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Contested perspectives on the social impacts of a residential fieldtrip.

Abstract

Background: Research into outdoor learning reveals social benefits for trip participants, both individually and collectively. However, this is not universal and individual participants can experience increased isolation from the wider group. **Purpose:** This research investigated the underexplored negative experiences of an individual trip participant, in the context of a program promoting collectivist beliefs. **Methodology/Approach:** An ethnographic methodology was adopted, to include full immersion into all aspects of the week-long trip. Data were collected by observation and interviews and analyzed using a conceptual framework around individualism and collectivism. **Findings/Conclusions:** The teachers perceived the trip as successful, in meeting their collectivist goal of enhancing group cohesion, and data revealed the building of community feelings amongst the majority of participants, alongside feelings of belonging, togetherness and mutual support. However, one participant exhibited contrasting individualist perceptions and experiences around interpretations of freedom, privacy, adversity and cohesion. **Implications:** Trip leaders need to be mindful of participants as individuals, taking care not to seek nor project a blanket group identity over all. Within the confines of health and safety and duty of care boundaries, and commensurate with the age range of trip participants, accompanying teachers should understand and respect individual needs within collectivist group socialization agendas.

Keywords

Introduction

Research into the social impacts of outdoor learning suggests that outcomes are positive, for enhancing personal relationships and group dynamics (Allison & von Wald, 2010; Beames & Atencio, 2008; Cooley, Burns, & Cumming, 2015; Mygind, 2009; Rickinson et al., 2004). This paper contributes to experiential education literature by adopting an ethnographic exploration of an outdoor education program, considering the perspective of one student's experience within the context of teachers' collectivist socialization goals. It is based upon participation in, and observation of, a week-long residential fieldtrip and builds upon previous ethnographic research focusing on developing community sentiments, and the positive impacts on social relationships (Gee, 2015). However, such manifestations are not necessarily universal (Gee, 2015a), and this research considers the underexplored negative experiences of an individual trip participant, in the context of a program promoting collectivist beliefs. It responds to the need for further research into unique and subjective individual perspectives in experiential outdoor education (James & Williams, 2017), and into experiences of community making (Sharp, 2005), by exploring contested perspectives on group socialization. Research questions consider whether personal well-being necessarily entails the integration of individuals into a social unit; and if the quest for social cohesion overlooks individual preferences and rights, in the context of a residential program.

Review of Literature

The Social Impacts of Outdoor Learning

Outdoor learning in residential settings provides powerful opportunities for group social cohesion, where school norms around space and power can be challenged and adapted, with resulting positive impacts upon individual and group relationships (Gee, 2015, 2015a). The delineated duration combined with the altered physical setting helps to foster a temporary,

psychological sense of community, underpinned by feelings of membership, interdependence, shared connections and 'in-jokes' (Smith, Steel, & Gidlow, 2010). Studies have also identified benefits for outdoor learning participants in relation to various individual social dimensions. Farnham and Mutrie (1997) cite improvements to group cohesion via an increased willingness to participate in group discussion for participants on a 4 day residential course, whilst Cooley, Burns, and Cumming (2015) report enhancements to communication, teamwork and community integration amongst higher education residential participants. In a study of social effectiveness, before and after a 5/6 day outdoor education course, Purdie, Neill, and Richards (2002) suggest that communication for participants is improved, whilst the building of camaraderie is cited by Bell (2005) for residential geography fieldwork pupils. Enhanced social relations amongst outdoor program participants are identified in studies by Mygind (2009) and Beames and Atencio (2008), as levels of reciprocity, confidence and trust increase. In an ethnographic study, Holyfield and Fine (1997) investigate how adventure programs can facilitate the sharing of intense emotions to build group cohesion, via the inclusion of pre-determined events designed to create 'structured spontaneity.' The acquisition of social gains are not necessarily organic and Sharp (2005) reveals how a leisure service provider consciously deploys trip leaders to deliver social integration and communitas through wilderness adventure programs.

Although social impacts are one area in which outdoor learning yields positive impacts, it is important to note that the seemingly convenient classification into social, cognitive, affective and behavioral/physical categories (Rickinson et al., 2004) masks potential blurring and inter-relationships between these domains. For example, Rosenthal and Lee (2009) report that the new social situations resulting from shared living on a residential trip enhance cognitive learning outcomes, whilst studies by Dillon et al. (2005) and James and Williams (2017) both reveal how motivation level is linked to enjoyment of learning outside the classroom. Boyle

et al. (2007) identify links between enhanced motivation and a positive affective experience and Nundy (1999) cites relationships between cognitive, affective and social domains. It is important to acknowledge that the extent and longevity of positive impacts beyond the outdoor residential program varies (Scrutton, 2015; Williams, 2012) and, as I argue in this paper, that the benefits are not necessarily felt by all participants. Chang, Tucker, Norton, Gass, and Javorski (2017) argue the need to facilitate both individual and collective voices in outdoor programs, and highlight research opportunities to explore this further via the concept of individualism and collectivism. This paper seeks to employ such a framework to investigate tensions in community socialization.

Conceptual Framework: Individualism and Collectivism

Frameworks based upon individualism and collectivism seek to analyse the relative importance attached to personal goals or shared activity (Wagner, 1995). Interpretations of individualism tend to assume individuals are independent from others, with an emphasis on personal autonomy (Hofstede, 2001) based around the prized values of individual rights, personal freedom and privacy (Sampson, 1988). Distinctiveness is valued (Triandis, 2001), group relationships are managed at cost to achieve personal goals (Oyserman, 1993) and the importance of self creates autonomous identities which diminish consideration for others (Hales, 2006). Collectivism assumes that groupings obligate individuals for mutual benefit (Schwartz, 1990), where common goals and values are prioritized and individuals are just components of a social unit (Triandis, 2001). Consequently, group membership is the key to identity (Hofstede, 2001; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002) and maintaining harmonious relationships is highly prized (Oyserman, 1993). Individualist and collectivist tendencies co-exist within every society, culture and person; fluidly manifesting themselves in response to circumstance (Triandis, 2001). This paper addresses gaps in the current literature by employing a conceptual framework on individualism and collectivism to focus

upon the underexplored dimensions of negative social impacts, and individual perspectives, within outdoor education programs.

Method

Research Design and Access

This research is based upon an ethnographic study of a 5 day residential geography fieldtrip at a UK field study center, hereafter referred to as Wychwood[i]. The methodology conformed to a 'compressed time mode' ethnography (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004) whereby I inhabited Wychwood throughout the program and sought to gain a full perspective of the context, dynamics, routines, relationships and structures. Participants were 36, male and female, Year 12 (aged 16-18) A level geography students and their 3 accompanying geography teachers, on a compulsory fieldtrip to learn about fieldwork techniques. Access was secured by obtaining consent from the school to accompany their fieldtrip, and by then approaching Wychwood to obtain their independent permission. The study was approved by the IRB at the University of East Anglia, UK, and included explaining my role to participants/parents, securing written consent for interviews and observations, and adopting strict procedures around the anonymity and confidentiality of data by the use of pseudonyms, password protection and the careful storage of material.

Data Collection and Field Relations

Data were drawn from my observation of, and participation in, all aspects of the program. This included, for instance, engaging in geographical data collection with students, attending classroom-based sessions and participating in mealtimes and leisure activities. I sought to focus upon evolving social relationships during the visit, seeking to capture and understand the complicated, contradictory and multi-dimensional nature of lived experiences. This was

informed by ethnographic principles of intense engagement within a natural setting (Atkinson & Delamont, 1990) and building empathy with informants to understand their relational, social experiences in an embodied social practice (Mills & Morton, 2013). My participation as a researcher (and not a student, or teacher), potentially afforded me a 'neutral' identity, with some distance from both, enabling me to build independent rapport. The adoption of an ethnographic methodology also enabled opportunity to respond to initial observations of a student (hereafter referred to as David[ii]), who did not willingly engage with the rest of the group, and to subsequently observe and record his nuanced and individual perspective, whilst maintaining observation of other evolving trip relationships. This methodological tension, acknowledged by Mills and Morton (2013), also links to the broader individualist/collectivist discussion of the paper.

Data and Validation

Field notes were obtained by committing key episodes to memory, making ad hoc shorthand notes, and writing up in opportune moments – for example, during classroom-based sessions or whilst travelling in the minibus. After 'lights out', when students had to be in their dormitories, I worked intensively coding and analysing notes for recurrent themes and emergent ideas, which informed my ongoing observations. Interviews were conducted throughout the week with seventeen students (including David) and all the teachers, to assist with the triangulation of observations, by checking my perceptions and understandings. Further verification techniques included my adoption of reflexivity (Pillow, 2003), whereby I sought to analyse the potential impact of my own presence, review how I was being perceived, and acknowledge the potential impacts upon my data. Verbatim speech and rich descriptions are included in order to enhance authenticity (Geertz, 1973), whilst accepting my perspectives, representations and analyses do not provide a 'true' objective reality (Jeffrey,

2018). Rather, they seek to offer a plausible and relevant 'subtle reality', gaining validity

from reader recognition of similar experiences (Hammersley, 1992).

Ethical Considerations

I found myself adopting the principle of 'ethical situationism' (Hammersley & Atkinson,

2007, p 219), actively reviewing my role and questioning my data collection throughout the

program. Specific anxieties related to eavesdropping on conversations and the covert focus

upon individuals (including David), in common with other social and ethnographic research.

Such covert aspects are sometimes employed to overtly avoid influencing behaviors and with

varying degrees of openness with different research participants (Burgess, 1985). My

decisions to pursue these approaches were founded upon seeking legitimate data for the

production of new knowledge, based upon my context-specific observations and

interpretations of social phenomena, whilst continually assessing and re-checking the

potential avoidance of harm or offence to participants.

Results and Discussion

This section explores contested perspectives arising from the collectivist beliefs of the

program leaders, and the individualism of a particular trip participant, informed by the

conceptual framework and the underlying research questions: (1) does personal well-being

necessarily entail the integration of individuals into a collectivist social unit?; (2) does a

collectivist quest for social cohesion overlooks individual preferences and rights? These

research questions are explicitly revisited in the Conclusion.

The Collectivist Agenda of Engineering Social Relationships

The collectivist values of group membership and valuing relationships with others (Hofstede,

2001; Triandis, 2001) were overtly stated as a key objective for the week. In an interview

with Mr Stephens (trip leader and teacher) on the first day he explained that, although the trip was justified and designed to provide opportunity for gathering geography fieldwork data and learning about associated fieldwork techniques, he felt that social cohesion was essential for a positive learning experience, by enhancing both engagement and motivation. He also informed me of his affection for Wychwood and his romantic belief that it contributed to group cohesion, by providing a *"magical cocoon"* (Monday, interview). He referenced a specific 'gelling' agenda with these particular students, who tended to congregate in cliques based upon their feeder schools, rather than integrating. However, he was also conscious that a remote setting alone was insufficient to stimulate the group 'gelling' he sought, so he specifically requested that the television set be locked away and wi-fi access be switched off. He believed the resulting isolation would create an introspective environment where face to face socializing based upon shared living and experiences would enhance social relationships within the group. This reveals his objective-driven approach to prioritizing collectivist principles for the fieldtrip, via the promotion of common goals in a 'power-over' approach (Chang et al., 2017), and the significance attached to building harmonious group relationships (Oyserman, 1993) alongside curricular objectives. It also aligns with the approach of program leaders in other ethnographic studies (Holyfield & Fine, 1997; Sharp, 2005), where social integration was sought by deliberate, and sometimes covert, strategies.

David became conspicuous from the first leisure opportunity on Monday evening when he opted to sit alone reading, adjacent to the impressive fireplace in the grand entrance hall, and this prompted me to enquire about him in conversation with Miss Wilson, one of the teachers. She outlined that he joined the sixth form as the only pupil from Robinia Comprehensive School[iii], in a market town 25km from the city, and not a usual feeder into St. Hugh's. He was initially keen upon his arrival, but this enthusiasm quickly waned and he increasingly became introverted. She believed that the trip offered the ideal opportunity to integrate David into the

group and specifically prompted two students to buddy up with him; involving him in activities, looking out for him and arranging for them all to share a dormitory. This further reflects the collectivist teacher perspective, whereby individual well-being is assumed to derive from active social engagement within a group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Positive Collectivist Social Impacts and Evolving Community Sentiments

The residential trip environment created a temporary social context in which collectivist goals of group membership, social interaction and fitting in (Hofstede, 2001) were promoted by the teachers. Plentiful opportunities to interact with different people, all of whom were sharing the same experience, were observed to facilitate conversations, enhance friendships, boost confidence, improve co-operation levels and expand the network of social relationships for many participants. Evolving social relationships on the trip, within the confined setting, also helped to foster sentiments akin to a traditional community (Gee, 2015), resonating with the findings of Smith, Steel, and Gidlow (2010) on adventure education in New Zealand. Community identification was built around a bounded location (Parsons, 1951), networks of social relationships based upon lived interdependence (Abrams & McCullock, 1976) and a spirit of commonality founded upon shared values and norms (Lee & Newby, 1983); all of which were temporarily (and artificially) replicated on the fieldtrip and align with notions of a collectivist social unit (Schwartz, 1990). Although societal and economic transformations, including the rise of global social networking, have now rendered such characteristics largely redundant (Bauman, 2001), they are potentially still attainable within a demarcated temporal-spatial residential program context. Furthermore, impromptu communitas moments arising from communal living generated intense, "euphoric and fleeting" (Frazer, 1999, p83) experiences, which resonate with contemporary community interpretations. The increasingly informal, jovial and egalitarian relationships as the trip unfolded, and the sharing of leisure

time, proliferated opportunities for such occurrences and a resulting social cohesion built upon common positive experiences.

Contested Perspectives?

Against this backdrop of positive and evolving social relationships, the following discussion is structured around recurrent themes which emerged from the entanglement of trip experiences, where differences in perceptions were evidenced. Data analysis revealed themes of freedom, privacy, expediency, adversity and cohesion, which are employed as subheadings in a classifying framework, to provide a data-driven structure. The individual perspective of David is integrated throughout, alongside the views of other trip participants, and analysis is developed with reference to the conceptual framework.

Whilst each theme is considered in turn, it is recognised that the complexity of evolving social situations cannot be fully captured by examples acknowledging, or refuting, a simplified notional concept. In reality, within all themes, there are inevitably nuanced and fluid interpretations, reflecting the complicated, dynamic and multi-dimensional social experiences on the trip.

Freedom

In relation to this research, freedom refers to the rights of trip participants to have control over their ability to freely engage with external influences. In particular, this was observed to encompass two related elements which were deliberately influenced by the teachers; the secluded physical location and the exclusion of television/wi-fi. The isolated setting was perceived as a key advantage of Wychwood by the teachers, and fundamental to their collectivist group relationship building agenda. Throughout the week they made positive references, in overheard conversations, to a "*bubble*", a "*cocoon*" and a *"refuge"*, where

students could "*escape*" from the distractions of school and everyday life. Alongside the perceived positive impacts on gelling a collective social unit, the teachers believed a loss of temporal and spatial orientation contributed to a less pressurized and more relaxing experience. They seemingly ignored, or discounted, interpretations around the importance of individual freedom, viewing positively any social necessity to *"follow the group"* (Tuesday conversation, Mr Stephens). In interviews, several students appreciated the 'escape' from life at school, noting opportunities for socializing were more extensive and that some school norms could be challenged. However, for others, physical isolation was interpreted as an infringement of 'adult' rights in restricting their personal freedom and autonomy (Sampson, 1980), as exemplified by Daniel: *"We are 18 years old – we need our freedom"* (Wednesday conversation).

A further consequence of the remote coastal location was the lack of mobile phone signals, and this was another distinct advantage from the perspective of the teachers. With mobile phones largely redundant, the only wi-fi access was via Wychwood's broadband; which was turned off at their request. The perceived resulting loss of individual rights caused significant student dissatisfaction upon arrival, but this seemed to wane as the week progressed, perhaps in resigned acceptance of the situation. During Tuesday evening I observed several students in the computer lab seeking to access the internet by attempting to crack the password. Others, when asked in interviews, pragmatically suggested they would readily use wi-fi if it were available, but acknowledged that the temporary loss of freedom was to the benefit of the lived social experience on the trip. However for David, he reported that the lack of externality made him feel: *"removed from civilization…."* (Friday, interview) and desperate to leave.

Thoughts on personal freedom reveal a variety of evolving perspectives, but they evidence a recognition of teacher power in seeking to impose a hegemonic collectivist socialization

agenda, with a resulting loss of individual rights and freedom. This aligns with the lowering of individual expectations for autonomy, as norms become diluted to conform to levels of accepted communitarian practices (Gereluk, 2006), and supports the findings of Hales (2006), whereby individualist tendencies of mobile phone use are assumed to detract from social cohesion in outdoor education.

Privacy

Privacy, alongside freedom, is a highly valued individual right (Sampson, 1988). In the context of a residential fieldtrip based upon communal arrangements, issues of privacy manifested themselves around the lack of opportunity to seclude oneself from the oversight of other trip participants. On Wednesday evening David sat reading by the fireplace, with its crackling flames and comforting smoky wood smell, when all three teachers came downstairs and sat on adjacent chairs. *"Do you want me to go?"* enquired David. *"No, of course not"*, came the unanimous reply, as the teachers proceeded to engage in conversation which progressively included David and ultimately caused him to abandon his reading. Within 20 minutes, as students descended the stairs, the group expanded, and sub-groups of conversations evolved, with the teachers consciously weaving David into conversation, which he readily engaged with.

When I interviewed David on Friday he specifically mentioned this incident, revealing his liking of the teachers, but also his feeling that they had deliberately targeted him for conversation, which he did not welcome. That said, he opted to remain, joining in the chatter and seemingly enjoying himself at the time. He linked his discontent to a broader perception around invading his privacy, especially as he felt that throughout the week the teachers were disproportionately paying him attention compared with his peers. It could also be that my

covert observations may have further contributed to this perception, and that he was only willing to share with me his thoughts on the teachers.

Most students were, at least superficially, accepting of Mr Stephens in creating out-of-school rules and conventions, perhaps based upon their pre-conceived acceptance of school norms and teacher autonomy. David, however, seemingly fostered a deeper resentment towards the exertion of teacher authority into areas he felt were unwarranted. Indeed, he explicitly referred to an unwelcome: *"intrusion of privacy"* (Friday, interview). He struggled to find private space and did not feel comfortable (neither physically, nor socially) within his dormitory, avoiding time in there other than when sleeping. On occasion he frequented one of the girls' dormitories, but usually he gravitated towards the fireplace to read a book. Ironically, this encouraged the teachers to sit with him and to initiate conversations, perhaps out of a collectivist welfare perspective, as well as their group socialization agenda. However, he viewed it as impinging upon his privacy by intruding upon his preferred solitary pursuit, and this highlights the tension when collectivist group rights supersede those of the individual (Gereluk, 2006).

Expediency

Expediency is used here to describe situations on the trip where practical or convenient behaviors were perhaps adopted, in acceptance of the social and physical confines of a bounded residential fieldtrip. In various situations throughout the week, participation and social interaction levels were observed to be motivated by expedient factors, heightened by the loss of social networking and the resulting need to 'fit in' with the collectivist group (Oyserman, 1993). For example, Frank implied a sense of compulsion to his socializing via the comment: *"we have no choice but to get on together while we're here"* (Thursday, interview). This provokes questions over the extent to which perceptions of community and

togetherness were founded upon enforced identification, as opposed to genuinely held sentiments, and whether group togetherness was a relational manifestation of individualism, as opposed to a genuine expression of collectivism based upon common values?

Some actions of David, which he shared with me in his interview as being motivated by expediency, possibly contributed to (overheard) teachers' perceptions of their success in achieving group integration. The Tuesday night check revealed David had been socialising in the girls dormitory (which was not permitted) whereupon, much to the amusement of those around, he hid in the wardrobe as Miss Saunders (teacher) entered the room, in a vain attempt to avoid detection. Also, a fun-filled conversation in the canteen after dinner on Wednesday seemingly revealed his confident interaction with others, laughing about his lack of affinity with the rural environment. Such occurrences clearly informed Mr Stephens' staffroom conversation on Thursday morning, when he advised the other teachers that David was *"happy"*, *"smiling"* and *"engaged."* David however, in perhaps overlooking or being unwilling to acknowledge occasional episodes of enjoyment, explained that any perceived engagement was: *"out of necessity"* (Friday, interview). He instead reported an absence of group empathy and no sense of having developed personal relationships. He was dismissive of notions of mutual benefit or common values, instead perceiving: "*just a group of students who have been put together"* (Friday, interview) in a reflection of his own ideocentrism. Nonetheless, within a dynamic social environment, necessitating varied and flexible responses to circumstance, it is inevitable that an individual does not reflect a unitary stance (Rapport, 1993), nor exclusively exhibit either individualist or collectivist traits (Triandis, 2001).

The need to develop expedient coping strategies around co-operation, social interaction and personal resilience arose for some trip participants, including David. These may yield longer term gains in terms of enhanced lifeskills, but they blur evaluation of genuine success in

'gelling' the group around collectivist harmonious relationships. The adoption of expedient strategies by participants may also contribute explanation of their reactions to adversity, but they are not simply adopted, or otherwise; there is a graduated engagement which constantly fluctuates according to circumstance.

Adversity

Notions of adversity relate to instances characterised by challenging, or unpleasant, circumstances and these emerged amongst the participants, with varying prominence, throughout the week. The food was a common source of overheard dissatisfaction, with issues regularly discussed including the serving of vegetarian dishes, portion size and persistent feelings of hunger. The standard of dormitory and bathroom facilities, which were functional rather than luxurious, also generated negative perceptions. For example, eavesdropped comments throughout the week included reference to the "*disgusting plastic mattresses*", *"piss yellow bath water"* and *"rancid"* toilets.

Geographical data collection in the field provided a tangible instance of shared adversity for many participants, whilst also evidencing elements of a resulting solidarity, which resonate with collectivist notions of common fate (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). On Tuesday, after a morning of measuring and recording river variables, the students arrived at the third sampling site with visibly less engagement, lethargically clambering out of the minibus. Miss Wilson, evidently recognising this, sought to initiate a water fight during the data collection, in an attempt to re-inject joviality and enthusiasm. The strategy proved successful, albeit temporarily, as upon subsequently arriving at the forth data collection site, with soaked clothing and the plummeting temperatures of a March late afternoon, the misery and discomfort of many of the students intensified. *"This is just ridiculous now… we should've gone straight back and got changed to warm up"* moaned Sally in the minibus.

Amongst this discomfort, elements of camaraderie and humour also emerged. On the final drive back to Wychwood there was an intense debate between three students over how to pronounce the word "*scones*", amidst the sullen atmosphere of the rest of the group, until Mark yelled *"shut up"* from the back of the bus, because it was making him desperate to eat one! The minibus erupted with spontaneous laughter, in concurrence with these sentiments, whereupon conversations and jokes about being wet, cold and hungry flowed for the remainder of the journey back, built around the fluid emergence of a common empathy (Triandis, 2001).

The events of that day frequently featured in overheard conversations, as the week progressed and the introspective environment intensified, whilst participant interviews revealed experiences of being wet and cold as an enjoyable feature of the trip for many. That shared adversity contributed to building sentiments of togetherness perhaps represented a positive group outcome from individual expedient reactions, but it was not universally felt. David reported similar adversity in his interview; of being cold and bored, a dislike of the quality of accommodation and the quantity of food, but rather than viewing these with an element of humor or as a source of strengthening affinity with the group, he suggested that they intensified his individual feelings of wanting to leave.

Cohesion

Cohesion is interpreted as the togetherness and 'gelling' identified by the teachers as a key collectivist objective of the Wychwood visit, and overheard conversations revealed the unanimous belief that they achieved this by the end of the week. For example, on the final morning, Mr Stephens gleefully reported to his concurring colleagues in the staffroom: *"Just as I thought, they've all come together."* (Friday, overheard conversation). As the trip evolved, social integration and the building of community sentiments increased, often

facilitated by planned interventions from the accompanying teachers. Observations of David revealed incidents of his engagement with other students during free time, examples which perhaps contributed to the teacher perceptions that: *"outsiders now seem enclosed within the group"* (Friday, Mr Stephens overheard conversation), built upon a collectivist perspective of analysing individuals in terms of their connections with others (Schwartz, 1990). This interpretation, however, contrasted with David's interview in which he reported growing resentment at his loss of freedom and privacy. Instead of the developing togetherness, enjoyment and mutual support felt by the other program participants, David evidenced escalating levels of demotivation in arriving late for meals and avoiding classroom sessions. He, perhaps insightfully, recognised the temporary and artificial status of the fieldtrip community such that, as the end of the program neared, his expedient participation declined. For instance, on Thursday afternoon when the teachers sought to gather the whole party for a group photograph he could not be found, so eventually the picture was taken without him.

The teachers may have conveniently perceived collectivist notions of a group identity and associated sentiments of togetherness among all participants, to align with their intended objectives. However, such perceptions were potentially just manifestations of individual student compliance within a culture of communal routines, as opposed to more genuine sentiments of collectivist group attachment. This relates to the argument of Rapport (1993), who queries the notion of collective and uniform social structures, as opposed to overlapping individuals constantly creating and re-creating fragmented social experiences. It also links to questions around the 'authenticity' of community sentiments emerging within outdoor programs (Holyfield & Fine, 1997; Sharpe, 2005).

Whilst feelings of cohesion, group empathy and camaraderie developed within the evolving community, based around the shared experiences of the visit, these were not universally embraced nor experienced. The strong collectivism-focused temporary community agenda

which made group obligation salient, effectively penalised David for not embracing group relationships, as he became increasingly isolated.

Conclusions

This research contributes to experiential education literature by offering an ethnographic insight into an outdoor education program, highlighting the perspective of one student's experience. It reveals the need - within the context of positive and powerful collectivist impacts afforded by residential trips, and widely promoted in the literature - to be mindful of individual differences.

Whilst the preceding discussion has identified elements of the residential experience within which different perceptions were evidenced, in reality they are time-specific and inter-related perspectives within a complex and evolving social context. The following thoughts, based around the identified research questions, are intended to prompt further questions for prospective outdoor program leaders.

Whilst the teachers were motivated by what they believed to be the best interests of their students, personal well-being may not always automatically entail the enforced integration of an individual into a collective social unit. Opportunity for, and respect of, individual pursuits is important and some students may actively eschew social integration. Ironically, in pursuing a strong collectivist agenda, any individuals who deliberately, or unintentionally, fail to connect with developing group sentiments may find themselves increasingly socially vulnerable, and becoming a more isolated 'outsider'. However these situations are complex, as are the unintended consequences, whereby escalating temporary social isolation may yield individual benefits around the development of resilience and coping mechanisms, and this is an area worthy of further research.

In pursuing a collectivist quest for social cohesion, accepting the powerful gains afforded by residential programs, there is a risk that individual preferences and rights are overlooked and that the complexity of group dynamics are oversimplified. Whilst a secluded setting and the exclusion of external influences can intensify and enforce socializing amongst participants, the latter may engender relationships based upon expediency or compliance, rather than deeply held sentiments of togetherness. There is perhaps a need to avoid imposing beliefs, to be continually mindful of participants as individuals, and to take care over erroneously projecting a collectivist group identity upon all.

The extent to which a collectivist socialization agenda is imposed upon an outdoor program inevitably depends upon the aims of the trip, the age and profile of participants, and the associated pastoral and health/social care duties. Teacher oversight is necessary to try and ensure that the experience is safe, beneficial and enjoyable for all participants, alongside respecting individual rights and well-being. Allowing scope for individual freedom and privacy requires careful consideration, and thoughtful negotiation of the tensions between this and the facilitation of group cohesion to enhance togetherness - which remains a powerful opportunity and aim of residential programs.

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[i] The field study center is referred to under pseudonym.

[ii] Named participants have been anonymised by pseudonym.

[iii] School names are referred to under pseudonym.