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SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS' ADVENTURE BASED

COUNSELING EXPERIENCE:

A CASE STUDY

A Dissertation in

Counselor Education

by

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Abstract

General education, middle school students' experience and outcomes related to their participation in adventure based interventions were investigated through the use of qualitative research case study design. Eight sixth grade Caucasian students from a rural school in Pennsylvania were participants in this study. The district's annual adventure based counseling (ABC) program for the entire sixth grade class was spread over two school days and included both high and low ropes challenges for all program participants. Critical questions relate to what students expect, experience, and perceive as the impact of adventure based interventions. Research participants were interviewed three times and observed throughout the program. Analysis of the three interviews, researcher observations, field notes, and journaling provide key insights into ABC programming. Analyses of data for what students anticipated or expected from the participation revealed themes of fun, fear, and confidence. Themes for students' perceptions of the experience were cognitive, emotional, and social challenge and success as well as fun. Analysis of the impact students perceived was social growth. These key insights into ABC provide facilitators, teachers, and administrators valuable information on the constructs through which participant growth occurs; with high ropes course outcomes differentiated from low ropes elements. The study also reveals discrepancies which may be connected to the focus of debriefing or lack thereof. Key research recommendations from this study include the quantitative exploration of multidimensional self-concept, the investigation of the long-term influence of the intervention, as well as the approach and nature of debriefing in the field.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Richard H. Albright and my mother, Sherry D. Albright. I have stood on the shoulders of my father's wisdom and my mother's compassion throughout my life. Their sacrifice, faith, and support have made this adventure possible. I will be forever thankful for having them as my parents and the steadfast support they have provided. How truly blessed and privileged I have been to have such wonderful parents! While my father was here for the beginning of this journey, regrettably, he is not here at the end to celebrate this accomplishment that, to me, seems as much his as my own. I look forward to the day when I will embark on the greatest adventure of all and be able to share this achievement with him.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, a brief description of the intervention, in addition to the research gaps around adventure based programming serve to demonstrate the value and purpose of the study. The population being studied, the potential significance of the results of the study, and the research questions are also identified and examined. This chapter begins with a brief introduction to the intervention at hand.

Adventure Based Counseling

Adventure based counseling (ABC) interventions are group-oriented programs that help participants learn to share responsibility, develop cooperative problem-solving skills, and increase self-confidence (Glass & Myers, 2001). Fletcher and Hinkle (2002) describe ABC as a mixture of experiential learning, outdoor education, intrapersonal exploration, and group counseling. They point out that ABC programming enjoys a rich and continuing history supporting children and adolescents.

ABC programming has been used in many child and adolescent settings ranging from residential treatment facilities and juvenile detention centers, to summer camps and the public school systems. This dynamic approach has flourished in these venues as counseling professionals provide support for youth, youth-at-risk, and their families struggling with behavioral, psychological, sociological, economic, cultural, academic, and family problems (Moote & Wodarski, 1997). Glass and Myers (2001) note that ABC programs have proven especially useful with children and adolescents at risk for

delinquent behaviors. Research has repeatedly examined the use of adventure-based programming with at-risk youth to enhance self-concept and interpersonal skills.

A comprehensive study from twenty-five years of research and practice consistently points to ABC as an effective intervention with at-risk youth to enhance self-concept and interpersonal skills. This consistency serves as a strong foundation for the use of ABC with at-risk student populations. Researchers, however, have also made note of the many weaknesses regarding research in the field of adventure based programming. Quantitative research in the field has long been characterized by in-house evaluations, use of nonequivalent control groups, lack of randomization, and inadequate follow-ups (Gillis, 1992). Moote and Wodarski (1997) posed similar concerns in their review of the literature, noting that many of the existing research studies were found lacking in their research design. Moote and Wodarski point to specific limitations such as nonequivalent control groups, nonexistent control groups, insufficient, and unclear sample size as just a few research design concerns that characterize research in the field of ABC programming.

Gillis (1992) pointed out that existing research typically does not adequately follow up on the short-term positive impact of the interventions. Goldenberg, McAvoy, and Klenosky (2005) echo Gillis' observations over a decade later when they suggest studying the long-term impact of ABC as a logical next step in the field. While the research base has certainly continued to expand since Gillis, Moote, and Wodarski's observations, the weaknesses they describe, particularly in regards to research design, are still very characteristic of research in ABC programming. A current review of ABC

literature reveals that these weaknesses still exist and that a great deal of the literature base is buried in unpublished doctoral dissertations that seem to lack strong research design.

Concerns about study design pervade the majority of ABC research. The literature base detailing ABC with students seems to utilize mostly at-risk student populations. Such research does well to examine outcomes relevant to this highly visible and critical student population. This research, however, does little to support the use of ABC programming by general population students and a variety of other school groups. If ABC is being used by schools in support of general student populations, it is essential that researchers take up the task of exploring the nature of this programming (Horak, 2003; Goldenberg, McAvoy, & Klenosky, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

An exploration of the impact of ABC interventions has the potential to be particularly meaningful for all those impacted by school programming, particularly in a time of public school budget cuts and emphasis on utilizing empirically validated approaches. If schools are continuing to utilize such programming despite the many limitations existing in the current research and dearth of literature exploring the experiences of students and schools participating in ABC programming, what benefit are these students experiencing beyond what the existing research base indicates?

The overarching purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of general education students' ABC experience. An in-depth exploration of a selected program will allow opportunity to acquire key insights into this dynamic intervention. A key question

here explores the nature of the population in question. Why study sixth grade students in particular, as opposed to elementary students, high school students, college students, or adults, all of which research shows, utilize ABC programming?

The Population

Practice and theory provide rationale for studying sixth grade students' participation in ABC. A review of the collection of published research in addition to discussions with professionals in the field populations reveals that adolescents are the primary age-population being served by ABC programming. Practically speaking, it makes sense to study the populations that are, in fact, utilizing a given intervention. The question, however, remains - why is it that adolescents are particularly well-suited for this type of intervention?, or what is the theory here behind the practice?

The social aspect of ABC provides an intervention which fits nicely into a time of students' social transition and social turmoil, often characterized by bullying and peer victimization (Olweus, 1994). Adolescents are often, by definition, in the midst of major internal transition with all of the accompanying mental, emotional, and physical ramifications of the onset of puberty. This time of profound adolescent development is characterized by children's exploring their independence and developing a sense of self (Erikson, 1966). ABC is a unique intervention which meets adolescents in the midst of this development with kinesthetic learning, abstract cognitive challenge, and adaptable physical challenge. Theoretically speaking, the intervention uniquely fits the population. A qualitative approach may well serve as most appropriate approach for investigating the

impact of the intervention with the population, which in both theory and practice, it so neatly fits.

Benefits of a Qualitative Approach

A qualitative approach seems a particularly good fit for exploring the impact of ABC on general population, sixth grade students. To address the trend in education towards using empirically validated interventions, Kazdin (2008) offers qualitative research as a key strategy for bridging the gap between practice and empirical validation. Richards (2003) states that a qualitative research approach often unveils a greater breadth of knowledge and the potential then exists for that knowledge to be utilized to enhance our understanding of specific concepts, people, and interactions. Such an approach would seemingly be able to explore the richness of the experience and the self-described impact of the intervention on the students.

Significance of the Study

The exploration and analysis of emerging themes from students participating in ABC provides key information for a host of vital stakeholders. Adventure based program providers will benefit from key insights gleaned from this exploration which will better equip them to provide more intentional, efficient, and effective services. School administration, teachers, and school counselors will benefit by being able to make more informed decisions on the costs and benefits of using ABC versus other kinds of interventions in support of their students. This study also provides vital information that parents of participating students and participating communities might find valuable as they exercise their right to express ideas regarding how students' time and tax dollars are

being spent. Additionally, and most importantly, students will benefit by the potential for subsequent improvements on methodology made possible by key insight into the impacts of this dynamic intervention.

The Research Questions

A review of the literature and limitations of the existing research base reveals several key issues which will be addressed in this study. Basic questions emerging from the literature include: 1) What do students anticipate or expect from participation in an adventure based program?; 2) What are students' perceptions of the experience of an adventure based intervention?; and 3) What do students perceive as the impact of an adventure based intervention? As a qualitative study, the construction of research questions also relies on the concept of *emergent design*, which emphasizes the importance of flexibility within the study design. The research questions themselves may change as the researcher enters the field, self-reflects, and begins to collect data.

As a qualitative researcher using reflexivity to address my own biases, I struggle at the very start to extract my own assumptions from the research questions. Using the word *impacts* in the research question, as opposed to the word *benefits* is a first step to ensure that my preconceived notions of adventure based programming as effective and beneficial to participants are extricated. Such disentanglement provides space for study participants to talk about their own experience without my predetermined ideas regarding the positive influence of such programming transforming or even invalidating their experience. Understanding reflexivity is just one step towards an appreciation of the

complexities of qualitative inquiry discussed in more detail in chapter three, the methodology section.

Strengths and Limitations

A key strength of this study is that it explores an understudied phenomenon of interest. General education, sixth grade students is an understudied population in terms of ABC. The existing research does provide a starting point from which to begin conceptualizing the impact of such intervention. Few if any researchers, however, have attempted to qualitatively explore the intervention with this population, let alone allow the themes to emerge from the experience rather than measure theoretically related constructs. Silverstein, Auerbach, and Levant (2006, p. 352) describe the inherent strength of qualitative inductive analysis as follows: "...although the researcher has a specific research question in mind, he or she does not specify the relevant variables. The research goal is to discover the appropriate variables." This study will stand out as unique and productive in this regard as it qualitatively explores the perceptions of students engaging in ABC. In addition, students' expectations of participating in an ABC experience are not found in previous research. Simply put, the key strength of this study is that it sets out to break new ground regarding the use of ABC as a therapeutic intervention for use with general education, sixth grade students.

Key limitations of this study include researcher bias which, if unchecked, could lead to a misinterpretation of the true impact of the intervention. Qualitative research, however, does provide an array of tools and techniques which have been utilized in this

study to mitigate this influence. Perceptions of qualitative research could also be considered a weakness of this study.

Western society's educational system relies largely on the use of quantitative analysis for the evaluation of programs it utilizes and subsidizes. Anticipated results from an exploration such as this will likely *not* provide the kind of rigorous data to support or disavow the use of ABC that some in the field of adventure based programming as well as the field of education might covet. This exploration, however, in no way seeks to gather such data to either support or disparage the intervention with said population nor does the proposed study intend for the results of the study to be generalized to the larger population. Rather, this study seeks a better understanding of the phenomenon in question. Such depth of understanding might very well serve as a foundation for the type of investigations that could conceivably yield the kind of empirical evidence that many seek in future explorations.

Conclusion

A brief description of the intervention was provided in addition to a review of the research gaps around ABC programming in this chapter. This has served to demonstrate the value and purpose of the proposed study. The population under investigation, the significance of the potential results of the study, in addition to the study's research questions, strengths, as well as limitations of the study were also identified and examined. A review of the literature surrounding adventure based programming; beginning with a look at the foundations of the interventions follows in chapter two.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an examination of the foundations of adventure based programming and an extensive review of the literature on the intervention. Definitions, descriptions, and evaluations of the quality of theory and research regarding adventure based experiences and the variables most closely tied to outcomes based on theory and research are included. The focus is primarily on issues and research related to school-age children.

Descriptions and Definitions

Foundations of Adventure Based Counseling

Adventure based counseling (ABC) traces its' roots to the 1940's, when Kurt Hahn and Lawrence Holt developed a wilderness program incorporating helping interventions that later became known as Outward Bound (Harris, Mealy, Matthews, Lucas, & Moczgamba, 1993). Hahn and Holt believed that the traditional approach to instruction was failing to educate the total child and set out to find a better way. In an attempt to address the shortcomings of the classical school curriculum in Germany, they began by substituting a wilderness setting for the traditional classroom (Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe, 1988).

Outward Bound required participants to overcome physical, mental, and emotional challenges while sharing responsibility and solving problems as a group. This approach was so innovative and popular that Hahn was asked to design a curriculum used to train military personnel for World War II. Outward Bound subsequently spread to 26

countries around the world (Carns, Carns, & Holland, 2001) with schools being established in England, Germany, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, among others (Nassar-McMillan & Cashwell, 1997). The Outward Bound model became the foundation for programming such as *wilderness therapy*, *experiential education*, and *adventure based counseling*.

The latter of these ABC programs was founded by Jerry Pieh (Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe, 1988), who adapted the Outward Bound curriculum for use in a more traditional classroom setting. Pieh and his staff of educators designed a curriculum that integrated academics, theatre arts, physical education, and counseling into a holistic program known as Project Adventure. Over the past 30 years, Project Adventure has earned a variety of national educational awards and founded *adventure based counseling* as its model program (Carns et al., 2001).

ABC and the other branches of Outward Bound vary in regards to activity/challenge type, environment, populations served, and length of program. Programs can vary from a half hour workshop in a classroom to a three month wilderness excursion. ABC is a treatment model used with a variety of target populations by clinicians from different fields with various theoretical orientations, and practice in a wide variety of settings that include psychiatric facilities, educational facilities, and treatment centers (Moote & Wodarski, 1997; Schoel et al, 1988). Though the intervention takes many shapes and sizes and many differences exist regarding how the approach is structured, ABC programming typically relies on the benefits of group work as a foundation for success.

Group Counseling

Group counseling provides acceptance, support, and a sense of community, which can be an antidote to an increasingly impersonal culture (Corey, Corey, & Corey, 2010). As group members' importance to the group is acknowledged, their ownership in the group and the group process are heightened (Mitchell, 1994). It is from this foundation that people of many different ages, backgrounds, and with different concerns can benefit from the group process.

Groups can be developed and implemented that effect positive change within a wide range of developmental areas. They provide a unique opportunity for children, in particular, to get feedback from others, develop social skills, and build healthy peer relationships. Group counseling provides an opportunity for these positive interactions to be provided in a counseling relationship and amongst peers (Gladding, 2003). Peers, in particular, are of central importance to older children and adolescents. Social relationships are of primary importance for the typical adolescent (Corey et al., 2010) and this orientation toward the social world enhances their need for independence.

The benefits of group work are numerous and include the strengthening of individual self-esteem when students work together toward achieving a goal. One of the most important needs of the developmental stage of early adolescence is to experience successes that will lead to both a sense of individuality and connectedness. This leads to self-confidence and self-respect regarding their uniqueness and their sameness (Corey et al., 2010). It is the outward focus and constructive participation with others that forms the basis for self-esteem (McMillan, Singh, & Simonetta, 1995).

Because the peer group is an important source of support for older children and adolescents, groups are the treatment of choice (Shechtman, 2004). Additionally, group counseling affords the opportunity to positively impact individual students as well as the school at large (Littrell & Peterson, 2002). It is from the theoretical underpinnings of group process and the central importance of peer support and healthy self-concept that the foundation is laid for experiential, group-based, adventure based counseling with children and adolescents.

Adventure Based Counseling

Unique Aspects of the Intervention

ABC, also known as cooperative/new games, and teamwork group initiatives, are interrelated examples of experiential group activities within the counseling community. This manifestation of small group counseling utilizes noncompetitive tasks that depend upon group interaction for successful completion of group goals (Nassar-McMillan & Cashwell, 1997). ABC interventions are group-oriented programs that help participants learn to share responsibility, develop cooperative problem-solving skills, and increase self-confidence (Glass & Myers, 2001). Furthermore, ABC is described as a mixture of experiential learning, outdoor education, intrapersonal exploration, and group counseling (Fletcher & Hinkle, 2002). Researchers and practitioners continue to make progress describing factors which set ABC apart from other counseling approaches.

Specific factors that distinguish ABC from traditional counseling include the setting, an element of risk, additional counseling skills, additional ethical considerations, an emphasis on processing using metaphor, and the transfer of learning for educational,

psychological, sociological, physical, and spiritual benefits (Fletcher & Hinkle, 2002). ABC challenges are designed so that success cannot be reached individually, but require group cooperation for completion (Wick, Wick, & Peterson, 1997). Another trademark of ABC that sets it apart from talking therapy is the experiential component.

ABC intentionally uses carefully chosen activities and initiatives that have metaphorical power with a focused purpose. Scenarios are presented and activities are selected in which group participants are challenged to solve a problem. The ensuing discourse prompts meaningful encounters amongst participants. These interactions, including both process and content, are relevant to therapeutic goals and become the source of material for dialogue between group members that can and often does lead to insight and behavior change (Glass & Benshoff, 1999). Group leaders help facilitate this insight and the potential for positive change by concluding activities with a *debriefing* during which participants engage in a discussion about feelings, behaviors, perceptions, and accomplishments during the preceding activity.

An important facet of ABC is that many of the activities used are fun and non-competitive by design. Winning is not the ultimate goal in the sense that a group could conceivably *win* or *lose* any particular activity. Participants, instead, are presented with an opportunity to attempt difficult challenges. Initial structuring and subsequent debriefing done by the group leader establish that the effort and process is ultimately more important than the outcome, succeeding, or failing to succeed at any particular activity (Schoel et al. 1988). It is the group leaders' responsibility to ensure that the

group activities, sometimes called *initiatives*, are selected with the group's specific goals in mind.

One of the most important tasks of the ABC leader is to continually assess the group's functioning relative to their therapeutic goals. Group leaders have a vast collection of published resources from which to select activities to address their particular group's needs. Schoel et al. (1988), for example, have published a number of activities and initiatives categorized into the seven categories as follows: Ice Breakers, Deinhbitizer Activities, Trust and Empathy Activities, Communication Activities, Decision Making/Problem Solving Activities, Social Responsibility Activities, and Personal Responsibility Activities. Counselors select activities that have a particular emphasis to help the group develop in the desired direction. *Deinhbitizers*, for example, help groups practice risk-taking and develop or enhance group cohesion.

Activities can be intentionally utilized to develop and/or enhance objectives such as: physical safety, emotional safety, level of trust, ability to cooperate, empathy, self-concept, decision-making, communication skills, level of tolerance, problem-solving, ability to deal with fears and frustrations, ability to compromise, capacity to offer support and encouragement, skill to set and achieve goals, as well as recognize and celebrate successes (Horak, 2003). The availability of such a wide range of activities with such a broad range of therapeutic benefits from which to choose may be one of the reasons why it is so appealing to counselors. ABC activities and challenges are also quite unique in their physical make-up.

Initiatives, also called *elements*, are often constructed with materials such as metal cables, wood platforms, walls, or poles and use equipment such as ropes, safety harnesses and helmets. These elements are typically built outdoors and sometimes use existing trees as fundamental supports. They are commonly referred to as *low* or *high* depending on how high they are built off of the ground. High elements allow participants to climb and engage in challenges as high as twenty feet or more off the ground. These unique challenges offer a significant degree of both perceived and real risk as a part of the experience. Both the high and low elements require specialized equipment and materials that has led to the popular term *ropes course* that is often associated with ABC. Due to the physical and emotional risk that are characteristic of ABC interventions, there are two fundamental concepts embraced by ABC that establish vital structure for the group and clarifies basic concepts of the philosophy of ABC.

Full Value Contract and Challenge by Choice

The Full Value Contract (FVC) and Challenge by Choice (CBC) are the two basic tenets, conceptualized originally by Project Adventure, that are characteristic of ABC. While other ABC program providers sometimes use different terminology so as not to legally infringe on Project Adventure, the basic premises are the same. FVC and CBC are critical concepts disclosed during the initial exchanges between the group leader and the group participants.

FVC is an understanding and agreement made between group members intended to protect the inherent value of each group member. FVC facilitates the basic premise

that each group member has a responsibility for the safety of fellow participants and for his/her self. A well-done FVC commonly talks about safety in terms of the physical and emotional safety of each group participant. Group leaders discuss with the group how emotional and physical harm can be expressed between members both verbally and nonverbally. Talking about FVC provides the facilitator with an opportunity to address and establish group norms regarding group participants shared responsibility for responding to one another's positive and negative behaviors. This provides both permission and responsibility to the group for such interaction and discussion. CBC is the other central concept in ABC. CBC establishes expectations and boundaries regarding individual participation.

CBC explores the risk and challenge inherent in ABC programming. This fundamental concept talks about a group's responsibility to encourage and support individuals while preserving the right of the individual to determine their level of participation. As part of CBC, each individual participant has the right to withdraw when they determine their perceived risk to be too great to continue. The responsibility to support the CBC concept is shared by both the group and each individual member. FVC and CBC help the counselor fulfill his/her ethical responsibility to inform participants of the practices, benefits, and risks associated with participation in ABC. Facilitation of ABC, however, is entirely more complex than just the introduction and enforcement of a FVC and CBC.

Activity Selection and Sequencing

There are a myriad of other factors that ABC counselors and/or leaders need to take into consideration when selecting activities, including the group's goals, the readiness of the group, the group's emotional state, the behaviors of group members, the level of physical fitness of the members, and the developmental stage of the group (Schoel et al. 1988). Participants' social development, cognitive abilities, and any mental or physical disabilities are also critical factors for leader consideration (Fletcher & Hinkle, 2002). The order or flow of selected activities is also an important facet for leader consideration.

The sequence of activities typically progresses from easy exercises through tasks that are more physically and mentally challenging (Alexander & Carlson, 1999). The activities utilized build upon each another and increase in difficulty so that the group is consistently challenged. Such incremental increase in level of difficulty requires that participants utilize increasingly more mature social skills and abilities to work together in order to successfully complete the challenges (Glass & Shoffner, 2001). The appropriate sequencing of activities creates conditions that are ripe for group leaders' facilitation of reflections about the group process.

Debriefing

ABC leaders are charged with the important task, or perhaps better thought of as the *art*, of debriefing. Debriefing, also known as *processing*, helps to ensure that the group members have the opportunity to derive meaning from their experiences and

generalize that meaning, using the activity as a metaphor, to other areas of their lives (Glass & Benschhoff, 1999; Harris et al. 1993). Conceptualizing challenges as life metaphors provides unique opportunities for participants to gain awareness of internal strengths that they utilized experientially and then transfer that awareness and draw upon those strengths in other areas of their lives. Debriefing skills, however advanced, are just one of a plethora of talents in which adventure based programming leaders need to be accomplished.

It is critical for the ABC counselor to be able to effectively utilize traditional counseling skills and techniques such as modeling, confrontation, linking, active listening, reframing, reflecting, clarifying, and summarizing; with a particular emphasis on group process (Glass & Myers, 2001). Additionally, ABC leaders need to be highly trained in skills that involve the more physical and technical aspects of adventure activities such as knot-tying, climbing, belaying, and spotting (Fletcher & Hinkle, 2002). Taken together, highly skilled ABC facilitators and this experiential approach allows group participants a unique opportunity to implement, practice, and process behavioral, cognitive, and affective changes in the group setting (Nassar-McMillan & Cashwell, 1997) and learn through inductive reflection (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 1997).

Altogether, the ABC philosophy is based on a foundation of solid counseling skills, logical rationale, and highly-refined theory and design. Testimonial and anecdotal evidence, both formal and informal, are common and provide valuable support for the validity and reliability of adventure based, experiential programming. In addition, the limited resources of those who would utilize such programming coupled with increasing

fiscal scrutiny has led to the development of a strong foundation of empirical research on the benefits of adventure based programming over the course of the last 25 years.

Existing Research Base

ABC with a Variety of Populations and Concerns

ABC interventions have been utilized effectively to treat a wide range of concerns with a wide array of populations. ABC has been utilized with both foster families (Faulkner, 2002a) and traditional families to improve family skills, enhance family cohesion, and effect positive growth and change (Gerstein, 1994). Variations of ABC have been utilized to work with all-women groups to promote female empowerment, personal development, career development, as well as to break down unhealthy stereotypes and body image (Hart & Silka, 1994; Stopha, 1994; Powch, 1994; Aubrey & MacLeod, 1994; Gubitz & Kutcher, 1999). Families and women, however, are just the beginning of a long list of populations that have been studied using adventure based programming.

Athletic coaches at both the collegiate and scholastic levels have utilized teamwork games and ABC interventions with their athletes (Kilty, 2000; Meyer & Wenger, 1998). In athletics, the goal is to help athletes transfer their successful experiential practices back to the competitive field or court. Still serving young adults, ABC has also been introduced to orient freshmen to college. Various studies with college student populations have been shown to improve leadership development, self-concept (Finkenber, Shows, & DiNucci, 1994), as well as teamwork (Miller, 1998) and

student retention (Gass, 1990). Success with young adults has been accompanied by the use of ABC with adult populations as well.

Major corporations have identified a variation of ABC as an advantage in corporate America. Business managers have used *corporate adventure training* in order to improve employee performance, morale, functioning, and teamwork (O'Bannon, 2000; Kelly, 1996). The field of counseling rehabilitation has devoted particular interest to the field.

Counselors working with adults with drug addiction issues have successfully utilized ABC programming to enhance participant problem-solving skills (Faulkner, 2002b). One study noted a short-term improvement in self-esteem and shift towards internal locus of control when studying a group of employees with disabilities who had participated in adventure therapy programming (Herbert, 1998). A wide and varied range of population groups have also been treated using an ABC approach in the context of therapeutic rehabilitation including: war veterans, senior citizens, people with mental illness, people with mental retardation, cancer patients, people with hearing impairments, as well as victims of abuse, trauma, and disease (Ewert, 1989; Herbert, 1996). Perhaps most commonly, however, ABC interventions have been utilized with groups of children and youth.

ABC Research with Elementary and Secondary School Students

Quantitative Research

ABC enjoys a rich history of working with children and adolescents and this tradition continues (Fletcher & Hinkle, 2002). ABC interventions have been used in many settings ranging from residential treatment facilities and juvenile detention centers, to summer camps and the public school systems. ABC has flourished in these venues as counseling professionals help youth, youth-at-risk, and their families deal with behavioral, psychological, sociological, economic, cultural, academic, and family problems (Moote & Wodarski, 1997). For these reasons, student populations continue to dominate both the use of adventure based programming and research done in the field.

A number of studies have explored the benefits of utilizing ABC activities with groups of youth or students, depending upon the group origination. Investigators have long-noted that there seems to be a limited number of comprehensive, empirical studies investigating this treatment approach (Moote & Wodarski, 1997). While it is true that the ABC model is a relatively new approach to working with students, the research base has grown over the course of the last twenty-five years. Researchers continue to note the need for more empirical research on the effectiveness of ABC (Carns et al. 2001), but an increasingly strong research base now exists which examines the impact of adventure based experiences on groups of youth. Many of these studies investigate the impact of ABC on at-risk youth.

ABC programs have proven especially useful with children and adolescents at risk for delinquent behaviors (Glass & Myers, 2001). A review of the evidence is

compelling. One study examined the effects of an ABC intervention on behaviorally disordered adolescent students (Sachs & Miller, 1992). In this study, researchers were examining the social interaction/cooperative behavior of a small group of teenagers using a pretest-posttest/control group design. Findings indicated that the intervention experience had a significant short-term impact on the cooperative behavior exhibited by the students in their school setting (Sachs & Miller, 1992). While the sample size is a weakness (16) of this study, random assignment to either ABC or relaxation training are study strengths. One key aspect to note, however, is the *short-term* effect of the intervention. This tendency resurfaces in similar studies.

One study explored the behavior change of a group of emotionally impaired intermediate school students having participated in ABC (Freed, 1991). Pretest-posttest results indicated a significant, positive impact on participants' scores on an assessment of interpersonal difficulties. The evidence, however, was not adequate to support long-term improvement.

Another study specifically set out to study the long-term impact of a nine-week adventure program on twelve 14 to 18 year old at-risk youth (White, 1998). This quantitative study looked at how the ABC program impacted participant locus of control and self esteem. Similar to Freed's (1991) findings, immediate post-test results indicated a significant improvement with, in this case, a shift towards internal locus of control and enhanced self-esteem with the youth engaging in the ABC program. This difference, however, diminished to non-significance when both control and program participants

were tested two years after program end. There are, however, several studies that indicate some long-term benefit from adventure programming.

A treatment program for adjudicated youth that integrated ABC with a community-based component reported positive long term results at a one year follow up (Sakofs & Schuurman, 1991). Another study explored the long term impact of an ABC on 266 high risk youth age 10-18 (Davis, Ray, & Sayles, 1995). Participants engaged in both low and high elements over the course of two days. Results from the program indicated significantly positive effects on trust, self-esteem, and teamwork. This study included a post-test six months after the intervention. While the lack of an adequate control group is severely limiting, results from this post-test signify some resiliency of the program impact as most measured constructs remained as high or higher when compared with immediate post-test results. Regardless of long-term benefit, the field is ripe with studies espousing the benefits of participation in adventure programming for at-risk youth.

One study found that special needs students with behavior and adjustment difficulties who participated in ABC activities in the school system improved their self-concept, decreased their anxiety, and showed an increase in positive attitudes toward school (Leiberman & DeVos, 1982). Another study, examined a similar population and utilized a quantitative approach to uncover the impact of an 18 week ABC intervention utilizing both high and low element ropes courses (Faubel, 1998). The program participants were 68 socially and emotionally disadvantaged eighth grade students.

Results indicated significant, positive improvements in terms of self-esteem, leadership skills, social skills, and teacher-rated, student depression.

Other researchers have also studied the effectiveness of ABC with at-risk youth. Results from one such study examining an eight week program indicated increased internal locus of control, enhanced self-esteem, enhanced self-efficacy for peer interactions, and significant behavioral improvements as well (Combs, 2001). This study was unique in that it utilized both quantitative and qualitative analysis. From the qualitative interviews, there was significant evidence that the ABC intervention, specifically the ropes course activities, had a positive effect on participants' self-esteem and self-efficacy. Quantitative results of this study, however, should be interpreted cautiously in light of the limitations of the research design (ABAB single case) utilized. Another study (Sale, 1992) examined the effects of an ABC intervention on a population of juvenile delinquent adolescent students, utilizing a pretest-posttest of the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale (1964). This study found significant gains in ego development and self-concept as a result of the ABC intervention. Unfortunately, there was no control group utilized in this study. Research design problems are all-too-common in the research base and are present in the following studies as well.

One study utilized adventure programming with 14-18 year old, co-ed, at-risk youth with several goals (Robitschek, 1996). This summer job program used both individual and team-building activities in an attempt to impact participant expectations and hope for future success, particularly with regards to career development and successful functioning in the world of work. Considerable limitations are evident in this

study, including the lack of a control group and poor instrumentation. Nevertheless, researchers noted an increase in participant problem solving skills, hope, and expectation for future success.

Another study examined the effects of ABC interventions with a group of 43 juvenile delinquent male students (Zwart, 1988). Research was conducted using a pretest-posttest design once again, but this time utilizing a self-report inventory and behavioral observations. The hypothesis of increased self-esteem was not supported in this study, but behavioral observations indicated an increase of socially acceptable behaviors. Interestingly, this particular study did not find ABC to have an effect on participant self-esteem. This apparent program failure to achieve objectives is uncommon, but can be found in other studies as well.

One such study explored the impact of ABC on teacher-identified, 12-14 year old, at-risk youth (McGarvey, 2004). In this program, however, evidence did not support the improvement of multi-dimensional self-concept, depression, and/or self-esteem. Small sample size (29 program participants), facilitator variables, as well as the duration and intensity of the program were identified as factors contributing to the apparent failure of the program designed to improve self-concept and enhance social functioning.

Another study, looking to explore the impact of ABC on students' sense of school connectedness and school climate, also failed to provide evidence of positive benefits (Horak, 2003). This study, however, is unique in that it explored the impact of adventure-programming on general population students. This study examined the impact of a ropes course program on sixth grade students with 51 students in the treatment group

and 54 students in the control group. This investigation attributed the lack of significant results to the multidimensional nature of school climate and limitations of the assessments utilized.

Researchers found better success over a decade earlier when they utilized ABC interventions in an attempt to improve self-concept with a group of co-ed general population, adolescent students (Hazelworth & Wilson, 1990). They administered a self-esteem pretest-posttest to their group of almost 40 youth, ages 12-15. In this case, Hazelworth and Wilson (1990) found significant increases in moral-ethical self-concept, identity and self-satisfaction. It is possible that the long-term, intensive nature of this intervention was instrumental in the effectiveness of the program. Compare this study consisting of four, two week sessions, each with a different adventure focus with Horak's (2003) quantitative examination of the impact of a single day intervention. The impact of ABC on students has also been explored in the context of family relationships.

Another study explored the impact of an ABC intervention on adolescents in foster homes (Faulkner, 2002a). This study found that the intervention had a significant impact on measures of participant self-esteem and family cohesion. Limitations to these studies include sample size, lack of random selection of subjects, and no random assignment to the comparison or treatment group. While quantitative design dominates the field of research, qualitative research on adventure programming does exist which provides valuable information on the richness of adventure based experiences. The first of these qualitative studies, like Faulkner's (2002a) also addresses the special needs of foster children.

Qualitative Research

One researcher-practitioner, concerned about the placement options for adolescent foster children, sought to develop a proposal for a residential high school to serve adolescent foster children (Gaffney, 2000). His curriculum included results from ABC initiatives and a variety of other experiential education components. This comprehensive intervention design provided qualitative evidence in support of the use of ABC programming to effectively address students' emotional and behavioral issues.

Another study utilized a qualitative approach to study the impact of a four-day ABC intervention on nine at-risk females, ages 13 to 18 (Autry, 2001). This intense intervention included both high, low ropes, and a backpacking/overnight experience. Themes emerging out of in-depth interviews with program participants included perceptions of trust, empowerment, teamwork, and the recognition of personal value. Other researchers provide additional anecdotal evidence as they discuss the active role that school counselors can play by facilitating low-ropes challenges (Gubitza & Kutcher, 1999). The authors discuss their experiences and how experiential adventure based approach, including the use of ropes courses teaches groups adolescent girls to trust themselves, foster identity formation, personal growth, and a greater sense of autonomy.

Another study utilized an ethnographic examination of an ABC program including high and low ropes course elements in an attempt to mold the identity and moral development of at-risk students (Holyfield & Fine, 1997). Their qualitative study supported the use of ABC with at-risk youth to demonstrate the power of personal

accomplishment, trust, cooperation, and the development of socially legitimized moral virtues.

Other research provides key insight into the benefits of utilizing ABC with seriously ill adolescents (Carlson & Cook, 2007). Anecdotal evidence from this study supports ABC as an efficacious approach to helping youth regain and increase a sense of self-efficacy and personal agency. Other observations include the development of a sense of social responsibility and the confidence to persevere in anxiety-provoking situations. The authors note that the youth finished the adventure program with a better fundamental understanding that although key aspects of their circumstances are beyond their control, they still have the ability and opportunity to make choices that make a positive impact on their lives. This review of the published research yields select commonalities worth note and discussion.

Common & Critical Variables

Over the course of the last twenty-five years, researchers have indeed focused their attention on the potential benefit of ABC on children and youth. Common factors identified as worthy of study have included locus of control, social skills, problem-solving skills, school/peer connectedness, leadership skills, sense of community, trust as well as the treatment of anxiety and depression. Self-esteem and self-concept, however, more than any other variable, seem to be the outcome constructs most often studied in connection with ABC interventions.

The overall results of ABC research seem to point to the short-term effectiveness of peer group oriented interventions to improve adolescent student self-esteem (Page &

Chandler, 1994). Such findings are somewhat encouraging due to the measurable and positive short-term impact of such interventions. The central importance of self-esteem and self-concept to adolescent social, emotional, and academic health make it especially critical for researchers to continue to explore research in this particular area. At least one other common finding emerges from a review of the literature. Moote and Wodarski (1997) pointed out in their review of ABC research that there does not seem to be any harmful implications from participation in adventure programming. This current review of the literature over a decade later finds this common factor unchanged.

A construct analysis of the literature specific to the use of ABC programming finds nineteen publications regarding the use of adventure based programming with children and youth. The following table details each of the repeating relevant constructs with the corresponding number of times that particular construct was under consideration. Similar constructs are consolidated for analysis. For example, *self-esteem*, *self-concept* and *self-efficacy*; while each having a distinct definition, are all merged under *measures of self* in the following table. The third column provides the corresponding references.

Construct Table 1

Construct Research Using Adventure Based Programming with Children and Youth

<u>Construct</u>	<u># Times reported, %</u>	<u>References</u>
1. Measures of Self	13, (68%)	White (1988); Davis, Ray, & Sales (1999); Leiberman & DeVos (1982); Faubel (1998);

		Combs (2001); Sale (1992); Zwart (1988); Megarvey (2004); Carlson & Cook (2007); Faulkner (2002a); Autry (2001); Hazel-worth & Wilson (1990) Gubitz & Kutcher (1999);
2. Social Skills	8, (42%)	Sachs & Miller (1992); Freed (1991); Davis, Ray, & Sales (1999); Faubel (1998); Carlson & Cook (2007); Combs (2001); Holyfield & Fine (1997); Autry (2001)
3. Locus of Control	7, (37%)	White (1988); Autry (2001); Gubitz & Kutcher (1999); Sale (1992); Holyfield & Fine (1997); Combs (2001); Carlson & Cook (2007)
4. Behavior Change	5, (26%)	Freed (1991); Combs (2001); Robitschek (1996); Zwart (1988); Gaffney (2000)
5. Emotionality	4, (21%)	Leiberman & DeVos (1982); Faubel (1998); Megarvey (2004); Gaffney (2000)
6. Trust	3, (16%)	Davis, Ray, & Sales (1999); Autry (2001); Holyfield & Fine (1997)
7. School Attitude	2, (11%)	Leiberman & DeVos (1982); Horak (2003);

Strengths of the Research

Research has repeatedly examined the use of ABC with at-risk youth to enhance self-concept and interpersonal skills (Faubel, 1998; Combs, 2001). Certainly, the high-risk nature inherent in the very definition of this population provide a solid rationale for continuing to explore the efficacy of this and other interventions aimed at providing needed support. Additionally, research in the field is characterized by quasi-experimental design (Hill, 2007). While obviously creating some limitations in regards to research design, such research coupled with rich testimonial and anecdotal evidence does provide facilitator, researcher, and potential participants with a better understanding of the potential benefits for those engaging in said programming. Finally, while some of the instrumentation utilized does lack reliability and validity, a solid base of research does exist (particularly in studies published in peer-reviewed journals) that utilizes high quality instrumentation to measure salient constructs (i.e. McGarvey, 2004).

Weaknesses of the Research

Researchers have made note of the many weaknesses apparent regarding research in the field of adventure based programming. Researchers have long-noted that quantitative research in the field is characterized by in-house evaluations, use of nonequivalent control groups, lack of randomization, and inadequate follow-ups (Gillis, 1992). Moote and Wodarski (1997) pose similar concerns in their review of the literature, noting that many of the existing research studies were found lacking in their research design. Nonequivalent control groups, nonexistent control groups, insufficient,

and unclear sample size are just a few research design issues concerning Moote and Wodarski.

It was pointed out long ago that research in the field typically does not follow up on the short-term positive impact of the interventions adequately (Gillis, 1992). These observations are echoed over a decade later as researchers suggest that studying the long-term impact of adventure-programming would be a logical next step in the field (Goldenberg, McAvoy, & Klenosky; 2005). While the research base has continued to expand since even these more recent observations, the weaknesses described, particularly in regards to research design and inadequate follow-up, are still very characteristic of research in adventure based programming. In a current review of the literature, these weaknesses are highlighted by the reality that a great deal of the literature base is buried in unpublished doctoral dissertations that lack strong research design.

In addition to concerns about study design, the majority of adventure based programming research with students seems to utilize at-risk student populations. Such research does well to examine outcomes relevant to this highly visible and critical student population. This research, however, does little to support the use of adventure based programming by general population students. If adventure based programming is being used by schools in support of general student populations, it would be essential that researchers take up the task of exploring the nature of this programming.

Conclusion

This chapter defined, described, and evaluated the quality of theory and research regarding adventure based experiences and the variables most closely tied to outcomes based on theory and research. Focusing primarily on issues and research related to school-age children, this paper reviewed the foundation of adventure based programming, described the intervention, analyzed the existing line of research, and explored critical variables connected to this intervention. An examination of the qualitative methodology utilized to explore the dynamic intervention detailed in this chapter follows in chapter three of this proposal.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter three serves to examine the qualitative methodology that was utilized to construct and analyze this case study. With the rationale for the study and literature review of adventure based programming as a foundation, this chapter details the qualitative research study which set out to investigate students' experience and outcomes related to their participation in ABC interventions. A justification for a case study approach is presented first. Select sampling method and data collection procedures which were utilized are then presented. An autobiographical section is presented next. Finally, this chapter presents a description of the data analysis procedures, validation and verification methods which were used. In each section, the rationale for the techniques utilized is presented first, followed by the specific application to this study. The chapter begins with an exploration and rationale for the use of case study design in this study.

Case Study Design Justification

Case study methodology is an approach that focuses on a particular phenomenon, provides rich descriptions, and offers new understandings (Merriam, 1998). Donmoyer (2000) contends that the rich, descriptive, case study approach provides an important means for addressing the complexity of applications in counseling, social work, and education. This provides powerful support for the use of case study design to investigate general education, sixth grade students' experiences.

This case-study is grounded in the phenomenological tradition, where priority is given to the lived experience and the production of in-depth descriptions of those

experiences (Creswell, 1998; Holstein & Gubrium, 1998). This study is *primarily* concerned with exploring the nature of the students' experiences participating in the adventure based program. The primary purpose is theory generation through the identification of themes, which involves drawing connections from the ground up rather than searching for data to prove or disprove a hypothesis as in the positivist quantitative tradition (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The methodology used draws upon a constructivist-interpretivist framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Such a framework acknowledges that meaning or understanding is developed through the analysis of participants' experiences in social contexts base in the rich descriptions of such experiences.

This particular study set out to rely on student participants' verbalizations of their experiences as the primary means for exploring the research questions. While interviewing children can be challenging, Labov (1972) observed years ago that when interviewed skillfully with consciousness of class, race, and age, children can be thoughtful about their experience in and out of school and are capable of reflection that is informative and compelling.

Due to the innate variance amongst ABC programs, a qualitative approach to examining ABC needs to offer both a method for in-depth exploration of a single program and considerable flexibility. Stake (2000) offers that case study methodology is comprised of in-depth exploration within a single bounded system, often within a single program. Furthermore, case study design is often cited being flexible in data collection and analyses methods (Merriam, 1998). Once again, case study design seems like an

ideal fit for the qualitative study students' experiences with a single, naturally occurring, time limited ABC program.

In a single instrumental case study such as this, the researcher focuses on an issue or concern and then selects one bounded case to demonstrate this phenomenon (Stake, 1995). This single instrumental case is in contrast to a collective case study wherein the researcher(s) selects multiple case studies to explore or illustrate a single issue. This single instrumental case study will be intrinsic in nature in which the focus is on the case itself, which Stake (1995) details as a particularly effective approach for evaluating a program or understudied phenomenon.

The case study design takes advantage of one of the key attributes of this study. General education, sixth grade students participating in adventure based programming is an understudied population with ABC being an understudied intervention. While the existing research provides a starting point from which to begin conceptualizing the impact of such intervention, few have attempted to qualitatively explore the intervention with this population, let alone allow the themes to emerge from the experience rather than measure theoretically related constructs. The unique research questions combined with the use of qualitative case study analysis provided great potential to break new ground regarding the use of adventure based programming as a therapeutic intervention for use with adolescent students.

Case Selection

Case Selection Rationale

Creswell (2007) points out that a case study approach is appropriate when the inquirer has a clearly identifiable case or cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the given case or program. The case study researcher must decide which bounded system to study, with the recognition that several might be possible candidates for selection, and worthy of study. Selecting the case or cases requires that the researcher establish a rationale for his or her purposeful sampling strategy for selecting the system and for gathering information about them.

Silverstien, Auerbach, and Levant (2006) suggest that using convenience sampling, at the very beginning, to identify a pool of research participants is appropriate. As Seidman (1991) points out, it is imperative that a researcher studying the experience of people at a site, whether it be a school, factory, church or business, must gain access through the person who has responsibility for the operation of the site. With that in mind, it was critically important to identify and work cooperatively with school administrator and teachers at potential schools throughout the group selection process.

Case Selection Application

This study sought to research an existing group of middle school, general population students participating in an ABC intervention. The cases were also bound by time (one or two day program), by space (high and low ropes course), and by season (fall/beginning of the school year). Through contact with schools and ABC provider

facilities in Pennsylvania, several schools and their corresponding providers were identified as potential cases. From there, school administrators were contacted for more information on their program and to ascertain their interest in cooperating on this research project.

One administrator at a K-6th grade elementary school in rural, North-central Pennsylvania was particularly interested in the potential results of this research study. Traveling from central PA, I made the beautifully, if desolate, drive through roads winding through the mountains of northern PA to meet with the teachers and principal of the district's sole elementary school. A meeting with the three sixth grade teachers revealed a group of teachers and administrators who were particularly interested in finding out more about their students' experiences at the ropes course program. Their two-day program, in existence for many years, had been funded by the state through a program designed for drug prevention. Several years prior, however, this funding source dried up. The teachers and school principal, having witnessed the positive impact of the experience on their students many times over, continue to request and receive over \$3,000.00 per year to pay for the program for their students from their district school board. The teachers' and principal's observations and anecdotal evidence persuaded the school board to fund the increasingly expensive program despite the absence of strong evidence providing verification for the positive impact of the program. The school fit all the criteria for the bounded system and, with mutual motivation, the process of recruiting students participants was set to begin.

Sampling

Sampling Rationale

Qualitative research seeks to develop transferable theories as opposed to generalize-able theories (Silverstein, Auerbach, and Levant, 2006). The key is to select participants that allow the widest possibility for readers of the study to connect to what they are reading. This is unlike quantitative research typically which uses random sampling from a large and diverse population in an attempt to assure that the research sample is representative and so that study results can be generalized from the sample to the larger population.

With transferability as the ultimate goal, the researcher must provide detailed information about the researcher, the participants, the phenomenon, and the dynamic process interactions between them. These rich descriptions allow readers an opportunity to infer the extent to which a study's findings transfer to other contexts. Silverstein, Auerbach, and Levant (2006) point out that sometimes the *theory* emerging from the patterns observed in qualitative research will be applicable to diverse populations even though specific content of the patterns may not be applicable.

Creswell (2007) recommends purposeful sampling. He further suggests selecting cases that show different perspectives on the problem, process, or events. Observing and interviewing a number of students allows for an exploration of differing perspectives. Patton (2002) indicates that the power of purposeful sampling in qualitative methods is that it can allow for the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth study. In this

study, maximum variation sampling (Seidman, 1991) was utilized, meaning that a rich example of the phenomenon of interest was sought. Seidman (1991, p. 42) states the following:

The range of people and sites from which the people are selected should be fair to the larger population. This sampling technique should allow the widest possibility for readers of the study to connect to what they are reading. In my experience, maximum variation sampling provides the most effective basic strategy for selecting participants for interview studies.

Sampling Application

Sampling boundaries were clearly defined in this study through maximum variation sampling (Creswell, 2007), meaning that a rich example of the phenomenon of interest was sought. In this study, all sixth grade students were recruited for the study via an informational meeting with the primary researcher and teachers in a private room adjoining the school library. Students were provided information about the research study, given an opportunity to ask questions, and were each issued a parental informed consent form to take home and bring back to school the next day if they were interested in participating in the study. Students were extremely well-behaved during this informational session and seemed particularly interested in my affiliation with Penn State, particularly with football season well under way.

Students who returned the signed parental informed consent to participate constituted the pool of potential participants. Out of fifty-four sixth graders, twenty-four

returned parental informed consent. This pool of participants was then narrowed to eight with regard to maximum variation sampling. The initial goal for this study was to interview approximately five to eight student participants. Eight students, the higher end of this range, were selected from this initial pool to account for potential absences from either school or the program. These numbers are consistent with recommendations of Polkinghorne (1989), Patton (1990), and Seidman (1991) for similar studies.

The teachers helped to select a diverse group from the pool on the following factors: gender, physical ability, cognitive ability, and social ability. All of the potential participants were Caucasian, so this was not a consideration. The only student in the class with a visible physical disability (wheelchair) had already decided not to attend the ropes course program prior to the first recruitment meeting. I found it particularly interesting during this meeting to select research participants, that the teachers seemed to know each of the students extremely well, even though it was only the second full week of school. The unique nature of this rural, small town K-6 elementary school struck me once again and as I wrote in my journal, I wondered what impact this might have on the study. Being sure to fill up the gas tank for the long drive home, I mentally prepared a plan for my first interview with the student participants.

Data Collection Procedures

Data Collection Rationale

Interviews. Creswell (2007) recommends data collection through observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials. Seidman (1991) strongly recommends

that interviews with informants be tape-recorded in some fashion. Furthermore, Yin (2003) suggests that all interviews with informants should be transcribed verbatim. Wolcott (1990) suggests guidelines for qualitative research in education by suggesting that the interviewer select an interview environment and conditions that promote comfort, security, and the privacy to openly discuss experiences. In addition to unstructured interviewing, direct observation is the other basic qualitative approach to data collection (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007).

Observation and Journaling. Qualitative researchers view human behavior as a product of how they interpret the world. The challenge in any kind of qualitative approach is to see the world from each participant's perspective and integrate each individual encounter into themes that better explain these experiences. Research must be conducted in the setting where the contextual variables are operating (Marshall & Rossman, 1980). Observations are considered *passive participation* when the researcher is present at the scene of action as a spectator but does not interact or participate.

Data Collection Application

Interviews. A series of three interviews were conducted with eight of the student participants in this study. These in-depth interviews with program participants took place one week before, immediately after, and then approximately a week following the phenomenon in question. Interviews with students were semi-structured, open-ended, fifteen to thirty minute sessions in which interview notes were taken, in addition to the audio-taping of interviews with eventual transcription. Parental informed consent and student verbal assent was obtained from all informants prior to interviews and audio-

taping. Full names were not utilized during audio-taped interviews to conceal the identity of participants.

Sixth grade teachers identified and secured a quiet, private room adjoining the library for the recruitment session, all three interview days, and the member-checking session. The room was a quiet, carpeted with rising levels for sitting in a semicircle and had a capacity of approximately 75 elementary students and teachers. Chairs and a desk were borrowed from the adjoining library for each of the interview sessions in addition to the member checking session.

Observations and Journaling. Field notes were gathered by researcher observations of the adventure based facility, the students' school, and observations of program participants engaging in the intervention via *passive participation*. Throughout the process that began with my initial meeting with the sixth grade teachers, I kept a journal of personal perceptions and observations of the process. This journal, reflecting my thoughts and perceptions was analyzed, compared, and contrasted with transcriptions from program informants.

Observations provided an opportunity to provide rich, detailed descriptions of the facility, participants, and experiences. Additionally, observations helped to guide the specific interview questions with particular students and also with the cohort of eight student participants. This step in data collection also provided an opportunity to self-reflect on how my prior experiences, thoughts, and impressions of ABC might impact the study.

Autobiographical Section

Autobiographical Rationale

Creswell (2007) talks about how researchers' preconceptions are *bracketed* so as not to inject hypotheses, questions, or personal experiences into the study. This continual process that aims to remove researcher bias in an effort to reveal the substance of the participants' experience is referred to as the *epoche*, which Moustakas (1994) explains more fully:

The epoche is the first step in coming to know things. This involves the setting aside of predilections, predispositions, and prejudices and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as anew for the first time (p. 85).

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 107) contend that the human interviewer used to gather data can be marvelously smart, adaptable, flexible instrument who can respond to situations with skill, tact, and understanding. Seidman (1991) also recommends an autobiographical section explaining researchers' connections to their proposed research as crucial for those interested in in-depth interviewing. This next section provides a self-portrait for that very purpose.

Autobiographical Application

It was necessary from the very start of the study for me to set aside my many years of experiences facilitating and observing adventure based programming. My

preconceived notions of this programming as beneficial and helpful to program participants had the potential to create a barrier to my seeing and hearing about the lived experience of program participants accurately. My bias, if left unchecked, could also emerge and influence the manner in which data was collected from program participants as well as how the data was analyzed.

My experience with ABC programming dates back approximately fifteen years to my work as an undergraduate student in Recreation and Parks management. I had taken a summer position as a camp counselor to get field experience for my degree. During the staff training, we were broken into small groups who were taken through high ropes, low ropes, and climbing wall challenges which were on-site. I recall my first *trust fall* and the resulting feeling of connection with my fellow counselors. I also recall helping to solve a low-ropes challenge and feeling really good about my ability to do so and look good in front of my peers. I recall the high ropes as frightening, difficult, and fun. Needless to say, my first experiences with ABC were very positive and from a personal and professional standpoint, I was hooked.

I spent the next five years facilitating many different ABC challenges with many diverse groups, including socially and emotionally disadvantaged children, children with physical disabilities, school groups, counselors-in-training, adjudicated youth, and corporate adult groups, to name a few. My interest in the therapeutic benefit that I witnessed facilitating these kinds of interventions led to my enrollment in a Counselor Education master's program. My master's project focused on the use of ABC as a school counselor in training with a group of socially and emotionally disadvantaged teenage

boys. Anecdotal evidence from this informal study provided support for increased social connection for program participants.

Three years as an elementary school counselor allowed me to integrate ABC programming into my classroom guidance lessons for general education fifth and sixth grade students for therapeutic and psycho-educational benefit. I was also privileged to chaperone a sixth grade field trip each of these three years to a low-ropes course. I participated in this programming with the students. While I was somewhat discouraged by the lack of focus for this program and what I considered poor facilitator processing and debriefing, I was still glad that the students were having the opportunity to participate in this programming which seemed to make such a positive impact on the atmosphere in the sixth grade wing of the school.

After three years as a school counselor I enrolled full-time in a Counselor Education Ph.D. program with a research focus on ABC yet again. During the first year of my doctoral studies, while talking with the principal at my former school, I found out that the sixth grade program had been dissolved due to a lack of funding from the school board. Knowing the board's insistence on utilizing empirically validated interventions, I can only conclude that this had something to do with the cancellation of the program.

I, admittedly, would very much like to spearhead research to provide the very kind of empirical evidence and support for ABC that is so needed in the field. In their best interests, I would like to see more and more students experience what I know to be a powerful intervention. With positive ABC experiences as a participant, facilitator, and an

avowed advocate for this very programming; it has been a real challenge to disentangle my preconceived notions of ABC as therapeutically powerful tool for impacting sixth grade students. This autobiographical sketch, however, has helped with that process.

Interview Design

Interview Design Rationale

Seidman (1991, p. 4) proposes a qualitative approach to interviewing as a particularly appropriate for the field of education. He states that at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of people and the meaning they make of their experience. He goes on to say the following in regards to utilizing in-depth interviewing in educational research:

So much research is done on schooling in the United States; yet so little of it is based on studies involving the perspective of the students, teachers, administrators....whose individual and collective experience constitutes schooling...if the researcher's goal, however, is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry.

Seidman's (1991) three-interview series approach provides a model of in-depth phenomenological interviewing which involves conducting a series of three separate interviews with each participant. The first interview places the participant's experience in context by asking them to tell as much as possible about themselves in light of the topic up to the present time.

Interview Design Application

In this study, the first interview with students sought to accomplish two main goals. The first goal was to explore the students' expectations regarding their participation in the ropes course program. Questions that were asked to explore these students expectations included "Have you ever been to a ropes course before?" and "What do you think that it is going to be like?" The second, yet equally as important goal for this session, was to establish rapport with each student participant in order to lay a foundation for the next two interviews sessions. In order to accomplish this critical objective, the primary researcher talked with students about themselves, their experiences, their family and friends while playing a wood building block game over the course of the session. This positive interpersonal relationship laid a strong foundation for the second interview.

The second interview with students took place in the early morning the day after students returned to school from their two school-day field trip to the ropes course. The primary purpose of this second interview was to explore students' perceptions of their ropes course experience. During this interview, each participant was asked to, using the same wood blocks from the first session's game, write, with a permanent marker, one word on two to five blocks that described their experience. The researcher and each student then engaged in a discussion exploring the student's experiences at the ropes course that led to their selection of each word. During the second and third interviews, customized research questions were generated in response to information from previous

interview sessions as well as from researcher observations of the students' participation at the ropes course itself.

One week after the second interview, the third and final interviews were held, again in the early morning at the school in the quiet room adjoining the library. The primary purpose of this interview was to explore each student's perception of the impact of the ropes course intervention on themselves, their peers, teachers, their class, and/or their school. Once again, I utilized the wood blocks, this time to construct a metaphorical bridge from before the intervention to the intervention after the intervention. Students were then asked how things were different than before going on the ropes course trip and/or what they had learned by going on the trip. Seidman (1991) is quick to point out that this third interview can be productive only if the foundation for it has been established in the first two interviews. As evidenced by the students' thoughtful reflection in this interview detailed in chapter four, it seems as though a solid foundation was established in the first two interviews with most every student.

This relational and conceptual foundation allowed for follow up questions for clarification, seeking concrete details, and requesting stories from the participant throughout the process. As the primary researcher, my main objective throughout this process was to actively listen and to move the interview forward as much as possible by building on what the participant began to share.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity Rationale

Reciprocity refers to the common practice of research participants being rewarded or paid in some way for their participation (Creswell, 2007). Seidman (1991) notes that in qualitative studies, interview participants often experience a deep appreciation for being listened to and have the opportunity to share their experiences.

Reciprocity Application

Participants involved in this study may potentially benefit from subsequent improvements to the methodology made possible by the publication of the findings. In addition, participants may have benefited from the interview experience itself as they shared their experiences. In addition to these indirect benefits, I gave each of the eight student participants a small token of appreciation following their individual member-checking sessions. The gift for each participant was a faux carabineer (similar to those used to secure harnesses and ropes in the high-ropes course) keychain with a compass and *Penn State* inscription.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative researchers have offered several definitions for both understanding and applying data analysis procedures that were utilized in this study. Bogan and Biklen (1982) address both theoretical and practical issues with their definition of data analysis in qualitative research. They detail this as the process of systematically searching and

rearranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials accumulated to increase understanding of them and to enable the presentation of what has been discovered to others. The analysis involves working with data by organization, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing, searching for patterns, discovering what is important (in answering the research questions), what is to be learned, in addition to deciding what and how to report findings. Another analytic strategy that can be utilized is to identify issues within each case and then to look for common themes that transcend the cases (Yin, 2003). An exploration of emergent design and specific data analysis steps provides insight into the approach utilized in this study.

Emergent Design

Rationale. Davis (1995) suggests that data analysis in qualitative research is cyclical in nature and interwoven throughout the entire process. Therefore, data analysis occurring during the data collection stage impacted the data collection process, as questions and observations became guided and more focused from preliminary examinations of the data. This cyclical nature is, in essence, the qualitative concept of *emergent design* in action.

Application. To explore valuable aspects of ABC, this study was designed so that objective impressions from both the observation and interviewing of participants could guide the nature of questions and observations throughout the data collection and data analysis. One example of this was the theme of teacher support/connection that emerged repeatedly during researcher observation. This concept then was explored with each of the student participants in the following interview session to explore the nature of its

salience with the students. This example of emergent design line is discussed in more detail in the results chapter. Subsequent to data collection, qualitative data analysis procedures necessitate a series of *steps* to make certain that the experiences of the participants are reflected accurately that begin with open coding.

Open Coding

Rationale. Strauss and Corbin (1990) label the identification of themes emerging from the raw data *open coding*. Van Manen (1990) suggests that searching for themes is an essential process for the interpretation of a lived experience. It is during this phase of this study in which the transcripts of student interviews and journaling are closely read and the narrative accounts examined on multiple occasions.

Developing an audit trail at the very beginning of analysis is particularly important. An audit trail is a strategy for identifying the data units according to who said them and the context in which it was spoken (Hoepfl, 1997). Qualitative research reports are characterized by the use of participant quotes that exemplifies the emerging themes. An audit trail helped to keep track of this vital information.

Application. The first step of analysis that was utilized in this study was the process of reducing the text by reading it and marking with brackets those passages that stood out as interesting. It was during this initial coding that I wondered *what statements or phrases seem particularly essential or revealing about the nature of the impact of the adventure based program on program participants?* to guide the coding procedure. The

raw data obtained from breaking the data down into manageable chunks was then coded to establish an *audit trail*.

In this study, the data units were coded with participant initials followed by the interview session number, followed by the starting transcript line. This coding utilized in this study looked something like the following: J.S.2.48, with J.S. representing the student (John Smith), 2 representing the second interview, and 48 representing the starting line of this particular excerpt from the transcript. In the reporting of the results using this chunked and coded data, students' names were changed to Mike, Sandy, Tanner, Mandy, Kristy, Justin, Maggie, and Mary to protect students' anonymity and to provide gender accurate context for the reader.

Axial Coding

Rationale. Strauss & Corbin (1990) call the next step in the process *axial coding*. This stage of analysis involves the re-examination of the categories identified in open coding to determine how they are linked. During axial coding, categories that emerge are grouped together. In an attempt to gather a holistic view of the experience, the discrete categories that are identified in axial coding are then compared and integrated in innovative ways. It is during the process of axial coding that themes emerge that provide a foundation for a conceptual model for the intervention and for determining the extent to which sufficient data exists to support these interpretations (Creswell, 2007).

Application. The chunked codes that resulted from the open coding procedure were then examined to determine how they were linked. It is during this phase that

specific themes emerged that provided the material for the building of a conceptual model of the intervention. One example of a theme that emerged in this study as one example was *social challenge and success*. Chunked categories, or codes, that were grouped in this theme included *teamwork, peer trust, and peer support*.

Extracting Themes

Rationale. The final step in data analysis of a case study is the integration of themes into a narrative description that accounts for both textural and structural components, addressing both *what was experienced*, and *how it was experienced*, respectively (Creswell, 2007). At this point, a detailed description of the case (Stake, 1995) emerges in which the researcher details such aspects as the history of the case, the chronology of events, or day-by-day descriptions of the activities. This study focused on a few key issues (or analysis of themes), not for generalizing beyond the case, but for understanding the complexity of the case. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) mention, this phase constitute the *lessons learned* from the case. Moustakas (1994), summarizing the objectives of this last stage, emphasizes the intuitive integration of the whole experience into a cohesive description that may include a reflection of personal meaning of the experience. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 57) add that the report be a “rich, tightly woven account that closely approximates the reality it represents.”

Application. Extracting themes serves as the final, interpretive phase of data analysis in this study. Themes that were identified in axial coding were then integrated to construct a conceptual model for understanding students’ ABC experience. This

conceptual model is presented and explored in the upcoming results and discussion chapters. Additionally, a detailed description of the case, including the chronology of events, descriptions of the facility and key observations are included in the chapters that follow as well.

Verification and Validation

Trustworthiness

Rationale. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that reliability and validity are inappropriate standards in qualitative research and that *trustworthiness* is the relevant standard for studies conducted from this methodological perspective. Trustworthiness can be established through triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, informational redundancy or saturation provides an indication of trustworthiness when the vast majority of the data collected repeated previously collected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Overall trustworthiness of the research, which relies on the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the data and the credibility of inferences drawn, can be achieved through engagement, persistent observations in the field, the generation of thick description in the field texts, and production of detailed narratives. These are indicators of worth, although not the only indicators, as they offer strategies for ensuring rigor in qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

The use of Seidman's (1991) interview structure incorporates features that enhance the accomplishment of trustworthiness as well. First, it places participants'

comments in context. It also encourages interviewing participants over time to account for idiosyncratic days and to check for the internal consistency of what is said. Furthermore, by interviewing a number of participants, it becomes possible to connect participants' experiences and check the comments of one participant against another. The goal of the entire process was to understand how participants understand and make meaning of their experience. Finally, to the extent that the interview structure works to allow participants to understand themselves and their own experiences as well as to help the interviewer understand their experiences, the process can be considered successful in establishing trustworthiness (Seidman, 1991).

Application. Trustworthiness was established, in this study, through triangulation. Triangulation was secured by comparing the three interviews with individual informants. The process of comparing and contrasting participants' interviews revealed consistency over time when comparing and contrasting individual participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Comparing and contrasting students' experiences against one another provided an additional layer of trustworthiness as participants' talked about similar experiences and similar reactions. Triangulation was also achieved by comparing and contrasting student responses with my own observations in the field. Though I was not able to witness every single incidence that students talked about in the interviews, I was present and observed the majority of experiences that the students talked about when detailing their experiences at the ropes course during the second interview.

Saturation was noticeable after the analysis of approximately five complete interview transcripts when no new or surprising information emerged in interviews as

stories told and examples given had been described previously by another informant. In the process of reporting findings, quotes and concrete examples are provided to support the emergence of relevant themes. These quotes and concrete examples also serve to enhance the level of trustworthiness of the study as the reader is able to read and interpret the participants' words for his or herself. Finally, in my opinion, the interview structure was extraordinarily successful in both helping students better understand their experiences in addition to helping me to understand their lived experiences.

Member Checking

Rationale. Some qualitative researchers have provided rationale for the presentation of research findings back to the program participants for feedback in order to establish trustworthiness. This approach, sometimes called *member checking*, is considered by some to among the most critical techniques in qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Others, however, have cautioned that such an approach actually poses more of a threat to validity. The argument here is that program participants may not be able to recognize themselves or their experience subsequent to the synthesis of experiences (Morse, 1998).

Application. For the purposes of this study, a member check was conducted with each of the participating students four weeks following the intervention. At these final meetings with the individual students, verbal descriptions and summaries of the thematic findings from transcripts were provided to participants. The participants were then asked questions such as: *What about that doesn't seem right?* and *How does that sound?*

Students responded unanimously to affirm each of the summaries with comments such as “Yeah, that’s it.”, “That sounds good.”, and “Perfect.” Trustworthiness was solidly established in this study through this seamless member checking experience.

Reflexivity & Multiple Coders

Reflexivity is a particularly important validation method and has already been integrated, as appropriate, throughout the discussion of both the data collection and data analysis procedures. This concept recognizes that the researcher(s) bias and life experience invariably influence the findings of any qualitative study. This particular case study which set out to explore the impact of adventure based programming on program participants has undoubtedly been influenced by the research that I have on ABC and the thoughts and feelings that I have gained through life experience. My experience with utilizing multiple coders, however, provides some assurance that I was able to approach this research project with an open mind to the students’ unique experiences.

In the analysis of the interview transcripts, two other coders volunteered to help code several of the transcripts. These transcripts were then compared and contrasted with the primary researcher’s work to look for discrepancies. Any differences and/or discrepancies were then discussed between the coders and consensus was reached on the final coding. While much of the coding overlapped so as to provide an additional layer of trustworthiness to the analysis, one particular aspect stood out as unexpected. In a discussion with one of the volunteer coders, an overarching and embedded theme of *success* and *enhanced self-concept* was identified. As a researcher well-versed in the

literature base, the natural inclination should have been for me to immediately pick out this theme (self-concept) in my analysis that cuts through and across the vast majority of research in ABC. However, only collaboration with an alternate coder helped to illuminate the presence of this theme for me. I consider this as further evidence that I have entered into this data collection and analysis with an open mind and held my own presuppositions in check throughout the process.

Conclusion

Chapter three served to examine the qualitative methodology that was utilized to construct and analyze this case study. With the rationale for the study and literature review of adventure based programming as a foundation, this chapter detailed the qualitative research study which set out to investigate students' experience and outcomes related to their participation in ABC interventions. A justification for a case study approach was presented first. Select sampling method and data collection procedures which were utilized were then presented. An autobiographical section was presented next. Finally, this chapter presented a description of the data analysis procedures, validation and verification methods which were used. In each section, the rationale for the techniques utilized was presented first, followed by the specific application to this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter will detail the results of the study. Each of the study's three main research questions will be answered by examining the themes that emerged from the data analysis. Because the study participant is the expert in a phenomenological case study Creswell (2007), direct excerpts from the interview transcriptions with the eight student participants will be used to illustrate each of the themes that emerged. Students' names have been changed to Mike, Sandy, Tanner, Mandy, Kristy, Justin, Maggie, and Mary throughout this chapter to protect their anonymity. Researcher observation and journaling will be utilized to complement participants' verbal responses. An additional analysis serves to provide additional key insight into distinct differences between the high and low ropes experiences regarding the emerging themes. The following chart provides the reader with a timeline for how the study unfolded over the course of approximately six weeks.

Timeline Chart 1



A brief introduction to each of the eight student participants is provided to help provide context for the lengthy student responses that follow to address each of the three research questions. The introductions begin with a closer look at the three boys in the study.

The Students

Tanner. Tanner, one of the more vocal students during the interviews, is an intelligent young man who wears glasses and is a bit overweight. He enjoys playing football and other outdoor activities, though he doesn't seem the star athlete. He has a few friends in class, but gets along with most everyone. Tanner, while very talkative with me, seems to have some difficulty developing friendships with students in class, particularly with females. I formed an immediate bond with Tanner that lasts throughout the program.

Mike. Mike, on the other hand, is one of the more athletic boys in the class and appears to have average intellectual ability. No question that he is the star athlete in sixth grade, which developmentally speaking, puts him in a position to be very popular with all of his peers. He comes across as very confident, yet modest, and I like Mike from the very start. He is naturally quiet, but talkative when prompted and quite observant as well.

Justin. Justin is the third and final male research participant. Small in stature with long blonde hair, Justin comes across as quiet, confident, and a bit mysterious. A bit of prompting reveals a very intelligent and insightful young man. Justin, while talented in math and the sciences seems to have more difficulty with developing strong interpersonal relationships with his peers than either of the two other males. By my estimation, however, Justin is liked well liked by his peers and is a decent athlete, though

the only sport that really seems to interest him is hunting. I was intrigued by Justin from the start and his insights add so much to the study. With the boys in tow, we move on to the five girls in the study.

Kristy. Kristy presents as a tall, thin athletic young lady. She participates in cheerleading and seems to be popular with her peers. Academically, she performs average to slightly below average. Her responses during the interviews were short and to the point. Kristy has a knack for stating the obvious, which I actually found very helpful. While I was often looking for the deep meaningful insights from the students, I would sometimes overlook what was most basic. While I am not sure I was able to develop as strong a rapport with her as some of the others, Kristy's honest responses reminded me of the importance of students' simple and straightforward reactions over the course of the study.

Sandy. Sandy presents as a very intelligent girl with medium build. Sandy was the only member of the group of eight students to have been to the ropes course prior to this trip. She had gone the year prior with a group of the highest academically tracked students in the school. Sandy regularly travels cross country to visit friends and family with her family. My impression is that in this school of students from primarily low socioeconomic status, Sandy is one of the few exceptions to the rule. I estimate her social skills as very strong and she has no problems getting along with her peers, though she was less talkative with me over the course of the study than I imagined she would be.

Maggie. Maggie presents as small in stature and effuses positive energy and enthusiasm. She is talkative and friendly with average to above average intelligence and

average to above average physical ability. Maggie seems to be friends with just about everyone in her grade and seemed to me to be smiling almost constantly. Her talkative nature, however, never seemed inappropriate or too much for her peers. She has a magnetic personality that makes her seem larger than her small physical size. I really enjoyed talking with Maggie. She shared really very keen insights throughout the research process.

Mandy. Mandy presents as a tall, thin female of average intelligence. Mandy seems to have strong social skills and equally strong communication skills. Furthermore, she is an active young lady with average athletic ability. She exudes modest confidence and seemed as self-aware as any of the students in the study which allowed her to share meaningful insights over the course of the three interviews. Of the females in the study, I believe that I connected with Mandy as good if not better than any of the others.

Mary. Mary presents as short and thin, with average to above average intelligence. She has strong social skills but does not seem athletically inclined. Despite her strong social skills, she seems very introverted with her peers. In interview sessions, however, Mary was very capable and willing to offer meaningful insight into her experiences. Disclosure of the results drawn from the observations of and interviews with each of these vibrant students begins with student responses to the first research question.

What do students anticipate or expect from participation
in an adventure based program?

Only one of the eight students interviewed had participated in any type of high or low ropes course prior to this two school-day intervention. Half of the participants, however, had siblings or close friends who had prior experience with ropes course participation. Student expectations, then, seemed to be formulated by word of mouth from friends, relatives, and teachers whose descriptions set the stage for emotional and cognitive anticipation and expectation. An analysis of the narratives yields three key themes that emerged. Those three themes are: a) Fun, b) Fear, and c) Confidence.

Fun

All eight of the student participants relayed the expectation that the ropes course would be enjoyable in one way or another. Comments such as “I think it’s going to be fun...really fun!” and “I think it’s going to be really fun!” were common. The following excerpts, also drawn from the first interview, illustrates a sense of excited anticipation.

Tanner: ...Kind of cool, you know. I mean....I think it's going to be, cool, until maybe after I try it. I mean, that's how some stuff works, you know, but right now I think it's going to be cool...I think it's going to be good.

Maggie: I think it will be a lot of fun, and it will give me a chance to be, like, high and get to...I don't know. I'm just excited.

Fear

In almost every case, the student's expectation of fun or enjoyment was tempered with worry and/or anxiety. This second theme of *fear* emerged during axial coding with initial chunking revealing open codes such as *doubt, fear, heights, scared, worry, and questioning to diminish fear and anxiety*. The following excerpt from the first interview with Mandy serves as an example for the *fear* theme found throughout this first interview, with much of this fear directed towards the fear of heights and the high ropes elements. One can sense the anxiety that this student is experiencing in anticipation of the upcoming ropes course trip.

Mandy: I'm afraid of heights, but like...I can't go on a Ferris wheel because it moves back and forth, but I think....there's a zip line right?...Um, how, uh how high does uh,. Um, the highest zip line go...er....what, do you know?

Interviewer: I don't know how many feet it is.

Mandy: Do you know an estimate?

Interviewer: Thirty.

Mandy: Feet?

Interviewer: My guess would be 30 feet, but I don't know exactly.

Mandy: Huh.

Another female provides an additional example of anticipatory fear regarding the high

ropes challenges.

Kristy: ...Some parts scary.

Interviewer: Oh you think some parts will be scary?

Kristy: Yeah.

Interviewer: Like what?

Kristy: Like the...high things. They're really...high.

Two other students detail their anticipation of being scared when they anticipate being up in the high ropes elements as well.

Justin: I'm scared of heights...I'm probably going to be sort of scared at first.

Mary: Well, if they're up high, I think they're going to be scary because I'm terrified of heights.

Confidence.

In each case, the students' fear of heights seemed to be assuaged by anticipation that they would be safe at the ropes course. This overarching optimism seemed to provide even the most fearful students with a strong sense of security. Each student was optimistic that they would have an enjoyable, safe experience, mostly despite the fears and/or anxiety that they were experiencing.

Mandy: I think I'm going to be able to go down that because...like, you get harnessed in, and I don't think you're going to fall.

Justin: I know I'm going to be safe on the harness and stuff...so I know I'll do it...

I'm not going to get scared, because I know I'm not going to fall.

Sandy, who had participated in the ropes course previously, said "Like, I probably won't be as scared because I've already done it." Mike, who was the one of two students who claimed to *not* have a fear of heights said "I think I'll do everything because I'm not afraid of heights."

A week after the first interview which explored students' expectations, the sixth grade went on their field trip. The next section details researcher observations of the ABC program.

Researcher Observations

Rationale

This section is included to provide context for the experience by detailing the ABC facility, facilitators, and the general schedule for the two-day program. My personal reactions to the program are also included in this section to provide the reader with a well-rounded understanding of witnessing an ABC program. The content of this section has been drawn from the personal journal that I kept with me and made notes in over the course of the two day program. The names of the facilitators have also been changed to protect their anonymity.

Application

Sixth grade students arrived at their school at their regular time on a cool but sunny morning on a Wednesday in mid-September, just two weeks into the school year. After a quick attendance check, fifty-three students, all three sixth grade teachers, the elementary school principal, the school psychologist, and one teacher's aide loaded the two school buses for their seventy-five minute ride to the ropes course facility.

The ropes course facility is located on a beautiful campus, mostly wooded with tall, mature pine, and hundreds of giant cedar trees just starting to turn color. The campus boasts trees and fields as far as the eye can see in any direction at any location, open areas for field games complete with large, permanent soccer goals, a large in-ground swimming pool, dozens of camping cabins, an administration building, and a large multipurpose gymnasium. This heated gymnasium, complete with restrooms, a conference room, and a gift shop would be utilized as the base of activities for the next two days. The camp is utilized most of the time as a faith-based, summer residential camp, but several full-time staff are present to offer a variety of recreation and spiritual programs throughout the year.

I arrived a bit early to meet and talk with the program facilitators about their training and experiences regarding ABC. The six facilitators, four females and two males, ranged in age from their early twenties to the one male serving as the lead facilitator, who was probably in his early-fifties. Each of the facilitators expressed

excitement about the group of students on their way and most had a positive experience with this school the previous year or more on this very program.

The facilitators all had considerable training in both the high and low ropes elements, but their conversation led me to believe that some felt more comfortable with the technical skills required on the high ropes, while some indicated more confidence and/or a preference for leading groups through the low ropes initiatives. Each of the facilitators had participated in at least three full days of site-specific training at some point within the last year which was tendered by a major ABC company on the U.S. East Coast that builds ropes courses (including this one) and provides trainings for the courses they build. All of the facilitators over the two days had prior experience leading groups through ropes courses, with summer camp, having ended just weeks earlier, serving as their busiest time of the year.

Soon enough, the two yellow school buses arrived on the scene, pulling right up to the gymnasium for unloading. The students, most wearing jackets or sweatshirts on the chill autumn morning, filed into the gymnasium, many taking the opportunity to use the restroom facilities adjoining the gym after their long trip. On the first day, one female student apparently had gotten motion sickness and regurgitated after getting off the bus. Several teachers attended to her while the rest of the students and staff went inside.

The lead facilitator, whom we'll call Rusty, took the lead. Rusty sports long brown hair, a long salt and pepper beard, blue jeans, and a flannel shirt. He is probably about fifty years old, but exudes the energy and enthusiasm of someone half his age. He

gathered the students in the gym to structure their two-day experience. The large group would split into two, with one group going to the low ropes course that day while the other would take part in the high ropes course challenges. Both groups would take a half hour break at noon, then go back to their area till about 4:30 pm, when they would head back to the gym to take the bus back home. The next day, Thursday, the groups would simply switch locations and follow the same schedule so that each student would have an opportunity to participate in both the high and low ropes course.

Basic camp rules were addressed at this time in addition to the introduction of the FVC and CBC concepts critical to ABC. Additionally, students were told about the *no discounts* policy at the camp wherein they were not to *discount* anyone's worth, including their own, by negative talk. The consequence for discounting someone, they were told, was that they would be required to give three compliments to the person or persons that they offended, including, if applicable, their self.

Rusty then led the large group in a series of active, large group icebreaker games. The students followed directions, laughing and seemingly having fun, with the games that lasted about twenty minutes. The teachers and other school staff were mostly observers during these activities. Rusty then split the group into four by having them line up and count off by four. When the groups gathered together, however, they were uneven. Most of the teachers seemed to think that several of the students wanted to be in their friend's or friends' group and so they probably slipped into the wrong group on purpose. The teachers helped to even the groups and two groups were directed towards the low ropes elements, each with their own facilitator, while the other two were led by the remaining

four facilitators to the high ropes course. At about 10:00 AM, with the weather outside on its way to a sunny 65 degrees, the sixth grade field trip to the ropes course had begun.

I chose to accompany the group of approximately twenty-five students, four school staff, and four program facilitators to the high ropes course on the first morning. While this group would be at the high ropes all day, I would switch to the low ropes groups after lunch. I did the reverse on Thursday, starting at the low ropes, and switching to the high ropes group after lunch. This schedule provided me an opportunity to observe each of the eight student participants that I was interviewing at both the high and low ropes elements.

A short ten minute hike into a grove of pine trees behind the gymnasium led to an impressive base of operations for the high ropes elements. At least a dozen telephone poles stretching half a football field in length were connected by a myriad of cargo nets, cables, ropes, logs, and various climbing equipment ranging from twenty to thirty feet in the air. My observations were that students seeing the course for the first time were awestricken as was I a year ago, when I visited the course for the first time.

Students worked with teachers and facilitators to put on full body harnesses that, when their turn came, would allow them to secure themselves to the various ropes and cables to ensure their safety. One at a time, the students were connected to a main rope and then thrust into the air by their fellow students attached to the other end of the rope and pulley system.

The first challenge was for students to grasp a large cargo net from which they would climb to their first landing some twenty feet up. Next came a series of tightrope walk type challenges, first across a twenty-five foot log and then across two wire cables running parallel to each other. Facilitators stationed at wooden platforms throughout the course assisted students as they latched and secured carabineers to ensure safety. A thirty foot rope challenge and ten foot pole climb brought students to the final challenge, an extremely fast zipline ride over one hundred feet long. In addition, the high ropes course included a leap of faith challenge that will be described later on and a forty-foot climbing wall. Not all students were physically or emotionally able to complete all the challenges. They were, however, encouraged to push themselves outside of their comfort zone at the very beginning when CBC was explained and on the ground by the encouragement of teachers, facilitators, and their fellow students. It would take an the entire day for the facilitators to take each of the students in the group through the course. My schedule, however, led to my switching my attention after lunch to the low ropes course.

A short five minute hike from the high ropes through the forest led to at least half a dozen low ropes elements at in one general location, connected by trails through the trees and underbrush. A twelve foot high vertical wall, a ten foot wide - rope spiderweb, and a series of four trees connected at intervals ranging from five to fifteen feet by wire cables just two feet off the ground are several examples of the low ropes challenges at this course. While seeing the high ropes inspired a sense of fear and trepidation in me, the low ropes aroused a primal sense of adventure that made me want to try each as if it were an adult playground. The energy and passion with which the students tackled each

of the low ropes challenges revealed to me that I was not alone in my enthusiasm. The next section will detail the themes that surfaced from the student interviews taking place after their two day adventure, with excerpts from those interviews providing support for the emerging themes in response to the second research question.

What are students' perceptions of the experience of
an adventure based intervention?

The second interview with students took place on the Friday following their ABC experience on Wednesday and Thursday of the same week. An analysis of the transcripts from this interview yielded the four themes of physical challenge, emotional challenge, cognitive challenge, and social challenge. A prevailing theme of success was intertwined throughout each of these four themes. In addition, a theme of fun and excitement was also identified as critical to understanding the students' experience. A presentation of the five themes with respective transcript excerpts follows.

Physical Challenge & Success.

Students detailed the many physical challenges that they experienced over the two day program. Here, as with the other three themes, students talked about the physical challenges. They detailed needing to use their balance and their strength to lift and climb in order successfully complete the challenges. Nearly all students talked about the physical difficulty of the experiences with an overriding theme of success woven throughout their recollections. A secondary analysis revealed that the physical challenge

and success that the students faced was connected to their participation in the high ropes and low ropes challenges fairly equally.

Tanner: I liked it...except for the part where the staples were so small...and climbing up it with the rope and the staples getting so small...climbing up and then jumping...then you get down and your legs start shaking. You're so excited, and you want to do it again. It was kind of difficult to climb up the staples and make sure the rope didn't get caught. And it was really difficult to grab the, the pole and hold onto it because when you hit it, it flies forward...and coming down, coming down was kind of hard because you had to sit down, hold the rope and then you get on to the (inaudible) and then you climb down and then if you didn't grab the rope fast enough, you'll go straight and you'll, like, fall...about 15 feet because it...the weight of you coming down and the ground keeps pushing on you makes it so that you fall down really...(coughs)...so you fall down really quick.

Tanner then talked about his experience doing the leap of faith in which he climbed up a pole and, standing on top of it, jumped off to try and grab a swinging bar. I had watched two days earlier as he fearfully took each vertical step up on large staples, reached the top and jumped to very nearly grasp the bar. Full of pride, he recounted the experience.

Tanner: I turned into superman.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Tanner: Um...Mr. C., he took a picture and it looked like I was superman...It looked like I was flying in the air.

One student informally added an additional challenge to the preexisting physical challenges on their own by making some of the high ropes challenges competitions between his older brother who had done the course the previous year and some of his friends at the course this year.

Mike:I completed the contest between me and my brother.

Interviewer: What was the contest?

Mike: Cause he was the only one to catch the leap of faith...to catch the bar (the previous year). I did too...Cause, like, I know last year when they did it, they had to go across and get on the platform and they had to walk up the staples, but I didn't know if they did it the same this year because we have the new things.

Interviewer: OK, so there was some competition between you and your brother, but also between you and some of your friends?

Mike: Yeah...Because Tanner and my friend Bill, he caught it, but...

Interviewer: But it slipped off?

Mike: Yeah...So we said "five seconds" and me and Kristy, only, that I know of caught it. Don't know about, anybody else.

In this next excerpt, Justin talks about the physical challenges that he faced in the high ropes course. I had watched and noted that Justin had particular difficulty traversing

some of the high ropes elements during my time at the course. I was interested to hear his take on the challenges that he faced. Here, he refers to the coping skills he relied on.

Interviewer: What else was hard about the last couple days?

Justin: Um...whenever we got up to the...spot on the high elements where we had to, like, walk across...So it was sort of hard for me to get to the zip line.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. I think I even remember you saying something like, "I'm ready to get down."

Justin: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...I watched you do some of that...how did you do it? It looked very challenging...how did you do it?

Justin: Balance.

Maggie also addressed the physical challenges of the high ropes course. She also mentions the weather as an added obstacle. While Wednesday, the first day of the program, was an ideal day for outdoor activity, Thursday was much less so. A chilly, cloudy morning turned into a rainy, frigid afternoon. Students on the low ropes course started the afternoon outside, then, as drizzle turned to a steady downpour, they made their way to the gymnasium where the facilitators were prepared to continue the program with a variety of indoor challenges. Students waiting for their turn on the high ropes elements, on the other hand, wore makeshift, garbage bag - rain ponchos to stay dry.

Maggie: ...Challenging...it was...I thought was challenging...challenging to get, like, across the high elements when it's pouring down rain and slippery and stuff like that.

The student participants also detailed physical difficulty in connection to their experiences on the low ropes elements. Note here again in these excerpts where the students detail the need for strength to lift and climb in addition to using balance to accomplish the low ropes challenges.

Tanner: Um...it was kind of difficult because at this one spot where you had to lift each other up and put a wood chip on top of this flat board thing...it was kind of like a rock wall except that it was just a flat board...flat boards going up...and we had to lift each other up and that was kind of hard.

Interviewer:...Anything else about “difficulty”.

Tanner: Um...I mean the bridge building was difficult too. The standing on the cables...the centipede, I think they said you called it...Everybody had to get up and hold each other's shoulders and you had to stay on the cable and balance out...and one or two people could be holding a tree to balance them out, and then have everybody go off them.....and then, like, um, the other part of the group that I was in had someone on the tree and then the group and then they turned around and that had another person on the tree, and then the group...it was kind of difficult, to get up there and stay stable.

Mary, Sandy, and Mandy also address the physical challenges in connection to the low ropes activities. Balance, a common theme in the physical domain, arises in each of the following transcripts.

Mary: Um, we got in line...like January, February...like that...and um, they got on and went to that side and the next went to that side and um...after...um, they went towards the middle to balance out...and then once we got everybody on it, we um, kind of went over to the edges.

Mary: I liked when we, um, stood on the cable...thing...on the wire, and, um, it took us a while to all, um, balance on it, but, then we finally got it.

Sandy: Well, like...the like...four logs and they had...different pieces of wood in them...and they were different lengths...for the way...then you had to put them in sideways, like, that way so you could walk...and then everyone had to make it across the bridge...without falling...

Interviewer: Did your group do it?

Sandy: Mm hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: You did?...

Sandy: Well, we had to start over once because, when this one person got on the end, he jumped off and they were supposed to stay on still...because they were supposed to put a block in place, but...yeah after that, we got it.

Mandy: ...Um, we just like had one person move and if someone started tilting, someone on the other side would move....And we would just keep on doing that until we had it all figured out and it was balanced...Um...it took a long time, just to get back to your spot, but whenever we got half way we figured it out and then we just started doing it like faster...

Kristy addresses balance in this excerpt as well as the need for the physical strength needed for climbing, getting over, and helping others in her group scale the 12 foot vertical wall.

Interviewer: ...Yeah. Sounds like you did a lot of hard things. What else was interesting?

Kristy: The...the um...you know that huge wall thing?

Interviewer: Where you had to get everybody over the wall?

Kristy: Yep. That was interesting.

Interviewer: What was interesting about that one in particular?

Kristy: Trying to get over it. (Laughs).

Interviewer: A little bit hard?

Kristy: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Wow. What else was hard?

Kristy: Um...we had people go to other sides and have people...two people in the middle to keep the balance...and uh...then you like, um...two other people go to the other side and have your feet on the end to keep your balance, and...we kept on going. And we had to walk around without hitting it. Well, we had 20 hits...It was hard. You...you were allowed to hit it, but...you were going to see how many hits you wouldn't make.

Cognitive Challenge & Success

Most of the students participating in the interviews talked in depth about the mental or cognitive challenges at the ropes course. Once again, the students overwhelmingly detail challenges in which they, often with the help of their peers, were successful in solving the difficult challenges. Interestingly, a secondary analysis revealed that all of the students' responses coded under as cognitive challenge and success were drawn from their recollections of experiences in the low ropes course as opposed to the high ropes challenges.

In the following excerpt, Mandy talks about one particular low ropes challenge that was especially popular with the students. Mandy's facilitator called this the *Pennsylvania Piranhas* activity with other facilitators called it the *Peanut Butter Pit*. In this challenge, students had to find a way to secure and use a rope to get their entire group from one small platform to another approximately 10 feet away. Their entire group of twelve students then had to all get onto the two foot by two foot wood platform.

Mandy: Um, just from swinging, and you had to listen to our instructor very carefully because he like didn't really play tricks on us, but you really didn't have to do what you were told to do...

Interviewer: Uh huh (affirmative).

Mandy: ...like he told us to use the ropes, and you didn't have to swing. You could just walk across it...And he made it pretty hard for us to get the rope, 'cause everyone was saying, "Can you get the rope?" and he's like, "Sure, I can". And then he didn't get it. And then someone said, "Can you please hand me the rope?" and he went and got it for us...We were, we kept on trying, like some of us got up and tried to like, hold my legs while somebody else...I had to try to get the rope, but I was, like, far apart from it.

Interviewer: Uh huh (affirmative). So figuring it out, figuring out the trick was kind of fun?

Mandy: Yeah.

Mandy: The um...there was this...I don't know what you call it, but there was this little thing, like that side, that you had to get your whole group on there. Like, just...the first time that we did it, she said put your...all of you guys' feet have to go on there. And...well...I just figured out, well, you just have to put your feet on there. So sit, and then just put your feet up on the platform...That was right. And then he said, "Well now you have to stand up on it."

Interviewer: But you figured out the trick at first...

Mandy: Yeah. (proudly)

Justin also talks about the rope swing challenge in addition to one of the activities inside the gymnasium on the rainy Thursday afternoon.

Justin: ...We had to...try and...try and think of how we would get the rope...cause it was out along the river and we weren't allowed to walk out and get it...so we had to think of a way to get the rope, and then swing across and have everybody land on the platform without...getting off the little platform.

Interviewer: How did you do that?

Justin: We thought of a way to throw a sweatshirt at it so it would swing back...and...we got the rope. And then we had to swing everybody across and just keep from going on the outside once you had everybody around the...um, every part but the front, and you start filling in the middle. Did that, and had some space left too...

Justin: Well, a game...another game we played...the game was, we had to get a noodle...like, ah, a foam noodle and stick it in between each other and try to keep it from falling off and walk all the way across the thing...and you're not allowed to touch it. That was really hard, until we figured out that if we just put it up and down and held on to the person in front's shoulders...if we did that it wouldn't

fall...The other way we had it aiming, like that and it wasn't even working and then went down if you weren't moving at the same exact pace.

Interviewer: Yeah. So how did your group figure that out?

Justin: Um, I don't know. We just kept trying to turn it different ways and then we thought of putting it like that...in between each other.

In this excerpt, Maggie talks about the cognitive aspects of the physical challenges at several of the low ropes elements, including the 12 foot wall element. The combination of challenge and success resulting in enhanced cognitive self-concept and possibly enhanced social self-concept comes through very clearly towards the end of this excerpt as Maggie details her success.

Maggie: ...Like the giant's toothpick was challenging because we had to think of how we could get the tie off a high rope and a high stick and so we ended up putting people in mounts...Well, people tried putting people on shoulders but they weren't tall enough so we had to go into mounts.

Interviewer: ...What else was hard?

Maggie: Um, over the wall was hard. It was harder getting some people over the wall than others. You had to decide who to go first, and second...and then someone else heard it (my idea), and then someone was like, "Shouldn't we do that?...And someone said, "Oh, that's what Maggie said." And then they're like, "Yeah, yeah, let's do that. That's OK."

Interviewer: What was it like to have...to come up with the right answer?.

Maggie: Um...it felt pretty good when someone recognized that I said it first.

Interviewer: How did it feel after you did it?

Maggie: Proud.

Emotional Challenge & Success

This section details the internal, emotional challenges that the students faced during their time at the ropes course. Again, the overwhelming theme that accompanies their recollections details successfully overcoming their internal emotional challenges, most often fear. Interestingly, the vast majority of emotional challenge and success that the students talked about was in connection to the high ropes course as opposed to the low ropes challenges. Tanner, one of the more talkative students interviewed, talks about the significant fear that he faced at the high ropes course.

Interviewer: I think I remember from us talking before. You were a little bit scared the first time we met, thinking about doing this, right?

Tanner: Yeah. And then I saw it, and it kind of got me a little more scared...But after I got up there and looked around...it kind of spooked me...And a hint for everybody that's scared of heights...when you're up there, don't look down.

Interviewer: Oh. Hm, talk about that.

Tanner: Um...I got up there and I started across the logs and someone yelled out and told me not to look down, and it kind of spooked me out a little bit...and I started across the log a little bit more...and the log was a little uneven...on one spot, and it was kind of...but it stuck out there, and there was still like a straight...straight enough to go through...and I looked down again, and it kind of spooked me out even more. And then I came back and I just got down. I wanted to push myself through the rest, then when I got to the skinny ropes and they were really small and really hard to get through there...A lot of people...had trouble getting through there.

Tanner: Yeah. Yeah. Mentally difficult...Um, you had to, kind of, think about it. You had to focus on going there and doing it.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Tanner: And not look down.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Tanner: If you look down, you're going to get in trouble and you're going to get scared. Going to get to the nearest spot where you, it's a circle, and you need something to hold on to.

Like Tanner, Mandy and Kristy also detail their fear reaction in connection with the high ropes elements. Their participation despite palpable fear provides a good example of the dynamic combination of emotional challenge and success.

Mandy: Well I'm afraid of heights so...whenever I got on there I really didn't want to go...

Interviewer: Yeah. So you didn't want to do it.

Mandy: No.

Interviewer: Scared?

Mandy: Yes...Whenever I was going down the zip line...I can't think of a word that describes it...I just felt like I wanted to do it again, even though I was scared of it...Whenever I seen somebody go down it...like, this was before lunch and I went after lunch...whenever they went down it, I was like, now I want to go...Because I didn't want to go before, and then after lunch I got, like, watching all of it, I was like "Eehhrrr..."

The following excerpt from the second interview with Kristy highlights a lack of awareness of her emotional coping mechanisms. The lack of debriefing following the high ropes course is a possible reason for this lack of awareness.

Kristy: ...sometimes it got scary.

Interviewer: Sometimes it was scary. Yeah. And you made it the whole way through the course, all the way over to the...to the zip. And you did the zip too, right?

Kristy: Mm hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Were you scared of (the) heights?

Kristy: Sort of.

Interviewer: Sort of. Well, uh, how did you handle that? Being kind of, sort of scared of heights and doing all those...

Kristy: Don't look down.

Interviewer: So you didn't look down...did you get scared while you were up there?

Kristy: I got scared doing the ropes...um...the wires.

Interviewer: Yeah. What did you do with that, like, scared feeling?

Kristy: Mm mm (expressing uncertainty).

Interviewer: It was there the whole time?

Kristy: Yep.

Interviewer: You just kept on going anyway?

Kristy: Mm hmm (affirmative).

Justin's interview revealed some of the self-awareness that was missing from the previous students' experiences. His use of self-talk as a coping mechanism for his fear reveals a resilient and self-aware young man and provides yet another example of the

high level of challenge coupled with high levels of success that are interlaced throughout the interviews.

Justin: Um...I think that one thing that was scary was thinking that that little tiny blue circle of stuff was the only thing holding you up if you fell...And I thought it was scary, being up that high and then look down and...having the people pull you up...on the, uh...platform to walk across the logs...where they had, where they grabbed the rope and pulled...Then you just...when you looked down walking across the logs, and it freaked you out because...but it was actually easy to stay balanced on the log. I didn't fall one time...one time when we were up there. So the heights...I just don't like looking down...When I'm up in an airplane, I like looking down because everything's so small.

Interviewer: (Chuckles). Yeah. Yeah. But this is a little different...

Justin: Yeah. Yeah...I was scared to, like, walk across 'cause I was making myself do it, but...once I went, and the zip line is pulling me, I feel that uh, the zip line is making myself walk...I liked the zip line...it's just that I was sort of freaked out walking across the wall...and the wires and...I didn't really like that.

Interviewer: But then, like, you just kept going. Now...what changed your mind?

Justin ...she (the facilitator) said, um, "Well, you're already there" and I was thinking, well if I get down, I won't even get to try it and what's the worst that could happen? I'd be scared. I'm not going to fall or anything...So the worst that could happen is that I'm scared. It's not like I'm going to get hurt by doing it or

anything...it kind of helped me conquer my fear of heights and...everything else and....I liked all the games we played and the...even though I was scared, I still liked it.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. So you could be scared and have fun at the same time?

Justin: Mm hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Yeah. So you mentioned before, whenever you were making your way up to the zip, right? That you kind of talked...it almost sounds like you had to talk to yourself, saying, "All right, the worst that can happen is..."

Justin: That I'd be scared.

Interviewer: Just be scared.

Justin: Not really going to get hurt.

Interviewer: Right. Is there anything else that kind of helped you overcome your...your feeling of being scared?

Justin: I looked it and I said, "Well, I'm already there...might as well try it," and...if I didn't, I'd have to go all the way back across everything and across that. Might as well just do the one thing that would be probably funner (sic) than doing all of that.

Interviewer: Yeah. So that kind of...that talking to yourself kind of thing...convincing yourself you're going to do it.

Justin: Yeah.

Justin's second interview was unique in that he found part of the low ropes course emotionally challenging as well.

Justin: Um. Something else scary was that thing when you didn't have a harness on or anything, and that people were lifting you up to put the wood chip up on the wall thing...thinking that if they dropped you, you might get hurt...but, I was sort of scared there, but it was actually really fun to do then, because there were people surrounding you with their hands up, to catch you and everything.

Social Challenge & Success

The social domain was perhaps the most diverse of all the themes that emerged in the study. Many different codes were grouped into this domain, such as: teamwork, trust, new friends, physical and verbal support, among others. For each and every student, the ABC program seemed to be a strong social experience in one way or another as the following excerpts from the second interview would indicate. A secondary analysis of the social domain finds that the social experiences were fairly evenly spread in response to both the high and low ropes parts of the program. Responses which address social experiences at the low ropes course are presented first.

This excerpt from the second interview with Tanner highlights the teamwork aspect of the low ropes challenges. Here, I ask Tanner about a specific incident that I witnessed where he physically caught a teammate who fell off a log while he was *spotting*. *Spotting* is when the students in the small group who were not up on the wires,

logs, etc. in the group provided physical support by being ready with arms out to catch and support group members who might fall.

Interviewer: So what was that like, to work with a team like that?

Tanner: Pretty good. I mean, it was good. It beats being alone and trying to do it.

Interviewer: You were kind of more alone when you were doing the high ropes stuff.

Tanner: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. So it sounds like there was something about the low ropes that you liked.

Tanner: Yeah.

Interviewer: Being part of that team.

Tanner: Yeah...Um...there was this bridge...this bridge building thing...you had to get on this stump and you had to build a bridge and you had to balance yourself across it and have spotters...and the...log blocks, whatever you want to call them...weren't all of the same size...and the stumps were different lengths apart from each other...and you had to keep moving them around until we found which one goes where, and then we'd have to move another one around to get to the other side.

Interviewer: Yeah. I noticed something when I was there watching you guys...did you...did you catch someone who fell off the stump?

Tanner: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah? Tell me about that. 'Cause I caught it kind of out of the corner of my eyes.

Tanner: Um, well...she got unbalanced and she started to go forward and then she stood up and she just kind of tripped on the log...and she fell back.

Interviewer: Yeah. And you, you caught her?

Tanner: Yeah. I was behind her at that point in time, and she fell backwards right into my arms.

Interviewer: Yeah. What was that like?

Tanner: It was kind of weird knowing that I could be there to help and make sure she didn't get hurt.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Tanner: I almost caught another person, but she fell backwards...she was going backwards and then...so I went behind her...then she tripped on the back edge of the log and she fell forward...she fell onto her feet and she was fine.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. Is that kind of like you, to be helping, supporting people?

Tanner: I think so.

Interviewer: Even at school?

Tanner: I do sometimes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Tanner: But not every time but, when its' really difficult and I know what to do, then yeah.

Interviewer: What did you get out of that one?

Tanner: Um, teamwork...A lot of teamwork...because if one person started wobbling, the cord would wobble. And more people would fall off from the start...And start wobbling. It kind of...one person gets out then we all get out.

In this second interview with Mike, he first mentions some of the social difficulties of working together to solve the low ropes challenges. In the second part of this excerpt, he talks about improved social relationships and making new friends in connection to the experience.

Interviewer: ... Anything else about “challenging”?

Mike: You have to work together as a team on the low ropes courses, and it's kind of hard when everyone's talking...And giving their opinion of things.

Interviewer: Yeah. So that was challenging?

Mike: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you overcome those challenges with your team?

Mike: Yeah.

Interviewer: How did you do that?

Mike: Everyone was listening to the other person's opinion, then they'd say their own.

Interviewer: OK. And that helped?

Mike: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...What else was enjoyable about the trip?...

Mike: Getting to be with your friends all day...doing stuff together...stuff that you couldn't have done at home that you wanted to do.

Interviewer: Was it just kind of hanging out with people who were already your friends, or did you make any new friends? I mean, tell me about that...

Mike: I think everybody made more friends.

Interviewer: Do you think so?

Mike: Yeah, because everybody was cheering everybody on, saying, "Come on, you can do it. Just try your hardest."

Kristy chose the word *interesting* to describe the experience. Her description here of cooperating and collaborating with the people in her group to achieve success is what she found interesting.

Interviewer: OK. What was interesting about the last couple days?

Kristy: Um...the...things that you learned to...work together...Um, instead of fighting you can try your best...Um...the uh, like...if you wanted to go through the high things, people could, like, lift you up and...help you get through it.

Trust of peers is the social challenge that is highlighted by Justin in this excerpt.

Interviewer: So you were actually kind of scared to go up there because you didn't have a harness on...people were just pushing you up, right?

Justin: Yeah.

Interviewer: Um...did you feel any differently about the people after you got down? Than you did before you went up?

Justin: Mm hm (affirmative).

Interviewer: How? What...what was the difference?

Justin: Because then I felt that I could actually trust them, because they were all there to help me if I fell.

In this excerpt, Maggie talks about some social struggle that occurred in her small group at the low ropes elements. Several boys with strong personalities were dominating

the experiences and conversations. The girls, including Maggie, did not appreciate their emotional aggression. I watched at the course as the facilitator processed this with the group and it seemed to me to help. Maggie confirms this with her explanation of what happened. In the second part of this excerpt, Maggie also talks about making friends at the ropes course, though it is not clear if any of these new relationships were connected in any way to the gender dissension that she discussed.

Maggie: Well, like...some of the boys were trying to do it all their way and making everybody...and yelling at them and telling them it has to be their way and that stuff, instead of just trying to listen up when somebody had an idea.

Interviewer: Yeah. Did you guys get it figured out, or was it...?

Maggie: Yeah. We finished most...most of them.

Interviewer: How did you guys do that, with those boys wanting, kind of, their ideas to be right?

Maggie: Um, we just kind of sat there, and then the girl would tell them to stop and then she'd say "Listen to other people," and she'd give the girls a chance to talk too.

Interviewer: The person who was, like, working at the camp.

Maggie: Yeah. Tami (facilitator – name changed).

Interviewer: Ah, Tami would kind of tell them to stop...

Maggie: Mm hmm.

Interviewer: ...and make sure you listen to the girls' ideas too...

Maggie: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...and that helped.

Maggie: Mm hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Yeah. So what was that...what was that like? Interesting...interesting because...? What was interesting again, about it? Could you tell me again?

Maggie: It was interesting because...how some people could work together as a team and others not...

Interviewer: Ah, I see. Yeah. Anything else that was interesting about the last couple days?

Maggie: The more you worked together as a team, the more you got to know people and the more you made new friends.

Interviewer: Did that happen for you?

Maggie: Um hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Yeah.

Maggie: I got to know a lot of people that I didn't really know better.

The following excerpts detail student social success experienced at the high ropes course part of the program. Sandy expresses this social success in the form of verbal support and encouragement. The social success experienced in Sandy and Mandy's expressions seem a bit different than that of from the low ropes, where intense levels of social challenge are detailed. Here, the basis for the social success in the form of verbal support and encouragement are unclear. My hypothesis from my observations is that teacher modeling and pre-existing positive relationships contributed to the social success that students experienced at the high ropes course, but this might be an area of exploration for future researchers.

Sandy: ...there was like, so many people there telling me I could do it. That helped.

Interviewer: Who were those people?

Sandy: Well, there was (inaudible)...there wasn't a lot of people from (inaudible)...and one of the teachers, and then...(inaudible, but seems to be naming names of classmates)...they were there...

Interviewer: Did that help, to hear them...offering you encouragement?

Sandy: Mm hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: Are they...did that...usual for you, to have people, like...cheering you on and supporting you like that?

Sandy: Yeah.

Interviewer: Are you used to that?

Sandy: Yeah.

The next excerpt details Mandy's experience.

Interviewer: How did you get yourself to do it?

Mandy: All of my classmates were cheering me on to do it.

Interviewer: Oh. How did that help?

Mandy: Just to hear them say, "Do it, do it" and like, "You can do it." It really did help me.

Interviewer: It did?

Mandy: Mm hmm (affirmative).

Interviewer: And then you, well you did it?

Mandy: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. How do you feel about your classmates who were cheering you on?

Mandy: Um...(pause)...they were usually, they were the people who usually cheer me on through a lot of things, then there were a lot of people who, like...um...like almost the whole group there was cheering me on to do it.

Interviewer: So you had kind of this group of friends who usually support you...

Mandy: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...Then there was those other people too. What was it like to have those other people, cheering you on?

Mandy: I was surprised, but I knew that they would probably do it because I didn't want to go across the (inaudible) there, because it was down-pouring whenever I went...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mike's second interview yielded some really interesting material as he shared his thoughts on his group developing good teamwork. Mike's impression was that the positive social connections that his group experienced on Wednesday helped his group have an exceptionally positive experience on the low ropes challenges on Thursday. The order of the programming, low followed by high versus high followed by low, did not emerge as a significant predictor of social success in the analysis of this case study. Mike's insights here, though, would be worth exploration in future research.

Interviewer: That's all right...was there anything else about the course that maybe doesn't have anything to do with these three words, but that you think was important that you want to say?

Mike: Teamwork on everything. Trying to get people across, and...uh...'cause some people didn't want to get on the zip line. They just didn't want to do it at all...They got up there, and they didn't want to do it anymore.

Interviewer: So you're telling me there was teamwork even on the higher elements?

Mike: Yeah, everyone had to tell them that they...that everyone else did it... so just try it, and if you don't like it, you can just get down. But some people, which...I mean, I thought I was just real confused about some of things, because some people did, like the harder ones, then on the easy ones didn't want to do it. I guess looks can be deceiving.

Interviewer: Yeah. So there was a lot of teamwork over the course of the two days?

Mike: Yeah.

Interviewer: The highs and the lows, a lot of teamwork?

Mike: Lows, mostly.

Interviewer: Mostly the lows then?

Mike: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mike: Because everyone had to help on that.

Interviewer: Yeah. And how...how did that...did automatically, people just had good teamwork, or did that have to happen, like...?

Mike: I think it happened over time.

Interviewer: Yeah. How?

Mike: I think...I think it was better that our group went to the highs first...

Interviewer: OK.

Mike: ...'cause, our group usually they wouldn't...like, there was a lot of people who wouldn't...a lot of people just wouldn't...be...hang around with, or something...and I think that really helped people come together and do things together. So the low elements, because all of it was teamwork...we all had ideas, and we all listened, and we all tried it.

Interviewer: Huh. Let me make sure I heard this right. So when you did the highs, you all kind of worked together and supported each other on the highs...

Mike: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...and then, that really helped because then when you went to do the lows, you were already working together as a team better?

Mike: Yeah.

In addition to the four themes identified here, two additional themes were identified from analysis of the second student interviews. The first details students' experiencing the program as fun.

Fun

Students overwhelmingly thought that the ropes course experience was fun, enjoyable, and/or exciting. Several excerpts provide insight into the students' unanimous response that was spread evenly in a secondary analysis between the high and low ropes parts of the ropes course experience. Both are included in the following excerpt.

Sandy: It was fun when I was finally up there. Cause I wasn't that nervous anymore, like, on the rope course and then, like, down the zip line. It was fun to do all the stuff on the rope course...Like the...the...some of the low...the lower elements...those were fun. Like, the one where we had to build a bridge, but we still had to stay on the logs...That was fun.

Interviewer: What else was fun?

Sandy: Um...the rock wall...At the high ropes.

Interviewer: Yeah. Anything else about the last couple days that was fun?

Sandy: I think all of it was fun.

Interviewer: Pretty much all of it?

Sandy: Mm hmm (affirmative)...Like...I was excited because when I was waiting to go on the high ropes, I was getting excited. I was still nervous, but I was getting excited...because everything was fun, especially the zip line.

Maggie's simple response cuts straight to the point that she found the experience enjoyable, or as she puts it "fun things that kids want to do."

Maggie: And it was fun...where it was challenging and interesting, it was also fun trying to work together as a team...It was fun...because, like, the obstacles were just fun. Fun things that kids want to do.

Mary, one of the less talkative students participating in the interviews details what she found enjoyable about the experience.

Interviewer: All right. So tell me about that. What was fun?

Mary: Um...I liked the...when we, um...had to build a bridge and go across the logs.

Interviewer: What else was fun about yesterday?

Mary: Um...I liked the Noah's Ark, because, um...I don't know. I liked it because it kind of teeter-tottered, and...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mary: ...it was rocking back and forth and after like, four tries, you finally got it.

Interviewer: What else was fun?

Mary: Um...the wall, like that wall thing?...I liked that, except we didn't um...lift each other up. Well, when we lifted each other up and we put wood chips on it,

because it was wet...and um, that was fun, I think. I liked it, but I don't know if everybody else did.

Interviewer: What was fun for you about it?

Mary: I got lifted...Um...I liked, um...that we didn't have to, like, go over it.

In addition to the theme of fun emerging from analysis of the second student interviews, a theme of teacher support was identified and analyzed.

Teacher Support

My journaling and observations noted a pattern of teacher support throughout the experience and, relying heavily on the qualitative concept of emergent design, I brought these observations into the second interview for exploration with the students. The students' responses, however, did not quite match my observations and emerging hypothesis of significant experiences that might enhance student-teacher relationship or attachment. The excerpt that follows highlights the possibility that students entered into the experience with a pre-existing high level of trust and security with their teachers. This would explain the discrepancy between my observation notes and the students' lack of response in this dimension. Mandy's response is representative of other students' responses to my inquiry about their teachers' role in the experience.

Mandy: Um, I had to jump and my teacher helped me, like, so I had to trust him that he wasn't gonna, like, move or something...and you can trust the teacher...I learned to trust my classmates more than my teachers because I could already

trust them...Like the teacher helped us, like get some people off of there...er, up there, and just to help people get up there was fun, just to see them do it because they wouldn't have done it without the teachers telling us we could do it.

The second interview was complete and it would be another week until I returned to the school to talk to the students again. The next interview, I would be asking the students about their perceptions of the impact of the program on their lives, their classmates, their school, and on anything else they noticed.

What do students perceive as the impact of
an adventure based intervention?

Social Growth

The third interview asked students to talk about their perceptions of the impact of the ABC program. Students' responses focused almost solely on improved social relationships. At times, this impact was connected to improved trust and other times connected to improved social skills. It is important to note here that none of the students verbalized on their own, or when asked, that anything had gotten worse due to their participation in the ropes course program. The following excerpts highlight some of the aforementioned social growth, including new friends and improved social relationships.

Tanner: Um...people I don't normally talk to, I talk to more. Um, and, I can talk to them easier, Um, I've actually been able to talk to girls easier.

Interviewer: How about your class, with communication? Has that changed with your class?

Tanner: Um...a little. I mean, I've talked to more people...but there's still some people in my class that I don't really talk to much...Um...some people that I disliked in the past, I've actually come to know them better and when they're not trying to goof off every, like 24/7, they're actually kind of cool to hang out with...And I've started to hang out with them more than I used to...Hanging out and getting to learn more about them, because of all this...we have more fun together...And we don't yell at each as much as we used to. Like, playing kickball or football or something, where you mess up one thing and get flipped on because we already have like two outs or are this close to a touchdown or something.

Interviewer: Yeah. OK. Good example. I'm going to ask you more about that example. So what did it look like before...before you went. What did it look like before?

Tanner: Um, if I kicked a ball and two outs and it was in your hands and you caught it and then it slipped out or bounced out of your hands...people would get upset, and come over and be a little mad to you, but now it's just...oh, it's OK. You'll get it next time. You'll get it...It's not, you should have caught that, you need to catch that...We can definitely work together as a team better. Kind of like, "teamwork" right there...And uh...when we're playing kickball or football, we're not as competitive. And actually, it's kind of exhilarating because you can do stuff without getting yelled at and you're actually working as a team and getting along.

Interviewer: Yeah. It sounds like...sounds like in general, everybody's getting along better.

Tanner: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, there's not as much, like, fighting and yelling at each other now as there was before.

Tanner: Not even close.

Interviewer: Not even close. No. Yeah. Hm. And what's that like for you?

Tanner: I'm happy.

Interviewer: Happy. Yeah. I was picking that up, but I kind of wanted to hear what you said. Yeah.

Interviewer: What else can you think of... that might be different?

Tanner: Nothing is as challenging as what it is...as what it was...and like, um...we were doing this study guide thing and some of my friends...I was in the middle and they were beside me and they couldn't...remember on the last one, there was...it was name the five animals kingdoms. It was animals, planets, fungi, bacteria and they couldn't think of produce, and I just kept thinking and thinking and I finally got it and wrote it down. And I pulled back to help them out.

Interviewer: OK.

Tanner: So it wasn't as challenging. Sure it was challenging to figure it out...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Tanner: ...but I made it a little easier because I helped them out.

Interviewer: And you think that that has something to do with this, do you think?

Tanner: Yeah, well, I mean I've done it sometimes. I haven't done it as much as I have...as I have lately.

Interviewer: Helping people out?

Tanner: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah. And that's somehow connected to what you did at the ropes course?

Tanner: Yeah

Mike, like Tanner, talks in the following excerpt about his noticing positive social change in his class as a result of attending the low ropes course. Mike's insight and specific examples provide support for the positive social impact of the ABC program.

Mike: ...with people, everybody...now everyone's pretty...more comfortable with people...you know, because they can trust them...everybody...I think I made more friends, like from people that I usually talk to...I talk to more people now, than I would...

Interviewer: So you've made more friends, talking to more people than usual?

Mike: Yes, I think everybody...I think that trip really showed more character than it did fun, because everybody had to work together, and everyone listened to each other's comments and ideas.

Interviewer: So, you said...because of those things happening...um...something about more character? There was something about more character about your class, before the...

Mike: Not more, but...you learned, you could understand their character better than you would have.

Interviewer: ...What else...what else have you noticed?

Mike: More respect for each other...I think because everybody got more comfortable, they're more respectful (sic) now, because they know what they like and now they can't really make comments about each other because they know what they're like now.

Interviewer: So...OK...so I want to ask you...this is interesting...an interesting thing, more respect...so what did it look like before? Can you give me an example of what it might have looked like before you went and now it looks different? But let's start with the before, when there wasn't as much respect. Can you give me an example of what that might have looked like?

Mike: Like if somebody disagreed with someone, they'd call him a name or something.

Interviewer: OK. All right. Good example.

Mike: I think now, if something says something, they'd go over it, see who said it, and why, and not the names.

Interviewer: They wouldn't automatically call names, they'd be exploring, asking questions and trying to figure out what's wrong.

Mike: Yeah.

Interviewer: More respectfully.

Mike: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Makes sense. Have you seen that?

Mike: Yeah.

Interviewer: Since you've been back?

Mike: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, OK. Mike, is there anything...is there anything that...ah, from before to now, right...that is worse?

Mike: (Pause). Ah...not really...I think it kind of made...made everything better. ..

Justin provides additional support for the positive social growth due the experience. Justin names enhanced trust as a key component to this process. Justin also details

changes in how his peers are relating to one another, which reinforces Tanner and Mike's observations.

Justin: A thing that's different is that...for me, I think that I've conquered my fear of heights a little bit...I feel better about myself and heights...For my class, I'm a lot more trustworthy with some of the people...with a lot of the people in my class.

Interviewer: What's that...what's that...what's that mean? How does that...?

Justin: Like...I trust them more now, and...I get along with them better...and other, a lot of other things.

Interviewer: ...such as?

Justin: I think people are talking a lot more. Like some of the shy people have more friends, and...

Interviewer: OK. You've noticed that, huh?

Justin: Yeah.

Interviewer: Where have you noticed that? Where at? In like, in class or in different parts...

Justin: Like...in like...in my class there will be some people who will sit at a different table talking to each other.

Interviewer: OK. And that's different?

Justin: Yeah.

Interviewer: Since this happened?

Justin: Yeah.

Interviewer: Have you learned anything that stands out?

Justin: Um...I learned to...trust other people and....like, get to know them before you...like, don't want to be their friends or something. Because you might actually want to be their friends. You just don't know because you haven't got to know them...But once I was there, I got to talk to a lot of people like, during the field trip. So...I may have made a couple more friends.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the results of the study. Each of the study's three research questions was answered by examining the themes that emerged from the data analysis. Excerpts from the interview transcriptions and from the primary researcher's observations and journaling were included to illustrate each of the themes. The additional analysis revealed that the two different aspects of the course drew upon the four dimensions differently. The results from the research lead to a discussion regarding the ramifications of the findings.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Chapter five will serve as the discussion chapter of the study. Critical aspects of this discussion will include an overview of the results of the data analysis, their connections to previous research, and the potential implications of this analysis for the field of ABC. Next, strengths of the study will be discussed, followed by the study's limitations. Finally, next steps regarding research in the field of adventure based programming will be proposed. Chapter five begins with a brief overview of the results of the data analysis.

The Results & Connections to Previous Research

The research questions and ensuing results of this study are multifaceted. Themes that emerged from the exploration of participants' expectations, experiences, and the impacts of ABC have led to a better understanding of the ABC experience.

Students' Expectations

General education, sixth grade participants' anticipation and expectations of the program centered upon the themes of *fear*, *fun*, and *confidence*. These straightforward results most likely intuitively make sense to anyone familiar with ABC. These findings, however simple, serve to add a new layer of grounded, theoretical understanding of ABC, as participants' expectations of ABC programming had not been addressed to any great extent in previous research efforts as evidenced by a current review of the literature.

Students' Experiences

Participants' experience of ABC was characterized by a prevailing theme of *challenge and success* emerging in four distinct areas; physical, cognitive, emotional, and social. This combination of *challenge and success* might very well indicate that students' experiences served to enhance their self-concept in each of these four areas, which, perhaps by no accident, represent domains of multidimensional self-concept (Marsh, 1990). Previous research has led to an understanding that ABC programming successfully improves participants' global self-concept and/or self-esteem (White, 1998; Combs, 2001). By and large, however, the impact of ABC on the distinct dimensions within these measures of self has not yielded credible results (McGarvey, 2004) or, as most often has been the case, has been neglected.

Observation and journaling revealed a potential for enhanced student-teacher relationship, but these findings were not supported to any great degree by student responses to interviewer exploration. Horak's (2003) study hypothesizing that ABC would enhance student school connectedness met with similar disappointment. One possible hypothesis for the findings in this study is that students had positive relationships and attachments with their teachers prior to their participation in the ropes course and so there was not a significant room for noticeable growth from the students' perspectives. Student responses support this hypothesis.

Students also overwhelmingly considered the experience to be enjoyable, exciting and/or fun. This result reveals ABC to be an intervention which students are likely to embrace as opposed to resist. This simple, yet meaningful, finding provides further

support for ABC to be utilized with adolescent populations, who are developmentally characterized by resistance and rebellion (Erickson, 1966).

An additional analysis of students' experiences of ABC revealed differences regarding the two distinctive aspects of the ABC program. The low ropes elements of the ABC program seemed to activate the cognitive challenge and success, whereas, the high ropes challenges seemed to activate the emotional challenge and success. Students' expressions seemed to indicate that both low and high ropes sections seemed to activate both social as well as physical challenge and success.

Impacts on Students

Results from an exploration of the third research question focuses on the impact of ABC on participants' lives following the intervention. Outcomes from this exploration yielded an overriding theme of positive social growth. This outcome matches well with previous research that shows ABC as having positive social impacts on program participants (Davis, Ray, & Sales, 1999; Faubel, 1998; Carlson & Cook , 2007). Students, however, had much less to say in this third interview overall. What students did report was meaningful, but the brevity of their response to the impact of the intervention is interesting if not meaningful. It is also interesting to note here that the physical, emotional, and cognitive domains that emerged as students detailed the significant aspects of the programming immediately following their participation did not translate into a conscious awareness of growth in these areas. One possible explanation for this result is that debriefing seemed to focus squarely on the social aspects of the challenges throughout the program.

Debriefing, also known as processing, is the critical process that helps participants better understand their experience, others experiences, and helps transfer learning in the therapeutic experience to their actual lives. There was a lack of debriefing addressing physical, cognitive, and emotional domains that was noted by the researcher in this case-study. This lack of attention may have contributed to students' conscious responses indicating that the experience impacted their social lives, but without a significant physical, cognitive, and/or emotional impact. Whether this discrepancy is indicative of an actual lack of impact in these areas or whether this is indicative of a students' lack of awareness of the impact they actually experienced is a just one of a plethora of good questions for future researchers brought to light from this study.

Comparing and Contrasting the Responses to the Research Questions

The use of Seidman's (1991) three interview approach allows for comparing and contrasting of students' expectations, experiences and perceived impact of the ABC intervention. This approach provides a unique opportunity for these assessments that are new to the field. The aforementioned discrepancy between students' experiences and the impact of the intervention is not the only incongruity that emerges when integrating the responses from the research questions. A comparison of students' expectations with their experiences yields some interesting results as well. Students' expectations of fun, fear, and confidence to overcome that emotional challenge each came to fruition. In addition to those outcomes, however, students experienced significant physical challenge and success, cognitive challenge and success, in addition to a diverse array of social

challenges and success. These unexpected experiences may have led to some type of growth in these areas.

A comparison of the students' expectations of the program with their perceived impacts yields no direct link between the two. This may, however, be due to the fact that students were asked *what they expected from the experience* and not *what they expected the lasting impact to be*. Again, this would be an interesting area for future research. These discrepancies and other significant findings contribute to a wealth of theoretical and practical implications for the field of ABC that can be drawn from this case study.

Implications for the Field of ABC

Better Understanding the ABC Experience

The core themes that emerged from the thorough analysis and meticulous synthesis of the interview transcripts could serve as foundational for future explorations of ABC. One of the objectives of this research was that results from the in-depth qualitative research would allow researchers a better understanding of how participant development occurs through ABC. The themes that have emerged here provide a roadmap for understanding the multifaceted nature of the impact of ABC. The emergence of the physical, mental, emotional, and social themes of challenge and success has provided a model for understanding the constructs through which participant development occurs.

It was theorized that such contributions could provide adventure based programming facilitators with support for the programming they offer and/or informed guidance to improve their programming. The publication and dispersion of the findings

generated from this study has the potential to provide ABC facilitators with valuable information that they might utilize to improve their programming. Quantitative researchers could also use the themes that emerged here as a springboard to studying specific constructs in relation to ABC participation, such as multidimensional self-concept.

The publication and dispersion of these findings also have the potential to educate and impact school administration, teachers, and school counselors as they could, potentially, better understand the benefits of using ABC interventions in support of their students. Additionally, and most importantly, the key insight into the impacts of this dynamic intervention could benefit students and other ABC participants by subsequent improvements on methodology that are being made possible by this qualitative study. The discrepancies surrounding the debriefing done in this study and the results of the analysis provide significant implications as well.

A Closer Look at Debriefing

My extensive practice and observation of ABC debriefing lead me to the conclusion that ABC facilitators often, appropriately, use the debriefing time to focus on the social nature of their experiences, particularly following low-ropes elements. This tendency was noted and mentioned already several times regarding this particular case-study. Facilitators then work to connect the social interactions experienced during ABC, often with the powerful use of metaphor, to foster social growth in participants' lives outside of the ABC experience. My experience and practice, however, indicate that the other three themes of challenge and growth that emerged in this study; *physical*,

cognitive, and *emotional* are often neglected, as they were in this case. I wonder, then, if my experiences and observations of this case study and in this regard are idiosyncratic or, perhaps, pervasive and representative of debriefing in the field of ABC.

Debriefing that followed the high ropes challenges, on the other hand, appeared brief and inadequate, if not entirely nonexistent. Findings from this study which indicate significant physical and emotional *challenge and success* subsequent to high ropes activity reveals an area that, up to this point, were overlooked entirely by ABC theory, facilitators, and programming in regards to debriefing. The integration of these ignored domains into the debriefing process could have, potentially, led to a greater positive impact upon participants' lives in these areas.

If, in fact, ABC facilitators are failing to address key experiences in the debriefing process, ABC facilitators and/or facilities could, potentially, expand the specific populations they service by taking into account these additional domains in the debriefing process. Perhaps an awareness of critical domains being ignored in debriefing process indicates that a greater emphasis should be given to the structure of the debriefing process so as to more intentionally fit the nature of the processing with the specific population. As trained facilitators expand their services, adapt, and focus debriefing more directly upon specific populations and upon specific domains, participants of all ages, genders, abilities, etc. may experience increased and improved opportunity for positive growth.

Strengths of the Study

Strengths of this study begin with the original aspects of the study design. First, this study examined general population, sixth grade students, which is an understudied

population regarding research in the field of ABC. Secondly, the qualitative case-study approach has provided key insights into the dynamic nature of the interaction, allowing the relevant variables to emerge from practice as opposed to studying variables that are theoretically connected. Furthermore, the use of Seidman's (1991) three interview design approach is unique to research in the field of ABC and has provided opportunities for comparing and contrasting participant responses at different points in time, which sets this study apart from prior research.

The study results are also particularly meaningful due to the fact that the results have been drawn directly from students' direct articulations of their experience. Furthermore, the study examines a pre-existing, naturally occurring program. The researcher's experience, connection to the school, and interpersonal connection to the students promotes *insider status* which has been helpful for collecting information that is both accurate and organic. These connections to the school and students, however, have not been so intimate as to interfere with the program, its' impact on the student, and in this or any other ways, confound the results of the study. In addition, the results break new ground in providing insight into students' expectations of participation in ABC.

Limitations of the Study

There are many limitations to this study that need taken into account that might potentially impact the transferability of the findings. These limitations include the nature of the research sample, potential researcher bias, and the many questions left unanswered. A closer look at the limitations or weaknesses of the study begins with a closer look at the sample utilized in this case study.

The Sample

This study served to examine the experiences of a group of middle-school, general education students participating in ABC. While the purpose of this study is not to generalize to the larger population, it is hoped that the results of the study might be transferable to other populations as those populations connect and/or identify with some of the characteristics of this sample population. The students in this study were drawn from a rural, small town, K-6 elementary school in north-central Pennsylvania. The student body was primarily Caucasian, as were each of the study participants, who had no visible physical disabilities, and who were well-acquainted with each of their classmates and teachers prior to participation in the experience despite the intervention being held at the very beginning of the school year. This sample population, obviously, leaves much to be desired in regards to its limited diversity and the limited number of potential ABC participants who might identify or connect with this sample.

Researcher Bias

Great strides were taken to minimize and/or identify the impact that researcher bias has had on the study. That said, however, the primary researcher's prior experience, optimism, personality, presence, and involvement with the school and students may have impacted the program in a variety of ways too numerous to mention. It should be noted, however, that such impact may not only have served to inflate the impact of the intervention, but was, perhaps, just as likely to impair growth and/or undervalue the program's actual impact.

Unanswered Questions

So many questions are left unanswered either as a result of this study or have become apparent as awareness has been heightened over the course of the study. The aforementioned limitations of the sample utilized beseech answers to how students and/or persons from a variety of diverse backgrounds might respond to similar programming. Teachers', administrators', and facilitators' expectations and experiences and the potential impact or insight that these expectations and experiences might have on program understanding and participant outcomes is left unanswered by this study. Additionally, questions that only quantitative methodology can address, such as empirical support and validation for ABC's impact on any number of critical constructs, have been left unanswered. Finally, the long-term impact of ABC on program participants is left unanswered. The illumination of the specific limitations of this study clears a direct path for researchers in the field and towards future research in the field of ABC.

Potential Areas for Future Research with Students

Stakeholders' Expectations

While this study breaks new ground in the field by exploring students' expectation of ABC, it is not evident what impact, if any, student expectations have on their experiences and/or the impact of the intervention. Future research would be needed to address these questions. Additionally, teachers' and facilitators' expectations remain an unexplored research area and what impact their unique expectations might have on the experience and/or the impact of the intervention could provide additional insight into the intervention.

Data on the Extent of Use and Purpose

This study does well to closely examine one specific ABC program utilized by general education students. Research, however, is needed to explore *the extent to which* adventure based programming is being utilized by general education students, school systems, the objectives of the programming, and the specific student populations utilizing said programming. In addition, an examination on the measurable impact of such programming on student achievement, as well as on student social, emotional, mental, and physical wellbeing is desperately needed in the field. Future research addressing these questions will lead to a better understanding of the specific student populations utilizing adventure based programming and the anticipated outcomes of such interventions. This, then, will provide much-needed guidance and direction for researchers to qualitatively and quantitatively examine the impact of ABC on specific populations.

Multicultural Considerations

This study examines the use of ABC as intervention for a group of primarily white, low SES, sixth grade students without visible disabilities from rural, small-town Pennsylvania. There remains, however, a scarcity of research exploring the use of adventure based programming with students in regards to their multicultural identity (Goldenberg et al, 2005) and this case-study does not provide much insight in this regard. The impact, if any, student race, gender, socioeconomic status, family structure, identity development, religion, sexual preference, etc. has on the benefits of ABC is, as of yet,

unknown. It was rather surprising that students' social networks were found to have expanded in this study of a K-6 elementary model where students were very familiar with both teachers and students prior to participation in the ABC program. It would be interesting to find out if 6th graders experiences are different in different school models, such as 6-8 middle schools. One might hypothesize that the social domain would be impacted differently with both student and teacher interaction. Research would be needed to find out in what ways.

Measures of Self

There is a scarcity of research that has looked to differentiate between the many domains of self-concept (McGarvey, 2004). Results of this study highlight multidimensional self-concept as an area which could hold the key to a better fundamental understanding of the impact of ABC. Additionally, the current collection of research does little to theoretically differentiate self-concept from self-esteem from self-efficacy for the purposes of study. Connections and/or distinctions are scarce and often utilized, inappropriately, interchangeably. Because so much research in the field focuses on studying these constructs, the field of adventure based programming would benefit by an exploration of the distinct impacts that said interventions have on the various measures of self in addition to the multidimensional nature of each.

Long-term Benefits

This study also provides some insight into the short term impact of the intervention. What impact, if any, the intervention has on participants' lives long after the intervention remains, as of yet, unknown. Goldenberg et al. (2005) stress the

importance of potential research on how participants' lives are impacted long after the adventure experiences is over. Most of the little research that exists on the long-term impact of adventure based programming seems to suggest little to no positive long-term benefit. A rapidly expanding collection of professionally trained facilitators, adventure programming facilities, and public school utilization of such programming does not seem consistent with the current understanding of adventure based programming as an intervention with a decidedly short-term benefit. Exploration around the long-term benefit of participation in ABC for diverse populations is long overdue.

Conclusion

Chapter five has served as the discussion chapter of the study. Critical aspects of this discussion included an overview of the results of the data analysis, their connections to previous research, and the potential implications of this analysis for the field of ABC. Next, strengths of the study were presented followed by the study's limitations. Finally, next steps regarding research in the field of adventure based programming were proposed.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

Date: September 3, 2010
From: Joyel D. Moeller, Compliance Coordinator
To: Richard G. Albright
Subject: Results of Review of Proposal - Exemption (**IRB #34864**)

Approval Expiration Date: August 31, 2011

“Qualitative Impact of Adventure Based Counseling”

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your proposal for use of human participants in your research. By accepting this decision, you agree to obtain prior approval from the IRB for any changes to your study. Unanticipated participant events that are encountered during the conduct of this research must be reported in a timely fashion.

Attached is/are the dated, IRB-approved informed consent(s) to be used when recruiting participants for this research. Participants must receive a **copy** of the approved informed consent form to keep for their records.

If signed consent is obtained, the principal investigator is expected to maintain the original signed consent forms along with the IRB research records for this research at least three (3) years after termination of IRB approval. For projects that involve protected health information (PHI) and are regulated by HIPAA, records are to be maintained for six (6) years. The principal investigator must determine and adhere to additional requirements established by the FDA and any outside sponsors.

If this study will extend beyond the above noted approval expiration date, the principal investigator must submit a completed Continuing Progress Report to the Office for Research Protections (ORP) to request renewed approval for this research.

On behalf of the IRB and the University, thank you for your efforts to conduct your research in compliance with the federal regulations that have been established for the protection of human participants.

Please Note: The ORP encourages you to subscribe to the ORP listserv for protocol and research-related information. Send a blank email to: L-ORP-Research-L-subscribe-request@lists.psu.edu

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