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TOWARDS THE NEXT GENERATION OF
EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES:
A CASE STUDY OF OUTWARD BOUND

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ABSTRACT

Much of the literature on experiential education programmes has focussed on outcomes. However, there is a lack of empirical research linking outcomes and educational processes for experiential learning. At a time of major change for the Outward Bound (OB) organisation due to falling enrolments and financial losses, this case study aimed to determine whether OB achieved its stated objectives and to develop a greater understanding of why the outcomes were achieved. In 1996, Part One of this study investigated the 22-day and 9-day courses at Outward Bound New Zealand, which followed a standard series of mainly physical outdoor activities. Part Two investigated a course for international participants (Intertouch) at Outward Bound Czech Republic, which was significantly different from the other OB courses. It placed emphasis on 'dramaturgy', a method of course design, and was characterised by the intertwining of a wide variety of social, physical, creative, and reflective 'games' using 'the dramaturgy wave'. The objective of Part Three was to trial the Intertouch course at Outward Bound Australia in 1999. A mixed method was used involving: participant observation of five courses; over one hundred and fifty participants questionnaire responses, initially from Likert scale survey and then open-ended written responses using a longitudinal approach six months and up to two years after the courses; semi-structured interviews with seventeen instructors. Effect sizes were computed for the statistical data and content analysis was used to code the descriptive qualitative responses.

The findings from all three parts suggested that the main outcomes perceived by participants related to the course objectives of personal and interpersonal development; in particular improved self-confidence and better interpersonal relationships. A 'holistic model', developed from the qualitative data, indicated that the key elements of the experiential education process in achieving the outcomes were: a holistic approach to course design, integrating a variety of activities involving reflection; the learning environment, which is safe and creates a positive and supportive atmosphere; the range of instructor facilitation methods and a diverse group of participants. 'Dramaturgy' has implications for course design, programme development and staff training, as it recognises the holistic and subjective nature of the outcomes of experiential education.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AEE	Association of Experiential Education
OB	Outward Bound
OBA	Outward Bound Australia
OBCZ	Outward Bound Czech Republic
OBI	Outward Bound International
OBNZ	Outward Bound New Zealand
VSL	Vacation School Lipnice

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