

**EMERGING FROM THE WILDERNESS: SIGNIFICANCE OF A SPIRITUALLY-  
ORIENTED WILDERNESS EXPEDITION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study used a concurrent mixed-method procedure within a modified grounded theory approach similar to Daniel (2003) and Wigglesworth & Heintzman (2012) to determine whether a 40-day, spiritually-oriented wilderness expedition through the Coalition for Christian Outreach was a significant life experience in the life of the participants. This retrospective study collected information from 53 male and female college-aged students who participated in programs between 1995 and 2012. Greater than 90% of the participants believed that the expedition had a lasting impact on their lives. Themes that emerged from the data centered around community, challenge, self-discovery, and the natural environment. Growth was best measured within relationships between the participants and others, nature, and God; and it was the discipling relationship that seemed to most help with transfer of learning.

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## **CHAPTER 1.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Statement of Need/Relevance of the Study**

Experiential education, adventure education, and environmental education are different branches of education with similar overarching goals for learning. The goals of experiential, adventure, and environmental education programs focus not only on increasing participants' knowledge and understanding, but also on fostering attitudinal changes evidenced by intentions and reasoned behavior (Hanna, 1995). Educators design programs with the hope that participants will return to their home environments with the ability and desire to live out the resolutions they made during the learning experience.

Previous studies in experiential, adventure, and environmental education have looked at the impact of various programs. Hattie, Marsh, Neill and Richards (1997) conducted a meta-analysis which concluded that adventure programs have a major, lasting impact on participants. Adventure programs, such as Outward Bound, and environmental programs, such as Audubon, enlarged the knowledge base of participants, but the translation from knowledge to behavior was weak (Hanna, 1995). Unfortunately, whether resolutions were personal, spiritual, or environmental in nature, many resolutions made in these types of programs did not appear to transfer to the home environment (Griffin & LeDuc, 2009; Hanna, 1995).

Although resolutions did not seem to transfer, some studies showed that memories of the experiences on adventure education programs did transfer to the home environment. Participants were repeatedly able to remember overall programs and the specific components that they

considered to be significant and impactful in their lives (Daniel, 2003). Further studies have shown that specific aspects of adventure programs remained significant to the participants. The community (Bobilya, Akey & Mitchell, 2011; D'Amato & Krasny, 2011; Fox, 1999; Gass, Garvey & Sugerman, 2003; Griffin, 2003; Griffin & LeDuc, 2009; McAvoy, Mitten, Stringer, Steckart & Sproles, 1996; McKenzie, 2003; O'Connell & Breunig, 2005; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992), natural environment (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011; Fox, 1999; Griffin & LeDuc, 2009; Kalisch, Bobilya, & Daniel, 2011; McAvoy et al., 1996; McKenzie, 2003; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992), instructors/leadership (Bobilya et al., 2011; Griffin, 2003; McKenzie, 2003; O'Connell, Todd, Breunig, Young, Anderson & Anderson, 2009), and intensity/challenge/adventure activities (Bobilya et al., 2011; D'Amato & Krasny, 2011; Gass et al., 2003; Griffin, 2003; Griffin & LeDuc, 2009; McKenzie, 2003) have all been shown to be significant. Also, the timing of the program in a participant's life (Daniel, 2007; Gass et al., 2003), the newness of the experience (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011; Daniel, 2007) and the spiritual component (Anderson-Hanley, 1997; Bobilya et al., 2011; Griffin, 2003; Griffin & LeDuc, 2009; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992) have also been shown to add significance.

Tanner (1980) was the first to use a retrospective study to determine which experiences significantly affected a person's life and future decisions. Tanner's study was followed by many others, including Chawla (1998) who used the same lens to research more Significant Life Experiences (SLEs) with a focus on decisions about environmental protection. Daniel (2003) took the SLE lens and adapted it to look at one specific outdoor experience to see if it was significant. Daniel's (2003) research on a spiritually-oriented wilderness expedition was followed up by Wigglesworth and Heintzman (2012), who studied a collegiate outdoor education course to determine life significance.

Taking into account the call for more retrospective studies (Daniel, 2007) and the need for more studies connecting spirituality with personal growth and change (Fox, 1999; Griffin, 2003; Griffin & LeDuc, 2009; Haluza-Delay, 2000; Henderson, 2000; Rea, 2003; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992), the present study researched past participants of the Coalition for Christian Outreach's (CCO) Leadership and Discipleship in the Wilderness (LDW) program. The LDW program is a 40-day wilderness program that has been in operation since 1988. The LDW program combines the outdoor skills taught by the Wilderness Education Association (WEA) with environmental practices and leadership development under a distinctly spiritual focus. The LDW program is designed to be a significant experience in a college student's life, an experience that helps to shape their future decisions and life trajectory. The LDW program has never been studied before and is of particular interest due to its length, which nearly doubles the length of previously studied wilderness programs. Using the SLE framework, the present study was designed to determine whether or not the expedition as a whole was described as significant to the lives of the participants up to 19 years after the experience. For those participants who thought the expedition was significant, the research focused on what specific aspects of the program as well as procedures that most impacted the participants.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

*Adventure Education*: “uses real or apparent risk and uncertainty to create dissonance” which causes an individual to experience personal and social growth after completing a task (Hanna, 1995, p. 21).

*Community*: a group of people with a “sense of community...a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that

members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9).

*Environmental Education*: education aimed to make people aware of systems of interdependence in rural and urban settings, to gain knowledge and attitudes that will create behavioral patterns focused on caring for the environment (UNESCO, 1978).

*Environmental Integration*: "the concepts that embody ecological and cultural literacy along with the cooperative planning and management skills needed to ensure preservation of resources through personal connections for past, present, and future generations" (WEA, 2015).

*Significant Life Experience (SLE)*: formative learning experiences which produce active participation (Chawla, 1998).

*Spirituality*: "can involve transcendence, ineffability, mystery, feelings 'deep in one's soul,' beauty, goodness, contemplation, a sense of inspiration or renewal, encounter with sublime natural settings, and intuition of the divine; it is often characterized by a sense of awe, unity, personal balance or inner peace" (Hitzhusen, 2005, p. 41).

*Spiritual Growth*: the result of awareness of spiritual experiences (Fox, 1999). In a Christian worldview, which this study focused on, spiritual growth referred to growth that evidenced itself when a participant behaved more like the person of Jesus Christ as described in the Bible.

## **Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions: 1) What was the impact of the LDW program on the participants years later? 2) What components of the LDW program impacted the lives the participants most significantly? 3) What made the LDW program

components significant? In this study, participants were asked to reflect on the program as a whole in regards to memory, significance, and transference.

## **CHAPTER 2.**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Designing Impactful Experiential Education**

Professionals involved in experiential education are interested in creating memorable experiences for the purpose of change, growth, and development. Experiential education could be described as learning by doing, adding to one's knowledge by direct experience through the process of experiencing, reflecting, generalizing, and applying (Luckner & Nadler, 1997). Kolb (1984) believed that experiential education differs from traditional education because of its focus on the process instead of outcomes. In the midst of an experience, true learning and positive change take place because a person comes head to head with a problem that he/she must overcome (Beard & Wilson, 2006). Experiential education "at its best does not just exist within the activity, but it is in the active construction of the process itself" (Roberts, 2012, p.107). Without the problems and challenges that are brought forth in experiential education experiences it is unlikely that people would change what they do (Beard & Wilson, 2006).

Environmental Education (EE) is a subset of experiential education that is concerned with addressing environmental problems. In 1976, the Belgrade Charter stated that the goal of EE was "to develop a world population that is aware of, and concerned about, the environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations, and commitments to work individually and collectively toward solutions of current problems and prevention of new ones" (Archie et al., 2005, p.2). Two years later, in 1978, the Tbilisi Declaration focused EE down to three goals which centered around fostering awareness and concern; providing opportunities for knowledge, attitude, and skill development; and creating new patterns of behavior (Archie et al., 2005). Currently, the North American Association for

Environmental Education (NAAEE) uses the Belgrade Charter, the Tbilisi Declaration and the 1992 Agenda 21 to inform educators how to best teach EE. The NAAEE stresses a systems approach to learning, combining interdependence, integration, infusion, and the importance of sense of place. Environmental educators are committed to help students develop roots in the natural world while seeing a bigger picture. Students should continue to not just learn but to participate in important issues and environmental problems throughout their lifetimes.

Overcoming challenges and problems to achieve growth is a cornerstone of yet another educational category also frequently put underneath experiential education: adventure education. The Italian word *expereri*, which means “to try,” actually shares a root with the word for peril/danger (Roberts, 2012). Adventure-based learning is “a type of educational and/or therapeutic program in which adventure pursuits that are physically and/or psychologically demanding are used within a framework of safety skills and development to promote interpersonal and intrapersonal growth” (Luckner & Nadler, 1997, p. 254). The goal in adventure education is to promote disequilibrium in an individual, forcing him/her to make some type of decision or change which will then be able to be generalized and transferred to another environment. Often, a novel setting and a cooperative environment adds to the adventure education experience by making it both unique and memorable.

Roberts (2012) claims that the understanding of experiential education is fragile and incomplete, for the field is shallow and not fruitful enough. Educators have not seen the changes in attitudes and behaviors that one would expect to see if the theory of experiential education was manifested in practice (Roberts, 2012). Luckner and Nadler (1997) claim, “The experience is just the experience. What we bring into it, take from it, leave there, reach for, and continue to

use are all up to us...The difference between a lackluster experience and a truly great experience is how we use it as a reference point in our life story (Luckner & Nadler, 1997, p. xv).

### **Impact of Adventure Education**

The impact of an experience can be measured by the transfer of the learning into a participant's life and the inclusion of the experience in a person's life story. Memory recall is just one aspect of meeting a program's goals, for most programs do not want their participants to simply remember what happened on an adventure education experience but also to have the participants' attitudes and future actions influenced by what they have learned. When Hanna (1995) compared a field ecology program (Audubon) with an outdoor education program (Outward Bound), she determined that a number of different factors ended up influencing the knowledge, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors of the participants. Hanna (1995) discovered that an increase in knowledge and the desire to change did not necessarily transfer to behavioral change. Programs oriented toward achieving environmental behavior changes were not as influential as originally hoped. Hanna (1995) hypothesized that a reason for this lack of transfer could have been that the participants in the programs had minimal time and energy to implement their new knowledge when they returned to their "real" lives. Hanna (1995) believed there was a need for more research to analyze how this change of environment may have affected the participants' changes in attitude yet their failure to follow through on their intentions.

Hattie and colleagues (1997) provided foundational research on the impact of adventure programs as they methodically examined the effects of adventure education. Hattie et al. (1997) looked across many programs in their meta-analysis, limiting the effects of small sample sizes.

Ninety-six unique studies of adventure programs conducted between 1968 and 1994 were reviewed. The adventure programs exhibited the following common characteristics: wilderness or backcountry setting, group of less than 16 people, physically or mentally challenging assignments, forced group problem solving and decision-making due to intense interactions, non-intrusive leaders, and a length between two to four weeks. The most important feature of these programs was that participants were separated from their normal environments. The researchers organized the outcomes of these adventure programs into six categories: leadership, self-concept, academic, personality, interpersonal, and adventurousness. Hattie et al. (1997) found that adventure programs exhibited short term gains in effect. However, those short term gains were followed by substantial additional gains during follow-up questioning. Over time, the category that showed the most increase was self-concept. Therefore, the researchers determined that “adventure programs have a major impact on the lives of participants, and this impact is lasting” (p. 70). Yet, Hattie et al. (1997) also found that not all programs are the same. Only some of the programs were effective, and those programs were only effective on some outcomes. The largest variance in impact was found as the researchers measured the age of participants and length of the programs. Hattie et al. (1997) concluded that adventure programs improved as age of the participants and length of the program increased but also said that too little was known about how programs work most effectively.

## **Key Aspects of Adventure Education**

McKenzie (2000) provided an overview of the literature regarding how adventure program outcomes are achieved, noting that the literature up to that point was largely based on theory rather than empirical research. McKenzie (2000) researched six program characteristics which the literature repeatedly brought up as effective tools to achieve program outcomes. The six characteristics were physical environment, activities, processing, group, instructors, and participants. In all the categories, McKenzie (2000) found inconclusive findings or gaps in the research that she suggested should be filled first by qualitative then quantitative research in order to determine not just that outcomes are achieved but how they are achieved.

Researchers before and after McKenzie (2000) have been conducting studies to fill those gaps in the literature. Significant adventure program and participant characteristics have been studied (see Table 1). Similar to McKenzie's (2000) findings, program analysis has found that the natural/physical environment, course community, challenging activities, instructors/leadership, course length, and spiritual emphasis are all significant program components. How the program fits into the life of the participant, such as the timing in his/her life (Daniel, 2003; Gass et al., 2003) and the newness of the experience (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011; Daniel, 2003), have also been shown to impact program outcomes.

Table 1

*Program and participant characteristics affecting outcome achievement*

<b>Program/Participant Characteristic</b>	<b>Supporting Studies</b>
Natural/Physical Environment	D'Amato & Krasny, 2011; Fox, 1999; Griffin & LeDuc, 2009; Kalisch, Bobilya, & Daniel, 2011; McAvoy et al., 1996; McKenzie, 2003; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992
Course Group/Community	Bobilya et al., 2011; D'Amato & Krasny, 2011; Fox, 1999; Gass et al., 2003; Griffin, 2003; Griffin & LeDuc, 2009; McAvoy et al., 1996; McKenzie, 2003; O'Connell & Breunig, 2005; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992
Challenging Activities	Bobilya et al., 2011; D'Amato & Krasny, 2011; Gass et al., 2003; Griffin, 2003; Griffin & LeDuc, 2009; McKenzie, 2003
Instructors/Leadership	Bobilya et al., 2011; Griffin, 2003; McKenzie, 2003; O'Connell et al., 2009
Length of Course	Ewert & McAvoy, 2000; Hattie et al., 1997; Sibthorp, Paisley, & Gookin, 2007
Attention to Spirituality during Course	Anderson-Hanley, 1997; Griffin, 2003; Griffin & LeDuc, 2009; Hattie et al., 1997; Marsh, 2008; McKenzie, 2000; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992;

Although the literature highlights more than just these aspects that impact the outcomes of an adventure program, the literature suggests that there is a connection between the natural environment, the course community, and spirituality (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

*Connections Between Key Aspects of Adventure Programs*



*Note:* Adapted from Fox, 1999; Griffin & LeDuc, 2009; Marsh, 2008; McAvoy et al., 1996; McKenzie, 2000; O’Connell & Breunig, 2005; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992

**Natural Environment.** McKenzie (2000) stated that an unfamiliar physical environment helped participants of adventure programs to gain a new perspective on their normal environments. Participants experienced dissonance, “a constructive level of anxiety” (p. 20), due to the new environment; and a wilderness environment appeared to specifically enhance self-awareness and growth because of the straight forward tasks, aesthetic and spiritual qualities, as well as responsibility that must be maintained throughout an adventure program in the wilderness. In a follow-up study with 92 participants, McKenzie (2003) found that over half of

them mentioned that being in the wilderness environment was an influential factor in their Outward Bound experience.

***Natural Environment and Wilderness in Adventure Programs.*** Ewert and McAvoy (2000) incorporated twelve years of research findings to determine the effects of wilderness settings, contiguous underdeveloped natural areas essentially free of human impacts, on organized groups. Although people in the past associated wilderness with hardship, people have more recently associated wilderness with enjoyment. Now wilderness is successfully used to “grow” people as well as natural resources. D’Amato and Krasny (2011) asked 23 participants what aspects of an outdoor education course they attributed significance to, and one of the four themes that emerged was “living in pristine nature”, which participants connected with psychological well-being and inspiration. Natural areas have been reported to have a calming effect (Kalisch et al., 2011). However, they have also been reported to be more than just a “backdrop” in programs, and are thought to contribute to what is happening in group development (McAvoy et al., 1996).

***Program Length.*** The ideal length of a wilderness expedition has also been debated. Ewert and McAvoy (2000) believe that programs can be too long, creating too much stress and weakening effectiveness. On the other side, Sibthorp et al. (2007) stated that longer programs are more effective. After researching 663 participants in 120 different courses, Sibthorp et al. (2007) found that participants experienced greater development gains in longer courses and that longer courses were perceived as having a greater impact. Sibthorp et al. (2007) and Griffin and LeDuc (2009) called for more studies to measure the effect of short-term versus long-term programs. Bobilya, Faircloth, and Montgomery (2013) reported that participants had higher growth in character development and leadership in longer Outward Bound courses, and they also

reported that females appeared to experience a greater shift in growth than males in character development but an equal growth in leadership and environmental awareness.

**Community.** Along with the importance of the natural environment, McKenzie (2000) discovered that there are certain characteristics of groups that are believed to add to the effectiveness of a program. Effective group dynamics include a small group size of 7 to 15, which is small enough to avoid cliques and yet numerous enough to provide diversity and conflict. McKenzie (2000) also discovered the importance of reciprocity within groups, the balancing of individual and group needs which allowed for personal growth through a feeling of value and support. Group bonding, enforced by mutual dependence and shared objectives, enhanced honest communication and a feeling of belonging. A community with these characteristics increased the likelihood that a participant would reevaluate his/her own values. McKenzie (2000) stated that personal relationships within the group were important in achieving program outcomes as well as the ability for participants to have independence within the group. In fact, those who participated in outdoor education commented that “the group processes are often the most memorable events of an outdoor education experience” (McAvoy et al., 1996, p. 58).

Community then, does not just refer to a group that is close in proximity, but it also includes a psychological aspect (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). “A sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Yet, it was not until O’Connell and Breunig’s (2005) pilot study on sense of community in wilderness trips took place that researchers started to recognize the importance of sense of community within group dynamics. O’Connell, Breunig, Young,

Anderson and Anderson (2009) further discovered that regardless of instructors' leadership styles, sense of community increased over time in an outdoor trip.

***Community in Adventure Programs.*** Undergraduate collegiate wilderness experiences are not alone in supporting the importance of community to program effectiveness. D'Amato and Krasny (2011) found that being part of a course community was instrumental in overcoming anxiety. Dilemmas to spur growth, remote settings, and positive communities were a strength of outdoor adventure education. McAvoy et al. (1996) found that group processes were often the most memorable part of outdoor education experiences and suggested that group dynamics were important to the successes or failures of programs.

***Spirituality.*** While the studies on course communities focused on external influences on the participant, McKenzie (2000) referenced the participant himself as one of the categories that attributes to adventure education outcomes. She referenced studies on age, gender, background, and expectations and said that those aspects may influence the outcomes of a participant's experience. Some studies have found that younger participants were more affected (Sibthorp et al., 2007); while others indicated adult participants (19+) experienced greater gains (Hattie et al., 1997; McKenzie, 2003). In addition, Hattie et al. (1997) showed that male and female participants displayed similarly positive results, while McKenzie (2000) found that males seem to be looking for challenge and adventure while females seem to pursue spiritual development. However, McKenzie (2000) brought up inconclusive findings in regards to trends for what works best for different participants and called for more studies to connect the participants themselves with the effectiveness of the program. She mentioned that "it seems that there could also be other characteristics of participants that may affect program effectiveness" (p. 25).

Since Stringer and McAvoy's (1992) study, the idea of spirituality as a means of enhancing adventure programs has been brought to the forefront. Spirituality is a core component of humanity and personal growth (Chandler et al., 2001; Rea, 2003; Smith, 1996), and researchers concluded that it needs to be considered in experiential and adventure education (Henderson, 2000; Haluza-Delay, 2000; Marsh & Bobilya, 2013; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992).

***Spirituality defined.*** According to Henderson (2000), spirituality is a “personal belief in something greater than oneself” (p.128). Rea (2003) maintains that the spiritual is not only part of the human essence, but it is “the defining characteristic of human nature” (p. 12). Because people's beliefs do influence their behaviors, regardless of which religion, “experiential educators will likely do a better job if they understand how religion and spirituality influence people's lives” (Henderson, 2000, p.133).

In the six main properties of health (spiritual, emotional, social, intellectual, occupational and physical), the spiritual aspect is central (Fox, 1999). Spirituality affects all other aspects of health. Therefore, in order to teach a student holistically, one has to include opportunities for spiritual learning in programs (Stringer & McAvoy, 1992). Spiritual experiences can contribute not only to spiritual growth but may also influence perceptions and behavior changes. These transcendent experiences could readily transfer into everyday activities and create beneficial behavioral change towards life in general, and self, family and society in particular (Fox, 1999).

Smith (1996) stated that personal growth, including self-development and transformation includes all of life, including the spiritual. Chandler, Holden, and Kolander's (2001) believed that the term ‘wellness’ encompasses intellectual, physical, emotional, occupational, social and spiritual components; however, the spiritual component is present within the other five components. Haluza-Delay (2000) remarked: “Spirituality can lead to health and wholeness,

compassion, cooperation, and a desire to persevere in the face of adversity, characteristics essential to creating social and environmental change” (p. 148). Furthermore, Haluza-Delay (2000) claimed that spirituality is at the heart of human experience, and therefore, it cannot be ignored in experiential and adventure education.

***Spirituality in Adventure Programs.*** The literature suggests strong connections between adventure education and spirituality. Stringer and McAvoy (1992) completed a study exploring the spiritual dimension of wilderness experiences. Two groups of thirteen people were evaluated through pre-trip questionnaires, observations, post-trip interviews, and journal analyses to determine the nature of their wilderness experiences and to describe whether or not they had spiritual experiences. Although the participants had differing definitions of spirituality, they stated that being in the wilderness greatly enhanced their spiritual experiences. Stringer and McAvoy (1992) determined that, overall, people perceive wilderness-based adventure programs as inherently spiritual.

Anderson-Hanley (1997) discussed the integration of psychology and spirituality into adventure programming. After reviewing the literature, Anderson-Hanley (1997) discovered a variety of ways that people have tried to incorporate spiritual dimensions into adventure education. Referring to earth as a sacred “thou”, not as an “it”, hugging trees and finding special places to experience nature, exposing participants to life cycles and natural phenomena, spending time alone, and taking part in rituals or ceremonies are all ways that some people have incorporated spirituality into adventure education.

Griffin (2003) conducted research on 114 participants in an explicitly spiritual adventure-based program to see how their spiritual growth was affected. Overall positive effects were discovered, and Griffin (2003) maintained that one of the reasons is that a key outcome of

adventure-based education is personal growth. The other key components: trust, support, perseverance, and appreciation for nature, all are parallel to teachings inherent in traditional Christianity and add to a person's spiritual growth (Griffin, 2003).

Early Outward Bound adventure program leaders struggled with whether or not to incorporate Christian principles and an evangelical emphasis into their programs (Anderson-Hanley, 1997). Outlined clearly in Emily Cousins' (1998) book, *Reflections on Design Principles*, the ten Outward Bound principles are: the primacy of self-discovery, the having of wonderful ideas, the responsibility for learning, intimacy and caring, success and failure, collaboration and competition, diversity and inclusivity, the natural world, solitude and reflection, and service and compassion. Because the Outward Bound programs ended up becoming more and more removed from explicit Christian teachings, a counter effect was the creation of "Experiential Discipleship" programs. Experiential Discipleship programs are explicitly Christian programs designed to aid in spiritual growth and development while incorporating Outward Bound Principles.

The Experiential Discipleship model uses specific methods to stimulate spiritual growth (Anderson-Hanley, 1997). Book readings, including the Bible and other inspirational literature, are used in the expedition and discussed. Prayer and singing are essential. Times to process and discuss with others, along with individual "quiet times" or solos are planned to facilitate corporate and individual learning. The leadership modeling, proposed metaphors and symbolism in things like foot washing provide tangible and experiential examples to help those who are learning spiritual truths remember them. Daniel (2003, p. 49) adapted a table from Anderson-Hanley's research on Christian wilderness experiences, which is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Methods Used to Facilitate Spiritual Growth on a Christian Wilderness Expedition*

<b>Method</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Books</b>	Provide topics for discussion and common themes
<b>The Bible</b>	Used for devotions, study, reflection, and inspiration
<b>Prayer</b>	Individual prayer time and corporate prayer time
<b>Readings</b>	Poems, quotes, and other literature used for inspiration or discussion
<b>Worship</b>	Group singing
<b>Discussions</b>	Processing times for reflective questions
<b>Metaphors</b>	Parallels that illustrate certain aspects of Christian life
<b>Quiet Times</b>	Personal time for reflection, meditation, singing, prayer, journaling
<b>Journals</b>	For recording events and special reflections
<b>Group Covenants</b>	Related to the concept of covenants in the Bible
<b>Solos</b>	Stationary time of fasting, reading, prayer, and meditation
<b>Modeling</b>	Being examples of servant leaders in accordance with Biblical teaching
<b>Symbolism</b>	Ceremonial events (e.g., foot washing) designed to illustrate Biblical principles

Griffin and LeDuc (2009) believed that the analysis of the effects of the adventure education programs are not complete until the spiritual dimension is addressed. In two sequential studies, Griffin and LeDuc (2009) examined explicitly Christian adventure-based programs to determine their impact. At the end of their program, the first group (114 males/females between the ages of 16-20) said that their positive growth was linked mostly to their specific adventure activities, their relationships with peers and counselors, and prayer. Three months after their program, the second group (29 males/females between the ages of 15-19) said that their positive growth came from a peak experience, religious activities/ceremonies, the “live in the now” program philosophy, relationships with participants and staff, and follow-up/accountability groups. Both groups experienced two-week programs; and both groups said that wilderness or peak experiences, religious activities/ceremonies and relationships to staff and peers were very important to their growth. Both studies also showed that although the program

significantly affected their spiritual beliefs, their spiritual practice was not affected. Griffin and LeDuc (2009) called for further research to determine which components are most effective in enhancing spiritual growth of participants. They wanted to know if an increase in beliefs but not practice was a characteristic of other programs, and they were interested in the differing effects of short-term versus long-term programs.

**Connection between the Natural Environment, Community, and Spirituality.** The importance of the natural environment, community, and spirituality appear to be intimately tied in the literature. Unfamiliar physical environments, especially wilderness, contribute to and enhance outdoor experiences (McKenzie, 2000; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992). There is a connection between setting, adventure education, and spirituality (Marsh, 2008; Marsh & Bobilya, 2013). The aesthetic and spiritual qualities of wilderness are considered by some to facilitate personal restoration and transformation (McKenzie, 2000), since spirituality is a core component of humanity and personal growth (Fox, 1999; Henderson, 2000; Haluza-Delay, 2000). Spiritually-oriented wilderness programs are like any other adventure program, in which the course community plays an important role (Griffin & LeDuc, 2009). Group dynamics are a key part of memory, and group processes are found as the most memorable part of an outdoor experience, but the group processes themselves appear to be influenced by the environment (McAvoy et al., 1996). Finally, the challenging qualities of both the natural environment and the learning to live within a course community caused them to be two of the factors most remembered by participants (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011) and also the two factors that most enhanced spiritual experiences (Fox, 1999; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992).

The natural environment, the course community and a spiritual focus all appear to add to the meaning and significance of an adventure education experience. Therefore, this study

researched a wilderness program which focuses on spirituality and community. In order to determine whether the spiritually-oriented wilderness experience was significant in the life of the participant, the Significant Life Experience (SLE) lens was used.

### **Significant Life Experience (SLE) Theoretical Framework and Memory**

Tanner (1980) was the pioneer of Significant Life Experience research. Tanner conducted retrospective studies of 45 leaders of conservation groups to determine which past experiences affected their current life choices. Tanner (1980) allowed his participants to recount any experience that they believed had affected their lives and decisions. Tanner's study was followed up by Palmer (1993) and Chawla (1995) who continued to look at a variety of experiences in order to determine what most caused informed environmental action. It ended up not just being the experience itself but the way the participants remembered their experiences that caused significance.

Memory is an important aspect of retrospective studies. Daniel (2003) suggested that there are two aspects to memory: verity and utility. Verity refers to accurate remembrance. Utility refers to how a specific memory is used in a person's life due to the meaning the person attaches to it. The experiences that are most influential in life are the ones that are remembered, but they do not have to be remembered accurately to be significant. Regardless of whether the memory is accurate, whatever was remembered is what affects that person in the present. As a person ages, new experiences may affect the perceived significance of an event as well (Neisser, 1982); so the person who is remembering the event is actually a different person than the one who experienced it (Rubin, 1988). So, although memory may not be accurate, the information gathered from a

retrospective study is still valuable because it gives a view of how an experience's significance even changes over time.

Daniel (2003) and Wigglesworth and Heintzman (2012) modified the SLE lens and narrowed it by focusing it on whether one specific experience was a significant one and what made it so. Daniel (2003) studied a three-week, spiritually-focused Outward Bound-type experience while Wigglesworth and Heintzman (2012) studied a two-week summer outdoor education course. Both studies discovered that most participants considered the programs meaningful.

Daniel (2003) studied the life significance of a spiritually-oriented, Outward Bound-type expedition for college students. Daniel's study was retrospective, using multiple methods (questionnaires, focus group interviews, findings from pilot studies) and collecting information from 227 informants who had participated in the course between 1976 and 2000. Ninety percent of the 227 participants believed that the experience made a difference in their lives. Although the participants grew in how they viewed themselves, their circumstances, and their spiritual journeys throughout the expedition, the participants also stated that the expedition served as a reference point for future growth. In fact, one-third of the participants said that the significance of this experience increased over time. The expedition, because it was located in a wilderness setting, led by qualified instructors, and full of challenges, did promote growth and change which made a difference in their lives. One overarching theme that came up as Daniel (2003) studied what the participants remembered and what they had learned was that the expedition encouraged a "sense of something greater within the informant – a sense that ranged from greater awareness of God to a greater awareness of the natural world to a greater awareness of self" (p. iv).

Daniel's (2003) study showed that the expedition produced lasting memories. Those memories served as a reference point for future decisions, a reference point that stayed with the participants far beyond the expedition itself. The expedition figured prominently into their life stories and therefore transferred into environments beyond the wilderness.

Wigglesworth and Heintzman (2012) slightly adapted Daniel's (2003) study to focus on a college course, not an expedition. Wigglesworth and Heintzman (2012) studied the University of Ottawa's summer outdoor education course which has been nearly unchanged since its inception in the 1970's. Fifteen people went through semi-structured, in-depth interviews where six open-ended questions asked them to recall an experience of over 20 years ago. This retrospective study was focused on determining how intrapersonal, interpersonal, and environmental relationships were affected through the summer course. Wigglesworth and Heintzman (2012) saw six themes emerge from the data. Participants grew in their interpersonal and social skills, learned about themselves (self-discovery), advanced in knowledge and skills in regards to the outdoors, acknowledged environmental impacts, changed in leisure pursuits, and desired to transfer learning to others. Although not all participants said that the course was a significant life experience, possibly because of previous similar experiences, they all stated that it had no lasting negative impacts.

The current study followed the modified SLE framework of Daniel (2003) and Wigglesworth and Heintzman (2012) by focusing on one experience to see if it was significant in the lives of the participants. Similar to Daniel (2003), the program studied was a wilderness expedition for college students. This 40-day wilderness expedition employed aspects of the Experiential Discipleship model as it sought to develop leaders through wilderness adventure activities, community interactions, and explicit Christian spiritual teaching. This study was

designed to expand upon existing knowledge by seeing what themes emerged out of data collected from participants who participated in a program that was much longer than previously studied spiritually-oriented wilderness expeditions.

## **CHAPTER 3.**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Method**

This study used a concurrent mixed-method procedure, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2009), within a modified grounded theory approach. A grounded theory approach is a strategy in which the researcher develops a general theory “grounded” in the perceptions of the participants (Creswell, 2009). The dominant mode of inquiry was qualitative and retrospective in nature as participants were asked to look back on their experiences and describe what they remembered. The design of the questions was based of the Significant Life Experience Approach, most recently utilized in Daniel (2003) and Wigglesworth and Heintzman (2012). The modified grounded theory approach allowed the theory to emerge from the data, but the data was interpreted through the SLE framework.

#### **Program**

The CCO is a campus ministry which focuses on transforming the lives of students by partnering with churches, colleges, and other organizations. Although present at colleges and universities across America, no two CCOs are exactly the same as the CCO focuses on meeting the needs of individual campuses. The focus of transformation refers to the goal of CCO to help men and women develop into leaders who live out their Christian faith in every area of life (“About us,” n.d.).

The LDW program is a summer program available to any CCO student regardless of campus. Depending on the year, the two program possibilities are a six-week backpacking trip in Wyoming’s Wind River Mountains or a four-week kayaking trip in Ontario’s Georgian Bay. Participants are challenged to grow as leaders, learning about their identities and their

relationships to God and others. The LDW curriculum focuses on developing participants in the following character areas: servanthood, knowing, community, Christ-likeness, and spiritual disciplines. These outcomes are achieved through participating in course components such as hiking, backpacking, and camping; living in the wilderness; practicing disciplines of fasting, solitude, prayer, and Bible study; practicing leadership as a “leader of the day;” cooperating in the 3-4 day “final” expedition without instructors; growing in community through feedback and debriefing; and developing as outdoor leaders through the Wilderness Education Association (WEA) curriculum. Not only does LDW take the participants into the wilderness environment, through WEA, the instructors also lead them through six key areas: outdoor living, planning and logistics, leadership, risk management, environmental integration, and education. The LDW program had been teaching low-impact camping and using the principles of Leave No Trace (LNT) for years, and because of the similarity between what LDW taught and the preservation concepts included in the environmental integration aspect of WEA certification, LDW became a WEA affiliate, enabling participants to be officially certified as an outdoor leader at the end of the course (<http://www.weainfo.org/wea-curriculum>). The overarching goal of LDW is to create people who live out their Christian lives both in the wilderness and at home. According to the CCO website, the description of LDW is the following:

Leadership and Discipleship in the Wilderness (LDW) is an extended wilderness trip that provides leadership development and a community living experience for college students. LDW participants are challenged to grow in their intimacy with God, embrace their identities as image-bearers of their Creator and develop character and leadership skills. You can choose to experience LDW through either six weeks of backpacking and mountaineering in Wyoming’s Wind River Mountain Range or through four weeks of sea

kayaking on Ontario's Georgian Bay. Either way, you will walk away from this experience with a deeper understanding of who you are as a beloved child of God and as a leader in His Kingdom (CCO, 2014, LDW, para. 1).

## **Participants**

The LDW participants included males and females of college/university age and older. They came from a variety of colleges across the United States. For this study, the participants had to meet three criteria: (a) they had completed the LDW program in its entirety, (b) the CCO office had their current email address, and (c) the participant provided consent to participate in the study.

## **Data Collection/Materials and Procedure**

In order to determine whether LDW was a significant life experience (SLE), 106 past participants from the years of 1995 to 2012 were contacted online. Participants received an email correspondence (Appendix A) sent through the main office of CCO on February 14, 2014. The first email alerted the participants to an upcoming survey and also requested more email addresses for past participants that the CCO office no longer had on file. One week later, another email (Appendix B) was sent from the CCO office with a link inviting participants to take a Survey Monkey survey which contained a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions (Appendix F). According to Dillman, Smyth and Christian (2008), the best response rate for online surveys comes from multiple contacts. Three follow-up email correspondences (Appendices C, D, and E) were sent to ensure the highest response rate before the online survey was closed on March 14, 2014.

Survey questions included quantitative Likert scales that measured how beneficial the LDW course components were to the participant's personal growth. Qualitative questions

investigated participant information regarding reasons behind participation, perceived significance of course components, life changes because of or since LDW, and whether or not aspects of LDW transferred back to the participant's normal environment. Broad, open-ended questions following Daniel's (2003) survey were used to determine what the participants remembered and learned from the experience. Survey questions were reviewed by a panel to ensure trustworthiness.

Ethical considerations were taken into account to ensure the anonymity of participants. No participant who took the survey was under the age of 18. The study was approved by the IRB committee in December 2013 (Appendix G). Although participants' names and addresses were attached to their data on the online survey, the primary researcher changed their names into unique identifying numbers. These numbers were used to present the data, thereby keeping their responses anonymous and separate from their personal identities. These numbers were attached to quotes within the data (i.e., "P34"), with the P standing for participant and the number referencing a specific participant.

### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative Likert scales were analyzed for basic frequencies to determine not only the highest overall ratings but also the frequency of highest rating for each possible answer. The technique for analyzing the qualitative data in the survey followed Creswell's (2009) method of continually comparing new data with old data. The primary researcher gathered, organized, and read through the transcripts. Then, the researcher coded the data by organizing it into frequently mentioned words or ideas, which were tallied both according to how many participants mentioned each code and how many times overall the codes were mentioned. Another independent researcher coded twenty percent of the data, selected at random. The primary

researcher and inter-coder negotiated codes and arrived at a 95% agreement rate for 20% of the data. Most disagreements were due to a misunderstanding of the meaning of the codes. This process increased the trustworthiness by ensuring that the primary researcher was truly seeing what the data revealed (Creswell, 2009).

Only after the information was organized into the most frequently mentioned codes did the primary researcher condense the codes into themes. Representative quotes were then picked to illustrate the themes. Essentially, the researcher took qualitative data and quantified it by counting codes in order to determine importance and overall themes (Creswell, 2009).

## **CHAPTER 4.**

### **RESULTS**

Over the period of twenty-one days in which the survey was available to participants, 65 responses were registered on Survey Monkey (Table 3). A total of 30 males and 33 females responded to the survey. However, only 21 males and 23 females filled out the survey in its entirety. Due to the descriptive qualitative responses in even the partially completed data, data from partially completed surveys were considered in the research results and analysis, increasing the number of response to 25 males and 28 females. Care was taken to calculate accurate percentages when analyzing specific questions as the numbers of responses for each question varied somewhat. Surveys in which the participant only filled out his/her name and address were not used in the final results. Overall, 53 participants' answers were used in data analysis, making the response rate 50% for this survey.

Table 3 reveals the basic participant data from the survey. Survey participants were evenly distributed between gender (47% male, 53% female). The majority (75%) were between 19 and 21 years of age. Survey participants represented 15 different LDW trips between the years of 1995 and 2012. The years that had no representative sampling (1998, 2002, and 2011) were years in which no trips took place due to either lack of participation or resources. All of the expeditions, except for 2007 and 2008, were 6-week trips that took place in Wyoming's Wind River Valley. In 2007, the trip took place in Canada for 6 weeks. In 2008, participants had a choice to participate in Canada for 4 weeks or Wyoming for 6 weeks.

Table 3

*Basic Participant Data from the Survey*

<b>Basic Participant Data</b>	<b>Numbers/Percentages</b>
Gender	25 male (47%) 28 female (53%)
Age during LDW	18 years old: 2 participants 19 years old: 11 participants 20 years old: 14 participants 21 years old: 15 participants 22 years old: 5 participants 23 years old: 3 participants 24 years old: 2 participants 25 years old or above: 1 participant
Previous Organized Wilderness Experiences	34 Yes (64%) 19 No (36%)
LDW Role	45 Participant Only (85%) 8 Participant who later became Leader (15%)
WEA Leader Certification Completion	31 Yes (58%) 22 No (42%)
Currently work in Outdoor Education	10 Yes (19%) 43 No (81%)
Year Participated	1995: 3 participants 1996: 3 participants 1997: 1 participant 1999: 4 participants 2000: 3 participants 2001: 3 participants 2003: 4 participants 2004: 6 participants 2005: 2 participant 2006: 6 participants 2007: 3 participants 2008: 3 participants 2009: 3 participants 2010: 6 participants 2012: 6 participants
*Number of participants is over 53 due to participants who came back as leaders in later years.	

## Perceived Impact of LDW

The qualitative responses revealed that participants believed the LDW program impacted their lives. Over 90% of the participants stated that the trip made a difference in their lives as a whole. Many referred to it as “*life-changing*”. One called it “*the single most rewarding experience I have had*” (P48). Another said that “*there was no way to leave LDW unchanged*” (P9). A participant who had been on multiple expeditions stated, “*LDW remains the most significant wilderness experience I have ever had*” (P14). Yet another participant stated, “*My experience was profound - challenging, difficult, fulfilling, enlightening*” (P56). On a spiritual note, one participant stated, “*This was without a doubt the most formative and influential month of my life and really helped to solidify my identity in Christ...*” (P64). Those few who stated that it did not have an impact on their lives referenced that it was too long ago to remember (P65) or that they spent time in longer programs afterwards that eclipsed the impact of LDW (P43).

## Significant Components of LDW for Overall Growth

**Quantitative Data.** The participants were asked to determine which components of the program were beneficial to their personal growth by using a Likert scale (1= not beneficial to 5 = very beneficial). The option of “N/A” for “not applicable” was available for participants whose trips might have lacked certain components. The average rating for each component and the percentage of participants who gave it the highest rating possible are shown in Table 4. Table 5 shows the ratings when the participants are split into male and female categories as compared to overall ratings. One important distinction in the data is the difference between the natural environment and environmental integration. The natural environment refers to the setting, while environmental integration refers to the LNT or WEA curriculum which focused on wise use and preservation of the natural environment.

Table 4

*Course Component Rating for All Participants*

Course Component	Average Rating out of 5	% of Participants who gave it a rating of 5
<b>1. 3-4 Day Final Expedition</b>	4.61	71.43%
<b>2. Natural Environment</b>	4.61	69.05%
<b>3. Daily Debriefing/Processing</b>	4.54	66.67%
<b>4. Being Leader of the Day</b>	4.51	69.05%
<b>5. Backpacking &amp; Camping</b>	4.50	69.05%
<b>5. Instructors</b>	4.50	69.05%
<b>6. Community &amp; Group Dynamics</b>	4.44	66.67%
<b>7. Solo Expedition</b>	4.36	66.67%
<b>8. Personal Reflection/Journaling Time</b>	4.31	57.14%
<b>9. Snow School/ Mountaineering</b>	3.95	40.48%
<b>10. Environmental Integration</b>	3.90	40.48%
<b>11. Wilderness Education Association (WEA) Training</b>	3.73	35.71%
<b>12. Daily Bible Studies/Devotions</b>	3.68	35.71%
<b>13. Climbing &amp; Rappelling</b>	3.46	21.43%

\*\*\*\*Similar ratings were distinguished from each other based on how many participants scored each component at each level (1-5).

Table 5

*Comparison for Course Components Based on Gender*

All Participants		Male Participants		Female Participants	
3-4 Day Final Expedition	4.61	3-4 Day Final Expedition	4.71	Natural Environment	4.55
Natural Environment	4.61	Natural Environment	4.62	Daily Debriefing/Processing	4.50
Daily Debriefing/Processing	4.54	Daily Debriefing/Processing	4.57	Instructors	4.48
Being Leader of the Day	4.51	Backpacking & Camping	4.52	3-4 Day Final Expedition	4.45
Backpacking & Camping	4.50	Being Leader of the Day	4.52	Being Leader of the Day	4.45
Instructors	4.50	Community & Group Dynamics	4.48	Community & Group Dynamics	4.45
Community & Group Dynamics	4.44	Instructors	4.48	Backpacking & Camping	4.43
Solo Expedition	4.36	Solo Expedition	4.33	Personal Reflection/Journaling Time	4.43
Personal Reflection/Journaling Time	4.31	Personal Reflection/Journaling Time	4.10	Solo Expedition	4.35
Snow School/Mountaineering	3.95	Environmental Integration	3.95	Snow School/Mountaineering	3.95
Environmental Integration	3.90	Snow School/Mountaineering	3.89	Environmental Integration	3.86
Wilderness Education Association (WEA) Training	3.73	Daily Bible Studies/Devotions	3.71	Wilderness Education Association (WEA) Training	3.86
Daily Bible Studies/Devotions	3.68	Wilderness Education Association (WEA) Training	3.60	Daily Bible Studies/Devotions	3.64
Climbing & Rappelling	3.46	Climbing & Rappelling	3.47	Climbing & Rappelling	3.36

The final expedition, natural environment, daily debriefing, and leader of the day (LOD) made into the top five on each list regardless of gender. The two components with the greatest difference in males and females were the instructors (#3 female, #7 male) and backpacking and camping (#4 male, #7 female). Consistently, the bottom three components included WEA training, daily Bible studies/devotions, and climbing and rappelling.

**Qualitative Data.** One question on the survey directly asked the participants what was most significant to them. “What do you consider to have been your most significant experiences on the trip? What made them significant?” (Question 11). The responses to this question were tallied and put into groups based on how many different individual participants mentioned each code (Table 6). Community (30 participants) was by far the most mentioned, followed by challenge (15), the solo (12), LOD (12), feedback (11), discipleship (11), 3-4 day final expedition (9), and the natural environment (8). Other significant experiences mentioned included summiting a mountain (5) and the length of the trip (3).

Table 6  
*Most Significant Experience from Question 11*

<b>Code</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Representative Quotes</b>
<b>Community</b> (conflict resolution, cook groups, meal times, decision-making)	30	<i>The most significant experiences on the trip were those of knowing others through the experience. The pushing through conflict, the decision-making and individual humility that was experienced (P36).</i>
<b>Challenge</b>	15	<i>I think some of my most significant experiences occurred when I was pushed just outside my comfort zone, and was challenged in a way I hadn't experienced before (P64).</i>
<b>Solo</b> (the solo experience, alone time)	12	<i>The solo was one of the most influential experiences. I am an extreme extrovert. Before that trip I did not like being alone for any extended period of time. The experience of being completely alone with my own thoughts for 48 hours was something that I will never forget. It was so uncomfortable at the time, but afterwards was so rewarding that I have incorporated it into my life back home (P48).</i>
<b>Leader of the Day</b>	12	<i>Leader of the Day was significant in that I had never had that kind of responsibility before. It brought out a lot of strengths and surfaced a lot of my weaknesses. I was able to work through those things with a supportive group that gave great, encouraging and challenging feedback (P20).</i>
<b>Feedback</b> (LOD Feedback, general feedback)	11	<i>LDW was the first time in my life that I received real-time feedback about my personality and interactions with people...My leaders helped me to see those leadership flaws, and helped me to grow from them. My peers on the trip helped me to be honest about my personality, the things that I SO struggled with, and still loved me (P21).</i>
<b>Discipleship</b> (mentored by staff, led by staff)	11	<i>Being mentored by staff who were gracious and loving with words of truth at key times (P57).</i>
<b>3-4 Day Final Expedition</b> (“finals”)	9	<i>‘Finals week’ without the instructors was the most significant and rewarding time of the trip. The anxiety of summiting was over and I was able to be peaceful and realize in a tangible way all that I had learned. Collaborating with my finals week group to make decisions was fun, and I felt very confident at that time (P47).</i>
<b>Natural Environment</b> (outdoors, simplicity, separate from society)	8	<i>I think just the overall being out in the wilderness away from present culture for that length of time. I walked away with a different perspective on what I needed "now" and deeply learned to value simplicity and living out of simplicity (P46).</i>

Although Question 11 specifically asked participants about significant experiences, the rest of the questions were also codified to see what components of the trip were mentioned by the greatest number of participants in the rest of the questions. The qualitative data was condensed into codes and then counted per participant (Table 7). Only Question 22 on the survey was not considered in the analysis because participants were asked about specific components in the question. For example, a comment about community from a question that directly asked about Community and Group Dynamics would not count as a code for Community.

Table 7

*Top Qualitative Data Codes*

<b>Code</b>	<b># of Participants Who Mentioned it</b>	<b>Percentage of Participants (out of 53)</b>
<b>Community</b>	44	83%
<b>Challenge</b>	42	79%
<b>Self-Discovery</b>	36	68%
<b>Stewardship</b>	30	57%
<b>Wilderness</b>	30	57%
<b>Leadership</b>	29	55%
<b>Awareness of Others</b>	28	53%
<b>Relationship with God</b>	27	51%
<b>Discipleship</b>	26	49%
<b>Vulnerable</b>	26	49%
<b>Learn</b>	25	47%
<b>Feedback</b>	23	43%
<b>Conflict Resolution</b>	22	42%
<b>Practice</b>	22	42%
<b>Preparation for Life</b>	22	42%
<b>Evolving Meaning</b>	21	40%
<b>Formative</b>	21	40%
<b>Confidence</b>	20	38%
<b>Processing</b>	19	36%
<b>Appreciation of Nature</b>	18	34%
<b>Failure</b>	18	34%
<b>Growth as a Person</b>	18	34%
<b>Readings</b>	17	32%
<b>Leader of the Day</b>	16	30%
<b>Quiet Time</b>	16	30%
<b>Solo</b>	16	30%

**Quantitative and Qualitative Data Comparison.** The quantitative data and qualitative data revealed different course aspects as the most significant to participants. Because the qualitative data included more possibilities than the 14 categories mentioned in Question 22, the qualitative data was coded and then put into quantitative categories (Tables 8 & 9). First, direct mention of the components was considered (Table 8). Then codes that indirectly referred to quantitative categories were included (Table 9). Some codes were used in more than one component due to the fact that they could apply to more than one category.

The largest discrepancies are in the different placements of community, final expeditions, solo, and Bible. Qualitative data and codes show that community far outweighs the other components in terms of significance, as it is mentioned 44 times by 83% of the 53 participants. The final expedition, although scored most highly in quantitative data, is much lower in frequency of mention in qualitative data.

Table 8

*Codes Directly Matched with Quantitative Categories*

<b>Quantitative Component</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b># of Participants Who Mentioned it</b>
<b>Community &amp; Group Dynamics</b>	Community	44
<b>Natural Environment</b>	Wilderness	30
<b>Instructors</b>	Discipleship	26
<b>Daily Debriefing/Processing</b>	Feedback	23
<b>Being Leader of the Day</b>	Leader of the Day	16
<b>Solo Expedition</b>	Solo	16
<b>Personal Reflection/Journaling Time</b>	Journals	10
<b>3-4 Day Final Expedition</b>	Finals	9

Table 9

*Direct and Indirect Codes Matched with Quantitative Categories*

<i>Quantitative Component</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i># of Participants Who Mentioned it</i>	<i>Total # of Mentions</i>
<i>Community &amp; Group Dynamics</i>	Community	44	<b>131</b>
	Awareness of Others	28	
	Vulnerability	26	
	Conflict Resolution	22	
	Teamwork	11	
<i>Being Leader of the Day</i>	Leadership	29	<b>105</b>
	Practice	22	
	Confidence	20	
	Failure	18	
	Leader of the Day	16	
<i>Natural Environment</i>	Stewardship	30	<b>91</b>
	Wilderness	30	
	Appreciation of Nature	18	
	Desire to Be Outdoors	13	
<i>Instructors</i>	Leadership	29	<b>68</b>
	Discipleship	26	
	Instructors	13	
<i>Daily Bible Studies/Devotions</i>	Readings	17	<b>52</b>
	Quiet Time	16	
	Beloved	15	
	Bible	4	
<i>3-4 Day Final Expedition</i>	Finals	9	<b>51</b>
	Practice	22	
	Confidence	20	
<i>Solo Time</i>	Solo	16	<b>47</b>
	Quiet Time	16	
	Alone	10	
	Silence	5	
<i>Personal Reflection/Journaling Time</i>	Readings	17	<b>43</b>
	Quiet Time	16	
	Journals	10	
<i>Daily Debriefing/Processing</i>	Feedback	23	<b>23</b>

### **Significant Components of LDW for Specific LDW Growth Areas**

As previously mentioned, the LDW program was intentionally designed to encourage growth in the four relational areas of spirituality, identity, community and environmental appreciation. In the survey, the participants were asked which aspects of the course most affected these four relational areas. Survey question 21 read: “Out of all the different aspects (i.e. Instructors, readings, natural environment, group dynamics, etc.) of the LDW program (planned or not), which aspect was the most influential in causing growth in the following? Please explain.” Although some participants incorrectly read the question and simply labeled the area in which they experienced the most growth, many did respond with quantifiable data (Table 10). The solo, natural environment, assigned readings, and instructors had the highest frequency in the category of spirituality. The instructors, solo, assigned readings, feedback, journaling, and community were all mentioned most frequently for identity. Identity was also the category in which the most participants claimed the greatest growth occurred. In the area of community, nearly every aspect of the course was mentioned. The natural environment, Leave No Trace (LNT) principles, instructors, and solo were most mentioned in environmental appreciation. The only two course aspects which were mentioned as beneficial in all four areas were the instructors and the assigned readings, and both were suggestions of possible answers in the question itself.

Table 10

*Answers to Question 21: Which Aspect Was Most Influential In Causing Growth?*

Influential Aspect Ranking	Spirituality	Identity	Community	Environmental Appreciation
<b>1</b>	Solo/Alone Time (14)	Instructors (10)	Debriefing/Feedback (3) Readings (3) Instructors (3)	Natural Environment (11)
<b>2</b>	Natural Environment (8)	Solo/Alone Time (9)	Cook Groups (2)	Instructors (4) LNT (4)
<b>3</b>	Instructors (6) Readings (6)	Readings (7)		Solo (2)
<b>4</b>	Journal (4) Community (4)	Debriefing/Feedback (6)		Readings (1) Community (1) God (1)
<b>5</b>		Journal (5) Community (5)		
<b>6</b>		LOD (4)		
<b>7</b>		Natural Environment (1) Challenge (1) Finals (1)		
<b>Most Growth Experienced in this Area</b>	1 participant	4 participants		2 participants

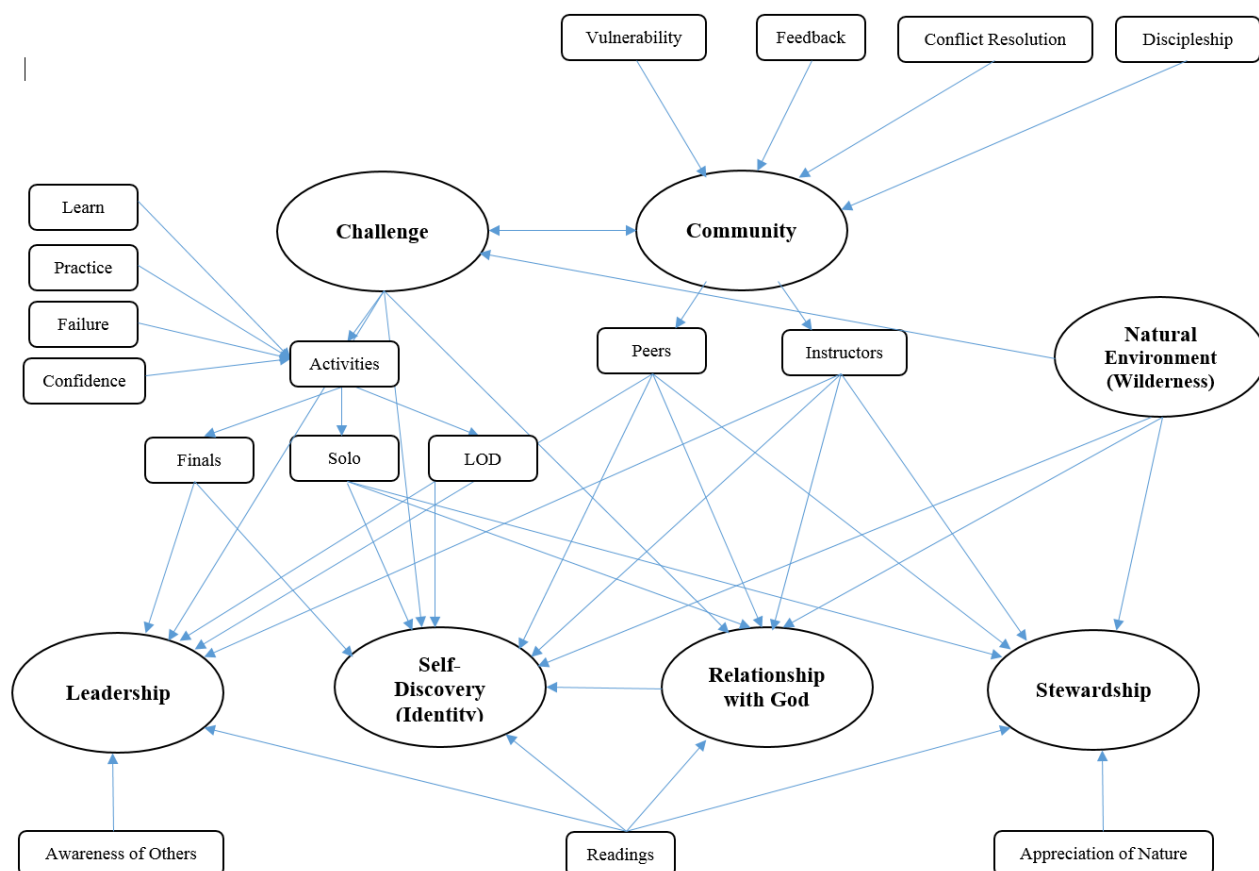
*Note.* Numbers in parenthesis indicate the number of participants that mentioned each aspect.

## Emergent Themes

Dividing a wilderness expedition into its component parts is a difficult thing to do because so many aspects of a program are interrelated. Based on the codified qualitative data (Table 7), the connections between each of the components were many (Figure 2). These connections helped reveal underlying themes. Growth was most clearly mentioned in four relational areas: *Self-Discovery* (Identity), *Stewardship* (Nature), *Leadership* (Others), and *Relationship with God* (Spirituality). The top two codes were *Community* and *Challenge*, which affected each other and appeared to underlie growth in every relationship. Community was made up of both peers and instructors, and the *Discipleship*, *Vulnerability*, *Feedback*, and *Conflict Resolution* experienced within a community added to growth in identity, stewardship, leadership, and spirituality. Community itself was called challenging, but challenge was also seen in the natural environment (*Wilderness*) and within activities (*LOD*, *Solo*, *Final Expedition*) that allowed participants to *Learn*, experience *Failure*, *Practice*, and grow in *Confidence*, thereby affecting the four relationships.

Figure 2

*Connections within Codified Data*



After incorporating the qualitative data together, the main themes that arose out of the codes in the qualitative data are as follows: 1) Community and challenge are the most significant aspects in this long-term wilderness expedition, 2) Self-Discovery is the clearest result of this long-term wilderness expedition, 3) The natural environment intensifies growth, 4) Growth is seen in relationships, and 5) Transference of lessons is helped through discipleship before and after the expedition (Table 11).

Table 11

*Themes and Subthemes*

Themes	Subthemes
<b>Community and Challenge are the most significant aspects in this long-term wilderness expedition</b>	Community is essential for growth.  Challenge is essential for growth.  Community and Challenge are intimately connected.
<b>Identity (Self-Discovery) is the clearest result of this long-term wilderness expedition</b>	
<b>The natural environment intensifies growth</b>	
<b>Growth is seen in relationships</b>	With God With Nature With Others
<b>Transfer of lessons is helped through discipleship</b>	

**Theme 1: Community and challenge.** Community and challenge codes far outnumbered any other code within the qualitative data. Not only were the direct codes for community and challenge significant, but as shown in Figure 2 these aspects were foundational for the other frequently mentioned codes.

***Subtheme 1.a.: Community is essential for growth.*** As shown in the quotes in Table 12, the LDW program highly emphasized community. The participants had to learn to resolve conflict with other participants and to be aware of others while they led. In a short-term trip, relational issues can be ignored, but on a long-term trip relational issues must come out in the open. Community was not only peer-related, but also instructor-related, as participants learned how to deal with conflict with instructors as well. Instructors were also frequently mentioned as

people who spoke boldly into a participant's life, causing them to think more deeply about what they were going through.

***Subtheme 1.b.: Challenge is essential for growth.*** Challenge seemed to be tied to nearly all aspects of wilderness expedition. It was connected to the challenge of the natural environment, challenge of activities (camping, backpacking, LOD, solo), and even the challenge of living in community. When they were pushed out of their comfort zones and enabled to see their own weaknesses and failures, participants experienced growth. Participants repeatedly mentioned some of their most significant days as being the hardest days (LOD, solo).

***Subtheme 1.c.: Community and challenge are intimately connected.*** Challenge and community were frequently mentioned together. It was not only challenging for participants to lead their peers but it was also challenging for participants to be evaluated by and given feedback from their peers. The feedback from peers and instructors after the LOD was frequently mentioned as a time for challenge and growth. However, challenge and realization of failure within a community was shown to be beneficial when the community (peers and instructors) came alongside a participant and encouraged them in how to succeed in the next challenge. A supportive community helped a participant get past failures in order to grow.

Table 12

*Theme 1*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Representative Quotes</b>
<b>Community and Challenge are the most significant aspects in this long-term wilderness expedition</b>	Community is essential for growth.	<i>LDW, due to the nature of the small group size, the intimate setting, and the duration of the program, asks you to understand that how we relate to each other in the group is the main objective for the next 50 days. And once I started taking relationships, communication, and the conflict resolution seriously and experience the joys and ease that come from the struggle I didn't want to go back to superficial, unresolved, unclear communication again (P20).</i>
		<i>There is not one aspect of this trip that does not correlate to community and group life. Out there we learned what it meant to 'do life together,' the very core of what a community is (P48).</i>
	Challenge is essential for growth.	<i>The time spent learning new skills, applying those skills, leading, following, debriefing, reflecting, journaling, and supporting each other, has been intentionally designed by the CCO staff to create an environment where you experience life just outside of your comfort zone and makes you think more about where you have been, where you are now, and where God is guiding you (P64).</i>
		<i>You are pushed so much more than you can think mentally and physically and it is during those weak times that who you are gets exposed through the façade that you usually put up for others (P8).</i>
	Community and Challenge are intimately connected.	<i>It was easily a couple of years later that I was fully able to grasp the communal implications the trip had, how absolutely central the idea of challenge is to my worldview, and how experiential education is woven into the fabric of my being (P7).</i>
		<i>Activities that demand respect and attention are essential to building a responsible group and delivering the seriousness of what it means to care for one another (P14).</i>

**Theme 2: Self-Discovery.** Self-Discovery was the third highest ranked code behind Community and Challenge, appearing more in the qualitative data than any other desired result of the LDW program (Table 7). The CCO desired to see participants grow in Stewardship (30), Leadership (29), and a Relationship with God (27) through Discipleship (26) in the Wilderness (30). It appears those areas of growth also added to Self-Discovery (36), as evidenced by the participant quotes (Table 13). In Question 16 of the survey, which asked whether completing LDW made a difference in the way the participants viewed and understood themselves, there were 36 “yes” responses and 2 “maybe” response, but not a single “no.” Identity/Self-Discovery was the only category of relationships in which zero “no” responses were recorded (Table 14).

Table 13

*Theme 2*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Representative Quotes</b>
<b>Identity (Self-Discovery) is the clearest result of this long-term wilderness expedition</b>	<p><i>I learned so much about being myself and being with God. I learned how to love myself and feel comfortable in my own skin. Not to sound cliché, but I really found who I am on this trip (P21).</i></p> <p><i>...going through LDW is what formed me into the person that I am today. I faced myself in more ways than one when I was on that trip, and still to this day LDW is teaching me things that I couldn't be learning on my own. The sense of community that I felt as well as the way that the instructors poured into me, made me feel loved and valued like I never had before (P22).</i></p>

Table 14

*Participant answers to whether or not LDW made a difference in the following areas.*

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Maybe/ I don't know</b>	<b>Reinforced Existing Beliefs</b>
<b>Spirituality</b>	30 (75%)	7	3	
<b>Identity</b>	36 (95%)	0	2	
<b>Relationships (Community)</b>	33 (92%)	1	2	
<b>Thinking about the Natural Environment</b>	26 (65%)	3		11

**Theme 3: The natural environment intensifies growth.** Following Community, Challenge, and Self-Discovery in frequently mentioned codes were Stewardship and Wilderness (Table 6). Many participants believed that their experience would not have been the same without the wilderness environment (Table 15). The challenge of living in a natural environment without modern conveniences makes it difficult to hide. Even in these quotes, the aspects of community and challenge are repeatedly seen. A few participants said that the natural environment was not necessary and that the lessons they learned, specifically spiritual lessons, could have been learned elsewhere. However, quotes from other participants show that the outdoors is where they learned about God the most.

Table 15

*Theme 3*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Representative Quotes</b>
<b>The natural environment intensifies growth.</b>	<p><i>The wilderness for me always takes those aspects of myself I don't want to see and magnifies them, but the community of LDW has always held those weaknesses or shortcomings with grace and understanding (P36).</i></p> <p><i>People's TRUE selves are revealed in the backcountry, and believe that it is in this time that you really get to see who God created. It sheds light on the masks that people wear everyday... (P43).</i></p>

**Theme 4: Growth is seen in relationships.** Stewardship, leadership, awareness of others, and relationship with God were the next highest codes. Growth is a hard thing to empirically measure. However, as the participants recounted how LDW had impacted them, many of them talked about their awareness of these relationships and how they now make specific choices based on how the relationships will be affected (Table 16).

Table 16

## Theme 4

Theme	Subthemes	Representative Quotes
Growth is seen in relationships		<i>Every relationship in my life is shaped by what I learned on LDW (P14).</i>
		<i>Every day I think about how my actions impact other people, and especially how they impact the environment. I make specific choices based on those impacts (P30).</i>
	With Nature (Stewardship)	<i>I think that LDW was the impetus for changing my behavior toward the natural environment in many ways. There is still much I could do better and more intentionally (P36).</i>
		<i>I could see the cause/effect more in the wilderness so I have to be more diligent at home to think about it even if I can't see it (P35).</i>
	With Others (Leadership, Awareness of Others)	<i>The intentionality in which we pursued understanding our impact on those around us was a great catalyst in behavior long term (P11).</i>
		<i>LDW made me more aware of how other people view my actions. This has led me to at least try to think more intelligently about how what I do will affect others (P39).</i>
	With God (Relationship with God)	<i>...during the program God's love and relentless pursuit became very tangible (P48).</i>
		<i>I felt that I walked away know that God walks with me every step of the way (P49).</i>
		<i>LDW is very dear to my heart. Without it I think that I would not have taken my faith as seriously...I was surprised even at how easy it was to recollect many of my memories of that trip and how the lessons have impacted my life to this day. I think that in and of itself is a testament of the power and LDW experience can have on the participants (P19).</i>

**Theme 5: Transfer of lessons is helped through discipleship.** The ninth highest code in the qualitative data revolved around discipleship. Participants were quick to discuss the impact that their peers and the leaders of their trip had on them during the program itself. However, these same people were also frequently mentioned as having an impact on the participants' lives after LDW (Table 17). In Question 14 of the survey, participants were asked: "Was there any aspect (i.e. instructors, personal quiet time, group dynamics, etc.) of the LDW program that helped you use what you had learned back in your home environment?" The highest codes for that question were community (14), discipleship (13), quiet time (10), instructors (8), and leadership (7). Although the highest codes may be higher due to the suggestions in the question itself, even the last question of the survey, where participants were asked to add whatever additional information they thought would help the survey, one participant added this:

*I truly believe that it is the follow up after the trip with the participants that makes the trip something special. When you live in the same area as people and continue those friendships and work through the experience, it gives the experience more meaning... (P43)*

Table 17

*Theme 5*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Representative Quotes</b>
<b>Transfer of lessons learned is helped through discipleship.</b>	During the trip	<p><i>We had great discussion on what it meant to apply what we learned to the real world. I attribute that to our amazing group, but also to amazing leadership that helped guide those conversations and let there be space for that (P50).</i></p> <p><i>I think both our instructors and the quiet time helped me to incorporate what I was learning and how it applied to my life back home (P24).</i></p>
	After the trip	<p><i>One of my instructors...has become a good friend since the trip and has been instrumental (P52).</i></p> <p><i>...having a leader on the trip who was also on my campus afterward meant it was easier to transfer the learning into real life. It meant greater accountability and a true friend, mentor and advisor for life (P1).</i></p>

## **CHAPTER 5.**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Impact**

Similar to the findings of Hattie et al. (1997) in regards to other adventure programs, the LDW program had a lasting impact on its participants. As seen before in Daniel (2003), greater than 90% of the participants of the LDW program believed that the expedition was impactful. Although the majority of participants found the expedition to be very beneficial, the few participants who reported negative experiences, in part or all of the program, are worth mentioning because their negative experiences also shed light on what could make adventure programs better. Interestingly, their struggles concerned the very things that caused the experience to be beneficial in the minds of other participants: community (people seemed phony or unworthy of trust, unresolved leader conflicts), challenge (too much physical pain), or spirituality (disagreements with Christian principles, struggles with expectations).

#### **Significant Components**

The highest ranking components on the Likert scale were (1) the final expedition, (2) natural environment, (3) daily debriefing, (4) LOD, (5) backpacking/camping, (5) instructors, (6) community and group dynamics, (7) solo expedition, and (8) personal reflection/journaling time. All of these components showed significance by averaging above a 4.3 on the 1-5 Likert scale. However, qualitative data and codes showed a different ranking of significant components.

**Community.** Qualitative data revealed that community far outweighed the other components in terms of significance. McAvoy et al (1996), also found that the community and group processes were the most memorable part of the experience. Although community and group dynamics were ranked 6<sup>th</sup> on the Likert scale for this study, nearly all of the components

ranked above community included some group aspect to them (except Natural Environment). It appeared that community was a foundational part of the other components and was talked about along with those components in the qualitative section, causing the ranking for community to be much higher in the qualitative data than the quantitative. It could be that the length of the expedition caused the individual activities, which were short in duration, to not be as memorable as the community interactions, which lasted the whole trip.

**Challenge.** It was not surprising that challenge was a frequently mentioned aspect of the LDW course as many studies (Bobilya et al., 2011; D'Amato & Krasny, 2011; Gass et al., 2003; Griffin, 2003; Griffin & LeDuc, 2009; McKenzie, 2003) also reported on the importance of challenge. The community itself added to the aspect of challenge within the course, creating situations which had to be resolved as personalities conflicted. The participants in this study frequently mentioned being pushed out of their comfort zones and experiencing not only physical but also relational risks within the community.

The solo, LOD, final expedition, and mountain summit also created some dissonance and anxiety for participants and helped to make the LDW program significant as a whole. The importance these participants placed on autonomous student experiences (solo and final expeditions) add to the growing research on their value (Daniel, Bobilya, Kalisch & McAvoy, 2014). The challenge of these activities and those with instructors (LOD and summit) brought the participants to a place of growth and change. These findings address a recent debate in outdoor education and adventure therapy. Berman and Davis-Berman (2005) questioned how much risk is actually needed in outdoor experiences because perceived risk is a subjective experience and might create negative, not positive, results. There does seem to be a high peak level of challenge that is necessary to allow the participant to experience enough dissonance to

want to keep trying but not too much anxiety to become hopelessly discouraged (Martin & Priest, 1986). A couple of participants in this study were physically challenged to the point of not experiencing the growth enjoyed by other participants. As Kalisch, Bobilya and Daniel (2011) noted, participant expectations and receptivity to risk may affect participant growth. Once a risk threshold is passed in the minds of the participants, or they experienced more anxiety than they had expected, the participants may become hopelessly discouraged.

**Natural Environment.** The wilderness, the natural environment experienced by the LDW participants, also had a large impact on participants. This finding is similar to McKenzie (2003), who found that participants considered the wilderness to be an influential factor in their Outward Bound experience. McAvoy et al. (1996) also suggested that the environment influences what happens in a group, and this study affirms that suggestion. The challenge of living in a sometimes uncomfortable environment with only fellow participants to rely on added to the memories participants associated with LDW. Participants' quotes also confirmed Daniel's (2003) discussion of the natural environment acting as a canvas, catalyst, or crucible in growth. For some participants, the natural environment was unnecessary (canvas) as they stated they could have experienced the same growth in any environment. For others, the natural environment acted as a catalyst that spurred their growth. For still others, the natural environment was like a crucible that burned away aspects of themselves that they had never noticed before, allowing them to see themselves as they truly were.

**Length.** The length of the program appeared to add significance with only one participant stating that the course would have been better in a shorter, three-week setting. The newness or novelty of the experience, which was mentioned as adding significance in other programs (Daniel, 2003), was not as frequently mentioned in the LDW program. Of the

participants that responded, 64% had previously been on wilderness trips, and yet over 90% said that it impacted their lives. The significance could have had something to do with the length of the program, as participants who had previously been on wilderness trips wrote statements like the following: *“I had never undertaken an expedition of this length or difficulty”* (P51).

**Males/Females:** The final expedition, natural environment, daily debriefing, and leader of the day (LOD) made into the top five on each list regardless of gender. The two components with the greatest difference in males and females were the instructors (#3 female, #7 male) and backpacking and camping (#4 male, #7 female). This finding confirms Hattie et al. (1997) who found that male and female participants displayed similarly positive results. Yet, it also confirms McKenzie (2003) who found that males seem to be looking for a challenge more than females. Females in this study seemed to connect more to relationships with other people, like the instructors.

### **Self-Discovery**

This study revealed that the most significant impact on the participants was their own self-discovery. This finding is in agreement with other literature, such as Hattie et al. (1997), where self-concept was shown to be the outcome that most increased over time. Both Daniel (2003) and Wigglesworth and Heintzman (2012) found self-discovery to be an important outcome of their programs. The LDW program data showed that the four relationships of identity, stewardship, leadership, and discipleship were very significant to participants. This is in agreement with Daniel (2003) when he reported that the overarching theme that emerged from his data was a “sense of something greater” within the participants, stemming from relationships with God, the natural world, and themselves.

## Spirituality

The study of the LDW program showed that many participants considered a revelation of how God sees them as a beloved child to be very significant in their self-discovery. It suggests that spirituality is intimately tied to identity and self-concept. Many of the “ah-ha” moments came from the assigned readings on spiritual topics (D. Bonhoeffer’s *Life Together*, B. Manning’s “Imposter/Beloved” from *Abba’s Child*) or from metaphors in nature. Although the participants highly valued the solo and quiet time as places where they “met God”, the importance of daily Bible study and devotions was not highly rated among the participants in the quantitative data. This is an interesting finding because the Bible is a core part of LDW’s Christian curriculum model. The times of Bible study might not have had as much novelty as the other components of the course, leading to less impact. Yet, it appears that the structure of the devotional times may have had an impact on how they were perceived by the participants.

Stringer and McAvoy (1992) found that structure was a factor that both contributed to and inhibited participants’ spiritual experiences. In LDW, this may have included both the structure of spiritual experience (how the devotional booklet was set up) as well as the structure of the trip in general (how much free time was there for group and individual processing of Bible passages, readings and experiences?). Some LDW participants stated that the lack of structure within the Bible devotional times made them less impactful. Stringer and McAvoy (1992) stated that the major inhibiting factor to spiritual growth was a lack of “time off” because of trip structure or their own leadership responsibilities. It is possible that because of the focus on surviving in a natural environment and the time, effort and structure placed in such training made the Bible devotional time seem less important.

Many participants stated that the natural environment is where they felt closest to God, which connects spirituality with the outdoors, matching previous findings from Bobilya et al. (2011) and Marsh (2008). However, not all participants considered the outdoors to be the best place for spiritual lessons (Table 14). One participant believed that he lost any spiritual growth that he had gained from LDW because he too closely connected spirituality with the outdoors. He said: *"I think losing the backpacking and climbing experience in life has led me to lose touch with the spiritual experience of LDW"* (P29).

Although a clear connection was found between the natural environment and the community in this study, the suggested link between natural environment, community and spirituality was not as clearly seen. Participants mentioned their relationship with God more than any individual activity (8<sup>th</sup> in qualitative data), but it appears from the data that the three most important aspects of the LDW expeditions are community, challenges, and the natural environment. Interestingly, D'Amato and Krasny (2011) found that the challenging qualities of both the natural environment and the community were the two factors most remembered by participants, while others connected them to spirituality as the two factors that most enhanced spiritual experiences (Fox, 1999; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992). Griffin (2003) stated that the experiences on an expedition parallel Christian teachings, and it was very obvious from the quotes of some participants that LDW marked a turning point in their relationship with God (Table 15). An understanding of God was expanded for some and narrowed for others. A few participants left their Christian beliefs after the trip, but most dug deeper into their faith. This study found that the solo experience, natural environment, instructors, readings, community and journaling were the most mentioned as components of programs that most enhanced spiritual growth. Although this data only just began to answer Griffin and LeDuc's (2009) question of

what components most enhance spiritual growth, it also affirmed the idea that follow-up discipleship and community interactions are some of the best ways to facilitate transfer of growth to the home environment.

The LDW program results confirmed the importance of community, challenge, and the value of the natural environment. Individual course components (LOD, final expedition, solo) were also incredibly valuable to participants. Unlike studies of shorter programs (Daniel, 2003), the short duration of the individual activities in comparison to the LDW course as a whole may have caused participants to remember more of the enduring aspects of their program (community and the natural environment). Community also was shown to be significant factor in the processing of information and transfer of lessons learned (discipleship). Although better structure may enhance spiritual experiences within the community and natural environment, it was clear that LDW was valuable to participants in the way it revealed who participants were as people and helped to initiate positive change.

### **Limitations**

Some limitations are worth noting in this study. First, one has to take into account the type of participant that might be likely to respond to a request to participate in a survey years later. Although there was a 50% response rate, responses were mostly from those who had positive experiences. Also, the likelihood of inherent bias within the researcher's questions could have led participants to think about the LDW experience as if it were an SLE. The wording of some of the questions, especially when examples of possible answers were given, could have caused the participants to rate certain aspects more highly because of the suggested responses. Additionally, due to the retrospective nature of this study, the participants' memories could have been a confounding variable within the data. Nevertheless, the memories of the

participants in this study, even if slightly altered over time, would still show whether or not LDW was an SLE which played a key role in continuing growth in many aspects of their lives. Finally, this study is limited in scope because the participants of CCO's LDW often represented a homogenized section of the population. Findings from this study represented one program and therefore cannot be generalized to other adventure education experiences, but findings that emerged from this study could be applicable to other programs.

## CHAPTER 6.

### CONCLUSION

The LDW program conducted by the CCO spurred growth in leadership. Growth was aided by discipleship both during and after the experience and was intensified by the wilderness environment. It appeared, though, that one of the biggest aspects of the program, which helped to support the rest, was missing from the title of the program itself (Leadership and Discipleship in the Wilderness): the aspect of community. The length of the program seemed to make the community stand out more than any one experience.

The LDW program was indeed a significant life experience in over 90% of these participants. According to the participants, there were many important and influential aspects to the program (Table 10), and many of them were intimately connected (Figure 2). In the words of one participant:

*The leadership development was really great. It's definitely something I use in my professional life, even to the extent that it showed up in my grad school application essays. But it was the personal and spiritual growth that struck so deeply. Reflections on community, communication, honesty were key. Leaders that spoke into my life and pushed me hard. Being physically challenged, bound to a community, removed from the world, immersed in beauty, and then given the push and the space to become grounded in my identity in Christ....I will never shake that. In the times in my life when I have questioned faith and wanted to walk away, I feel so marked as his child. This deep identity I attribute to LDW and the kingdom I tasted there. Our solo experience and the naming of our beloved/imposter was a high point. My Beloved name is tattooed on me today (P50).*

Community and challenge were the most mentioned aspects in the LDW program, both of which were intensified by the natural environment in which the program took place. Challenging relationships (community & instructors), the challenging environment (wilderness), and challenging activities (solo, LOD, finals) all played significant roles in growth stimulation. The growth was most clearly seen within relationships between the participants and God, participants

and their view of themselves, participants and others, and participants and the environment. The data showed the greatest effect on participants was in their view of themselves (self-discovery). What seemed to most help the growth transfer to the home environment was a discipleship relationship both before and after the experience itself.

### **Recommendations for Practitioners of Wilderness Programming**

1. Program Length: Extended wilderness programs should be prioritized by professionals in the field whenever possible. The length of this expedition and the challenges that arose because of the time frame provided significant growth in many areas, specifically in regards to community interactions.
2. Challenge: Practitioners should include appropriately challenging activities, such as a 3-4 day final expedition, solo experience, and LOD experience because they are essential for the revealing of individual strengths and weaknesses, which can only be addressed once they are revealed.
3. Community: Great focus should be put into building the community relationships at the outset of a wilderness expedition with team-building activities because a course community can make or break an experience, as it will either provide grace to support a participant to overcome a challenge or stymie growth through negative associations. Assigned cook groups are one way to establish shared experiences early on in the expedition.
4. Structure: Practitioners should be intentional with the design and structure in solitary activities such as the solo and Bible studies, as it can mean the difference between significance and irrelevance. Purposeful design will also help group activities such as debriefing discussions and environmental integration. In Bible studies and readings,

having specific questions to answer about a passage will help to direct thoughts and not leave room for boredom. Time should be carved out for individual processing as well, with guided questions to aid in focus.

5. Spirituality: The spiritual aspect of a participant should be emphasized. Spirituality is intimately tied to self-discovery and purpose in life and affects growth. Solo seems to greatly influence the spiritual growth of participants.
6. Discipleship: In order for knowledge, attitudes and actions to transfer to the home environment, great care should be made to connect either a leader or another group member to each participant to help them process and apply what they have learned once they get home.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The following questions for future research emerged from this study:

1. Does community always factor as such a significant component within an extended wilderness course?
2. What specific activities (solo, finals, etc.) cause growth in specific areas such as spirituality, identity, and environmental appreciation?
3. How does the structure of program design (amount of time, organization of each component) influence participant growth?
4. How can curriculum readings and devotional times be most effectively framed and utilized for spiritual growth?

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE #1**

Mailed on 14 February 2014

Dear LDW alumni,

In the next few weeks, you will be receiving an email invitation to take a survey about your experience with the LDW program. This survey will help a graduate research student, Alexis Zantias, complete her Masters thesis at Montreat College in North Carolina. It will also be used by the CCO to determine ways to improve the LDW program. We would greatly value your input on the survey.

Because of changing email addresses and our desire to reach as many alumni as possible, if you know of any updated email addresses or ways of contacting the other participants in your year (Facebook, etc.), please respond to this email.

Thank you so much!

--

Steph Wessel  
XD Summer Opportunities Coordinator  
Coalition for Christian Outreach

**APPENDIX B**  
**EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE #2**

Mailed on 21 February 2014

As promised, here is the survey regarding your experience with LDW. We thank you for helping us continue to improve participants' experiences with LDW. As a thank you, a small incentive for filling out the survey will be sent to you after you've submitted the completed form. Thank you for your time and input!

---

Dear LDW participant,

A research study is being conducted on the Coalition for Christian Outreach's (CCO) Leadership and Discipleship in the Wilderness (LDW) program. This study is designed to determine what impact the LDW program as a whole had on the participants, as well as determining which of the program components were significant. The hope is that through this research the LDW program, and other programs like it, can be improved for future participants.

We would love to have you participate in this study! Anyone who submits a survey will receive a small CCO XD sticker. However, those who are one of the first 15 to complete the survey will also have a CCO water bottle sent to them!

By clicking on the link below and filling out the survey, you will be agreeing to this consent form. Although there will not be complete anonymity, after the data is compiled, your name will be substituted for a number and only the researchers will have access to the files that connect you with your answers. So, please read the following carefully and feel free to ask the investigator of this project any questions before you fill out the survey.

### **Who is doing this research?**

The investigator for this research project is Alexis Zanias. Alexis is conducting this study for her research project leading to her Master's degree in Environmental Education from Montreat College in North Carolina. As a Christian educator, Alexis desires to understand what experiences most seem to spur personal and spiritual growth.

### **Why should I respond?**

First of all, please know that this is a completely voluntary survey. You do not have to participate.

There are potential benefits to participating:

- Having the opportunity to reflect on your experience at LDW
- Gaining awareness of the effect (or non-effect) that LDW has had on your life
- Enabling future program directors to better design and implement experiences that have the most long-lasting effects
- Receiving a CCO XD sticker for your car, water bottle or computer

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to fill out the connected survey, which depending on the thoroughness of your answers, may take upwards of an hour in time.

**Will people be able to connect my name to my answers?**

All of the information collected will be strictly confidential. You will never be identified by name in this project and any and all information that would lead to your identification will be disguised. Any quotes or descriptions of your individual answers will remain anonymous, although they may be included to illustrate particular findings within the study.

None of your information will be released to any third parties.

The personally identifying research information will only be seen by the researcher, Alexis Zanias, and any staff that assist with research analysis. The compiled research results and report will be given to CCO and other publications.

By clicking on the link below and completing the survey, you are signing consent to the following paragraph:

"I, \_\_\_\_\_, give my consent to participate in the LDW research study. I've read the above information, and have asked any questions that I desired to ask. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time. I am free to ask Alexis Zanias any questions and receive explanations about the study. A summary of the research will be available from Montreat College when it is completed. All information obtained by the study is confidential and any information which might lead to my identity will be disguised."

Survey Link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/KQYZR86>

Sincerely,  
Alexis Zanias  
[zanasam@montreat.edu](mailto:zanasam@montreat.edu)  
[610-217-2126](tel:610-217-2126) (cell)

Montreat College Advisor: Dr. Brad Daniel  
Professor of Environmental Studies and Outdoor Education  
Co-Chair of the Outdoor Education Department  
Montreat College  
Montreat, N.C. 28757  
Phone: [828-669-8011](tel:828-669-8011) x3307  
Fax: [828-669-9554](tel:828-669-9554)

Steph Wessel  
XD Summer Opportunities Coordinator  
Coalition for Christian Outreach

**APPENDIX C**  
**EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE #3**

Mailed on 24 February 2014

Thanks to all who have already responded! Keep those responses coming!

It has been brought to my attention that if you start the survey and don't finish it, you might not be able to get back in.

I have gone back into Survey Monkey to adjust the settings. You should now be able to get back in. If you cannot, please email me directly at [zantiasam@montreat.edu](mailto:zantiasam@montreat.edu) and I will work on opening yours up again.

Survey Link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/KQYZR86>

Sincerely,  
Alexis Zantias

--

Steph Wessel

XD Summer Opportunities Coordinator

Coalition for Christian Outreach

**APPENDIX D**  
**EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE #4**

Mailed on 10 March 2014

Hello, all!

Thanks for the time that so many of you have taken to complete this survey.

The survey will be open for one more week. It will close the evening of 3/14/14.

The stickers and water bottles will be sent out in a few weeks, but will only be sent to those who fully completed the survey.

So, those of you with partially completed surveys, please take the time to go back and finish your responses.

Any questions, please email me!

Sincerely,  
Alexis Zanias

[zanasam@montreat.edu](mailto:zanasam@montreat.edu)

--

Steph Wessel

XD Summer Opportunities Coordinator

Coalition for Christian Outreach

**APPENDIX E**  
**EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE #5**

Mailed on 14 March 2014

Final reminder for LDW Survey:

The survey will be closing after tonight. If for some reason, you need more time over this weekend, please shoot an email to [zantiasam@montreat.edu](mailto:zantiasam@montreat.edu)

Thank you again so much for your participation!

Hope all of the emails weren't too overwhelming! :)

Sincerely,

Alexis Zantias

--

Steph Wessel

XD Summer Opportunities Coordinator

Coalition for Christian Outreach

**APPENDIX F**  
**SURVEY**

## Leadership & Discipleship in the Wilderness Survey

(Adapted from Daniel, 2003)

Posted on Survey Monkey

### Part One: Background Information

1. Which of the following best describes you in relation to the Coalition for Christian Outreach's LDW program?
  - a. A participant on the expedition
  - b. A participant who later became a leader on another LDW
  - c. A leader on LDW who never went on the trip as a participant
2. Do you currently work in a field related to Outdoor Education?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

If yes, describe your current position: \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
4. What was your age when you went on the expedition? \_\_\_\_\_
5. During what year did you go on LDW? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Had you participated in an organized wilderness expedition prior to going on LDW?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

b. If Yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

c. What was the average length of these trips? \_\_\_\_\_

d. Describe the purpose of these trips: \_\_\_\_\_
7. At the time you went on the trip, did you consider yourself to be a(n):
  - a. Atheist
  - b. Agnostic
  - c. Buddhist
  - d. Christian
  - e. Jewish
  - f. Muslim
  - g. Other (specify:\_\_\_\_\_)
8. Currently, do you consider yourself to be a(n):
  - a. Atheist
  - b. Agnostic
  - c. Buddhist
  - d. Christian
  - e. Jewish
  - f. Muslim
  - g. Other (specify:\_\_\_\_\_)

### Part Two: Reflections on Trip & Meaning

1. Why did you decide to go on LDW?
2. If a prospective participant contacted you to ask if you thought going on the trip would be a valuable experience, what would you tell him/her? Please explain.

3. What do you consider to have been your most significant experiences on the trip? What made them significant? Please explain.
4. Has your opinion of what the expedition meant to you changed or remained the same since completing the trip? Please explain.
5. Has the fact that you went on LDW made a difference in your life in any way? Please explain why you think it has or has not.
6. Was there any aspect of the LDW program that helped you use what you had learned in the wilderness back in your home environment? Please explain.

### Part Three: Components of the trip

Please evaluate how meaningful the following features of the LDW expedition were to you by writing the number which best describes your feelings. Please comment on why they were or were not important.

<i>Not Meaningful</i>		<i>Somewhat Meaningful</i>		<i>Very Meaningful</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>

*(N/A means the component was not part of your trip.)*

1. 3-4 day final expedition (without instructors) \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Backpacking & Camping \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Being Leader of the Day \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Climbing & Rappelling \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Course Community & Dynamics \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Daily Bible Studies/Devotions \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Daily Debriefing/Processing \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. The Natural Environment (places visited) \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Personal Reflection/Journaling Time \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Snow School/Mountaineering \_\_\_\_

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11. Solo Time \_\_\_\_

---

12. Wilderness Education Association (WEA) training \_\_\_\_

---

13. Instructors \_\_\_\_

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#### **Part Four: Summary**

1. If there anything else that you would like to say about either this survey or your LDW experience that you think is important, please do so in the space below.

**APPENDIX G**  
**IRB APPROVAL LETTER**

December 11, 2013

Dear Ms. Zanas,

Thank you for submitting your proposal (Emerging from the Wilderness: Significance and Transference of a Spiritually-oriented Expedition) to the IRB for review. The committee has reviewed your proposal and approves of your project. We wish you a blessed Christmas.

Dr. John DeWitt, Chair  
IRB  
Montreat College