 1998). I also retained through the entire course of my student any document I received from Outward Bound.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I used as a guide, crystallization grounded theory analysis. This method was a way to provide a profound insight into Outward Bound uses educational frameworks, methods and staff culture. I was also able to use multiple forms of analysis and accounts to build a rich account of the implicit Hero’s Journey phenomenon and value making sense of my data in more than one point-of-view (Ellingson, 2009)

I used the constant- comparative method (Charmaz, 2001), I read and re-read my interviews, field-notes and documents for emerging themes. As Charmaz explains, “promotes openness to all possible theoretical understandings, fosters developing tentative interpretations about the data through coding and categorizing, builds systematic checks and refinements of the researcher’s major theoretical categories.” (Charmaz, 2005) By reviewing all data gathered with this method I could group together different emerging themes.

Results

The following data illustrates how Outward Bound uses Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey as an implicit framework to generate holistic character development and generates a culture of mysticism amongst staff to support their role as mystic in a student’s hero journey. My grounded theory analysis resulted in four main themes of: mission delivery, facilitation, origins and community culture emerged. Through the experience of my ethnographic study and grounded-theory analysis, I argue that The implicit use of Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey as that generates a culture of mysticism amongst staff to support their role as mystic in a student’s hero journey in Outward Bound can be examined to enable to transference to school settings. Refer below to Table 1 for an overview of the four main themes. The following sections provide a more in-depth analysis of each theme.
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<th>Label</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example – Instructor Interview</th>
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**TRUST**
Mission Delivery | How instructors utilize and feel about the educational framework that fulfills goals of Outward Bound | “We’re trying through rock climbing, sea kayaking how those mediums and that challenges can be used to understand their character. Uh so we have these intentional conversations and lessons and all these things on expedition, so that we are continuously cycling back to, “Okay this is hard, so where’s your character at? How can you communication that?” | “All I have stuck in my head now is “Excellence with a capital E.” Vikki and Robert [my instructors] keep emphasizing how if we keep up our gear and each other with Excellence, things will be much more manageable. “ |

Facilitation | How instructors use intentional methodology and their individual instruction styles | “If you can be a silent guide. You can reach to inspire people to be their best selves and then step away and not have it all fall apart when you step away. Build a structure, build themselves.” | “Today we began our “main phase” we had the challenge all afternoon of only being able to ask Vikki and Robert one question. “ |

Origins | The relationship of Outward Bound history and current practices | “How we’ve expressed our mission has changed over time. We don’t talk about physical fitness anymore but we do talk about excellence.” | “At lunch today we reviewed the 7 laws of Salem and how we can apply them, such as “enabling others to act” “ |

Community Culture | Behaviors and beliefs that create staff ethos on and off course | “It is very much a place where people of certain values will feel very comfortable and validated. But I think the great thing about this community also is that sometimes it take it upon itself—they themselves to train each other, they say “Hey, let’s get together and learn how to paddle better.” – this place supports learning and mentorship.” | “It was CRAZY to hear that Vikki and Robert had never lead a course together before. We were all shocked. Well they do collaborate all the time…..” |

Trust

In the Outward Bound staff handbook it states:
“Our mission is to inspire character development and self discovery in people of all ages and walks of life through challenge and discovery, and to impel them to achieve more than they ever thought possible, to show compassion for others and to actively engage in creating a better world.”

That is a very lofty mission to many however there is one key element that emerged that enabled instructors to fulfill that mission, trust. In my reflections, observations and interviews I was continually impressed by Outward Bound’s staff level of “trust” this emerged through my coding process as a main theme and was reflected in multiple practices. In the Hero’s Journey a crucial aspect for the hero is that as Joseph Campbell says, “One has only to know and trust, and the ageless guardians will appear.” Not only does the hero has to trust their mystic but the mystic themselves must trust “the process” of quest. 17 of the instructor’s I interviewed discussed “trusting the process” when I asked them to define that this is what they said:

The root of this trust I identified came from primary sources that build upon each other: the mission delivery, facilitation, origins and community culture. In the practices of experiential education as (Estes, 2004, p.143) explains, “skilled experiential educators can make conscious choices that empower students to take control of their own learning, and meaningful learning can be increased to the extent that experiential educators can facilitate learning experiences that are more student-centered.” As reflected in the Hero’s Journey the job of the supernatural assistor is to give the heroes what they need to finish the quest—not finish it for them.

Mission Delivery

Outward Bound’s educational framework is comprised of: values (compassion, integrity, excellence, inclusion & diversity), design principles (Learning through experience, challenge and adventure, supportive environment) and outcomes (character development, leadership, and service). This educational framework is integrated into each aspect of an Outward Bound course and serves as the most direct mirror to the Hero’s Journey. The framework is executed in three stages of training5, main6, and final7 on an Outward Bound course and to move through each one student must demonstrate different hard and soft skills to an instructor. Just as the hero encounters different stages of their quest, the role of their mystic continually removes themselves as the quest progresses allowing as in experiential educational practices that students can find their own authentic voice, and they create knowledge through critical encounters with reality and ideas (Shor, 1989). A program director, Trent, talked about this in the role and development of that for instructors,

“If doesn’t come naturally to a lot people to be in a leadership position where you’re stepping away. It’s a different kind of leadership that you learn here. The first time you step away, you’re watching people inevitably fail. And that’s as instructor, if you haven’t seen the process all the through, is disheartening and frustrating, it doesn’t feel right for you not to be helping. However, after you instructed and you watch the process, then you

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5 Provides time for introduction, instruction and assessment. This phase is about knowledge and success. (Bound, 2008, p. 4-8)
6 This phase is the first step of purposeful responsibly. This phase is about communication and responsibility. (Bound, 2008, p. 4-8)
7 This phase is about applied learning and initiative. There is a high level of responsibly. (Bound, 2008, p. 4-9)
know what the end goal looks like. In end, if your kids fail, it not the end of the world. Like, you get lost, who cares? It all about how you pick yourself back up and find your way back. I don’t know if it’s just a different quality the more you trust in the process, but it is real investment in what works, and they counsel instructors to do that. But then also, a belief in one of our mission statements, still with guidance and mentorship of our instructors. What we want the instructors to do is pass of the autonomy to the group, and the benefit of that is you’ve got people experiencing real challenge, real responsibility, for the first time.”

In one interview I was talking with Sandra, who had spent over 10 years with Outward Bound in multiple roles, we were discussing what drew her back to Outward Bound after a brief departure, she explained:

““It is less about thrills and skills and more about personal development, group development through adventure challenge and wilderness, I guess I’d say. And so- and then so that’s held true, and in fact I – you know the stories I accumulate year after year of working with students and seeing the transformation happen, that’s a huge dividend of working here. And it’d be really different if it was –um, well, I worked in a climbing gym, you know. It’s has a different feel to it than, um the kind of powerful and transformative experiences that can happen with the intensity and design of an Outward Bound course. So that’s what kept me involved.”

Sandra’s statement about the draw to working with Outward Bound revealed how the educational framework is highly fulfilling as staff members. Just as Walter Fisher theory details, that evocative experience occur through storytelling, it the stories of students learning through Outward Bound that build up instructors to invest in the difficult mission. This is also reflected in the Hero’s Journey as Campbell explains, “So when one hears the seer’s story, one responds, “Aha! This is my story. This is something that I had always wanted to say but wasn’t able to say.” There has to be a dialogue, an interaction between the seer and the community. ” (Flowers, 1998, p.104)

The educational framework (values, design principles and outcomes) of Outward Bound not only provides a foundation to a course but also is key for staff retention. Outward Bounds enculturation process of the intern expedition not only provides a student point-of-view but also begins to build a culture of “trust” as people have bought into the process.

Facilitation

As I experienced my own expedition and talked with instructors, a salient theme that emerged in regards to how organizational culture impact instructor methods resulting in student outcomes was vulnerability. The ritual of an instructors checking in with a course director during the
course of an expedition, Abrahams writes, that rituals "have a sense of wholeness and potential to them; they invoke special ways of acting, special language, rules, and even boundaries." A lead instructor and course director, Ross, was talking to me about the support instructors receive from the leaders in the organization.

“You know, like, so, it’s being, able to call into the superiors and being able to say more than, “Oh, it’s great. Everything is good, you’re my boss and I’m fine.” And what we do, we say, “Look I Want to know you got it. Show me that you got it. And if you don’t that’s okay. Were going to help get you there. I’m in it here with you.”

At first glance, yes that does look like great leadership communication but it is also a important ritual performance, the significance of staff talking with course directors during the expedition is not merely the productive procedure to ensure and help ensure the mission delivery to students is occurring but that this organized routine allows instructors to be vulnerable. Instructors are not only facilitating a supportive environment on course by being vulnerable with students to establish “a culture of trust and intimacy” but by having that same vulnerability with course directors, it helps establish that supportive environment for staff also.

As a participant on an Outward Bound course, there were times I felt vulnerable, lost, disoriented, cold, and more. Society today works to avoid the uncomfortable but it through those natural consequences and uncomfortable moments that we tend to learn the most. All of the 18 of the staff members I talked to brought up the role of natural consequence and that is one of their most valuable tools of facilitation. A instructor and course director, Caroline, told me a story that exposed just that.

“I deem it, like, “how to look good in the woods,” like, always being prepared, always knowing, where your raingear is, your water bottle, your –equipment is in good working order, and when it’s not your get to fell the ripples of that. I was on this course, I don’t know, it was earlier this season, these girls I was taking out, I taught them how to, like roll their raingear so their raingear didn’t get wet, taught them how to stow it, um then they got to main, where they were, like, on this next of level of like, freedom, right ? So, “Woo we can do whatever we want now, we don’t have to listen, we can do the way we should do it.” And that awesome. Like if you don’t want to roll up your raingear, cool, like deal with it when it happens. So, the very next day, they, like leave, their raingear outside their tenet inside-out, and it pours. And I’m like, “that really unfortunate that happened to you, but I mean, I taught you something different, like that was the standard we held you to, and the minute you got more freedom, you decide to do whatever you want? Well, now your rain jacket’s soaking we and who knows when it’s going to stop raining.”

There was what at first seemed to be a paradox of staff expressing how intentional they are about their work methods and yet they felt most successful when they removed themselves from the situation and the students continued to thrive. I discovered that those sentiments were not actually contradictions, but a profound understanding of the course construction and transference to post-course life. Campbell Hero’s Journey and Walter Fishers theory model how the structure of Outward Bound is an ideal model for communication and instilling a process of character
development in students. As instructors use various methods to let a student’s journey unfold, Campbell explains,

“Mythology has a great deal to do with the stages of life, the initiation ceremonies as you move from childhood to adult responsibilities, from the unmarried state into the married state. All of those rituals are mythological rites. They have to do with your recognition of the new role that you’re in, the process of throwing off the old one and coming out in the new, and entering into a responsible profession.” (Flowers, 1998, p.38)

If we work with students in development, growth model not a fix model, we are allowing them to acquire skills not just understand skills to be a productive member and developed member of society.

Origins

When talking with instructors about how they learn the philosophy and design of Outward Bound, all them recalled their intern experience, where a current lead intercept instructor, Peter, explained,

“You just get all this info about Outward Bound, and about, what we do, and our roots, and our philosophy, and how it’s evolved over, you know, since the first school, you know, in Europe was founded like what, like, 70 years almost, now? And like, it’s Homeplace in particular, like, we just celebrated our 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary [VOBS]. There really strong sense of commission, um, but not tradition, but not so that, so much tradition that you cannot evolve, right? Like, people are always trying to improve, but there’s this eye to past, and this eye to what we’ve done. And I think, there’s just a lot of pride, you know, in that, in that among instructors.”

Outward Bound founder, Kurt Hahn believed that, Founder Kurt Hahn education philosophy was based on respect for adolescents, whom he believed to possess an innate decency and moral sense, but who were, he believed, corrupted by society as they aged. He believed that education could prevent this corruption. Just as we have seen the recent national recognition to help students develop to overcome societal challenges, Kurt Hahn recognized that over 50 years ago and that is still reverberates in Outward Bound courses today. This is seen with former program director Jack, as he states,

“One of Kurt Hahn’s – you probably saw this as you saw the Seven Laws of Salem was building in the element of, he wanted to give responsibility to young people such that if they did it wrong, they would sink the ship. And that’s something most adults aren’t willing do you, you know, is teach a child to drive a car with them not in it to grab the steering wheel.”

Staff members acknowledge that foundation of Outward Bound is what makes them stand apart. As Jack continued,
“Good organizations recognize that the found had, some principles that they were building the idea one. And some aspirations and some values that were important to codify so that everybody knew, going forward – you know, even as you charter an Outward Bound school, you have these principles in place, these safety precautions, these relationship systems, these course-traditions in place so that you can call it an Outward Bound program, you know is not just a summer camp. I think in good teaching systems, the history is carried forward so that you know, “where are the roots for this organization? Where do they con from and how can I as new instructor pass on some of those?”

That relevance of Outward Bound history is not only a point of pride for staff but clearly adds the depth to who they are. On my expedition, not only did I learn the Seven laws of Salem but what Kurt Hahn’s vision was and how Outward Bound began, the discussion of history on my course provided a framework and commitment to the principles of Outward Bound.

The ritual of all staff and students learning the history of Outward Bound really grounds Outward Bound culture and clearly guides their evolution over time.

Community Culture

As we examine what structures we can transform to help improve character development it is important to look at the community of Outward Bound. Staff members voiced an overall theme that the Outward Bound community culture is what they believe how they do their jobs. When I discuss community I am talking about the culture of when staff members are on base and not on course, this is more of an examination of off course life.

When talking with John who has been working with VOBs for over 15 years, he explained that he never left because of the people.

“ It’s a great organization, and it’s mission driven and values centered and it’s in a beautiful place, and is dynamic and changes a lot, and strive to be predictable at the same time for employees and I think all that is good, but I don’t know. It’s hard to find such a high concentration of good people.

I asked how he believed they retained such a “high concentration of people.” He explained that it is not only the mission and values but also the concept of adventure education. This is important note because the role of wilderness cannot be present in all programs. Although my paper is not examining the role of wilderness in methods, it is necessary to note that a lot of instructors and staff member not only see the wilderness as imperative teaching tool but that it fuels their dedication to the cause of the organization.

It is also critical to note that Outward Bound provides as John explained, “It’s a place that’ll suck you in. I mean you show up here in May and you don’t have to leave until August and all your needs are taken care of.” This allows instructors not only a high level of stability, outlets, resources and capability to focus on the sole goal at hand. This not a luxury that many schools
and other programs can afford and certainly plays a role in the quality of execution of these programs.

When talking about the role of community in course success and execution, every instructor expressed three main ideas, the “mentorship model” which includes the role of feedback and that by surrounding yourself with people of similar values you, as Mike explained, “You begin to understand it as more than just a job, but like a lifestyle, and a life-changing purpose.”

The standards and support the community not only build a place for instructors to thrive but embrace all the benefits of working under such model.

Discussion

I will discuss how these are reflective of Joseph Campbell *Hero’s Journey* and defining of the instructor’s capability to be a mystic. The use of Joseph Campbell’s *Hero’s Journey* as an implicit framework generates that holistic character development by generating a culture of mysticism amongst staff to support their role as mystic in a student’s hero journey.

The journey of a hero as Joseph Campbell describes it as exploring what means to be human and the responsibilities of that ("A Hero With a Thousand," 2012, p. 6). The Hero’s Journey works in what can be considered two phases, the *ordinary world* and the *special world*. To enter the special world a hero must “Cross the threshold” this is the physical world beyond the hero’s home and to enter the ordinary world he must take “The Road Back” which is where the hero generally faces one more challenge before he can return home to share his new wisdom. This basic structure is directly reflected in Outward Bound mission delivery, a students begins by leaving their former life behind for this new life of Outward Bound, they then go through the expedition and return back to Homeplace to share their skills and knowledge through the Personal Challenge Event. However we must examine next the role of the mystic, so we can understand how through organizational culture instructors best participate in this role.

The hero’s journey cannot occur without a mystic. In context to Outward Bound, the instructor always plays the mystic role. The mystic meets the hero right before the hero enters the special world. Just as student would meet their instructor at Homeplace before they leave into the wilderness. The mystic role includes many parts from providing wisdom, prepare the hero to face the unknown and accept the adventure. Just as an instructor takes students through the training, main and final stage of expedition and works to build a framework that garners “student by in.” The mystic although never actually involved in the individual challenges the hero is taking provides encouragement and tools.

Multiple instructors cited that common saying that the best thing Outward Bound does is not it’s students but it’s instructors. The organizational culture of Outward Bound fully supports the instructor in the mystic role. As we examined there are multiple structures that support this process of the *Hero’s Journey* and the implications of that on staff.
We can conclude with limitations that an effective model of character development can be found in the implicit framework of *Hero’s Journey* through educators acting in the mystic role as exemplified in Outward Bound by utilizing Walter Fishers narrative paradigm theory.

**Limitations**

My research contained multiple limitations. First there was lack of prior research studies on the lack of research about the organizational culture of Outward Bound. A second limitation is that my self-reported data was delayed after the occurrence, possibly causing errors at times, most notably on my expedition. However this was due to nature of Outward Bound, as student, I could not step away to be a researcher. A third limitation was access, I had complete access to one Outward Bound base but we cannot assume the organizational culture or this framework of the *Hero’s Journey* displayed at VOBS is representative of other Outward Bound bases.

Another limitation to this study was that I was evaluating a program that took place in the wilderness and it difficult to justify at this the transference to an urban school setting without further researching the impact of the wilderness on their programming and role in the execution of the *Hero’s Journey*. To improve this study I would recommend spending time observing staff in the field, to gain a richer perspective on the application. Some of my suggestions for future research would be: Examining frameworks and organizational culture in urban Outward Bound bases, study the relationship between narrative paradigms and character development and conduct a study on the role of a mystic versus a teacher and how to perform both roles.

**Implications**

Although my study was small in scope I believe that my data can be useful in Outward Bound staff training, to help new staff members quickly understand the nature of their work and how that operates in context to the Outward Bound Community. This research can also assist Outward Bound in years to come as they evolve models by providing rich understanding key aspects of their current frameworks and culture.

I also believe my data can be useful for educators, I would recommend that schools begin to consider implementing character education programs consider using the *Hero’s Journey* as model for students and teacher roles. This study also provides important information about roles of mystics by utilizing this information in training new educators there can be a stronger development of practices where teachers guide students in learning not just dictating making learning not only a intellectual experience but character development experience.

In 1938 John Dewey stated, “There is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education.” As we work to help develop the youth and adolescents of the United States we need to understand that we cannot educate in the positive traits that help people to thrive and contribute in society we must let them experience and develop those traits.
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