Adventure-based Learning and Reflection: The Journey of One Cohort of Teacher Candidates

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Adventure-based learning (ABL) consists of a deliberate sequence of activities that foster the personal and social development of participants (Cosgriff, 2000). Participation in ABL programs help to foster an increased level of self-awareness which can then be applied to other areas of the participant’s life. The mechanism to help participants to reflect on the learning that has occurred in an ABL program is called the debrief, and it is one of the most important aspects of ABL. The purpose of this study was to explore, through the lens of experiential learning (Jarvis, 2004), how teacher candidates (TCs) in one Physical Education Teacher Education program learned to incorporate a meaningful debrief (reflection) in a five day ABL unit. An interpretive qualitative research design utilizing a case study approach was employed to explore the experiences of TCs learning to incorporate a meaningful debrief during an ABL unit. Data were collected through three
different sources: observations, interviews, daily reflections (called critical friends). Data were analyzed using line by line coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and constant comparison (Patton, 2002) resulting in two themes: Technical vs practical understanding and learning to guide not teach. The TCs in this study demonstrated that the primary experience of both participating in and teaching an ABL unit resulted in reflective cognitive learning (Jarvis, 2004) that further developed their biographies related to incorporating a meaningful debrief in their lessons.

**Key Words:** Adventure-based learning, physical education, reflection, teacher candidates

The multi-activity curriculum model dominates what occurs in middle and high school physical education in the USA. The model is comprised primarily of team sports, and a unit of instruction involves a few lessons of skill development followed by game play for the remainder of the unit (Ennis, 2006). The multi-activity model is popular with physical educators due to the ease of teaching relative to content knowledge, management, and organization. However, the model is also heavily criticized due to lack of relevance for students (Cothran & Ennis, 1999; Kirk, 1997; Tinning & Fitzclarence, 1992), poor program quality (Locke, 1992), and inequitable opportunities for participants (Ennis, 1999; Evans, 1993). Despite the popularity of the multi-activity model with physical educators, there are a number of innovative curricular models within physical education that address the criticisms of this model. These models include movement education, Sport Education (Siedentop, 1994), Tactical Games Model (Griffin, Oslin, & Mitchell, 1997), SPARK (Sportime, 2007), adventure-based learning (Cosgriff, 2000), and fitness for life (Corbin & Lindsey, 2005). Within the field of physical education however, little attention has been given to how teachers learn to teach these curricular models (McCaughtry, Sofo, Rovegno, & Curtner-Smith, 2004; McMahon & MacPhail, 2007; McMahon, MacNeill, Fry, Tan, Tan, & Schempp, 2006). The purpose of this study was to explore, through the lens of experiential learning (Jarvis, 2004), how teacher candidates (TCs) in one Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) program learned to incorporate a