



Raleigh International Pilot Study Report

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Dr. Simon Beames
Moray House School of Education
University of Edinburgh
Holyrood Road
Edinburgh
EH8 8AQ

0131 651 6522
simon.beames@ed.ac.uk

Dr. Tim Stott
Faculty of Education, Community & Leisure
Liverpool John Moores University
I. M. Marsh Campus,
Barkhill Road
Liverpool
L17 6BD

t.a.stott@ljmu.ac.uk

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Research objectives

The investigation's principal objective was to gain a greater understanding of how expedition participants are influenced by their Raleigh International experience. This pilot study was designed with the understanding that the findings will be used to offer Raleigh International initial information on how they may design expeditions that present their participants with more opportunities for learning. The findings presented below will help the researchers and Raleigh International "fine tune" the questionnaire for use in a more substantial investigation.

Research methodology

The research methodology was designed with the aim of collecting data from a large number of participants. The data collection focused on participants who were taking part in a 10 week expedition to Costa Rica in the autumn of 2007. A two-page questionnaire was completed by participants before they left the UK and shortly before they returned.

The questionnaire used two methods. First, a Likert scale was used to gain data on participants' perceptions of expeditionary learning related to themselves, those they work with closely, wider society, and the natural environment. Second, two open-ended questions provided opportunities for participants to expand upon their thoughts without the constraints of the rating scale. Further rationale for this design was that the statistical results would be usefully incorporated into organisational reports and funding bids. Similarly, the qualitative data would offer Raleigh a rich, deep, and contextual understanding of their product. Raleigh International was responsible for obtaining participants' consent, collecting all data, and sending the data to the researchers. Field staff played an important role in the data collection process.

Quantitative data from the first section were examined through statistical analysis using pre-test v post-test Chi-square analysis. Qualitative data from the second section were rigorously analysed through computer-assisted open-coding. The findings yielded from this mixed method approach offer Raleigh International trustworthy information upon which they can further develop their programmes.

Findings

The findings presented below only consider questionnaires from Venturers. The reasons for this are explained in the Discussion section.

Quantitative findings

42 pairs of pre and post-expedition questionnaires were returned. A pre v post Chi-square analysis performed on 46 Likert scale items in the questionnaire revealed that there were statistically significant changes in the following items:

Wider Society
I am sensitive to the customs and beliefs of those from other cultures *
I am comfortable dealing with people from different cultures and countries **

Group
I am able to plan and lead group projects *
I speak my mind in group situations *
People can always rely on me *
This expedition experience will enable me to interact more effectively with my friends and family back home *

Self
I am aware of my mental strengths and weaknesses *
I am resilient and can motivate myself to succeed even when the "chips are down" *

General
Changing groups was an important part of the expedition **

Key: * = p < 0.05 (significant)

** = p < 0.01 (very significant)

Qualitative findings

The analysis drew upon responses from 45 participants. Note that three people only completed a pre or post expedition questionnaire – hence the difference in participant numbers between the quantitative and qualitative analysis. Open-coding was used to arrive at dominant themes under four pre-determined categories. The major criterion for a dominant theme was that at least 10 respondents raised the topic of the theme. While 10 is a round number, it was not chosen arbitrarily; there happened to be an obvious gap between the dominant themes and those that were only raised by three or four people. The numbers in parentheses refer to the number of respondents who reported positive indicators of the themes.

Beginning of expedition

Hopes
Gain some sort of amorphous “personal growth” (11)
Clarify “life direction”/career (10)

Attractions to the Raleigh expedition
Wanted to help others/those less fortunate (18)
Wanted to face a challenge, test limits of ability (15)
Raleigh’s reputation (14)
Wanted unique experience, a break from day-to-day life (12)
Wanted cultural exchange/exposure/immersion (11)
Raleigh offered a variety of projects (10)

End of expedition

Outcomes
Gained confidence in self (16)
Clarified “life direction”/career aspirations (13)
Gained some sort of amorphous “personal growth” (12)

Critical elements of the experience
Living with the host family/in a local community (18)
Being with a diverse group of people (UK and host country venturers) (11)
Mental and physical challenge of the trekking phase (11)

Discussion

Venturers vs. Venturer Managers

As indicated earlier, the above findings only consider questionnaires completed by Venturers. While the quantitative section lends itself reasonably well to being used equally by Venturers and Venturer Managers, the qualitative section did not. The reason for this is that in any quantitative investigation, the questions and the scope of the responses are controlled by the researchers. So, the Venturer Managers had no choice but to complete a questionnaire that was not designed expressly for their use. An example of this lies in the statement *People can always rely on me*. This item had statistical significance for Venturer Managers but not for Venturers. This indicates that the volunteer staff felt that they were quite reliable before the expedition began. One would hope so.

In open-ended qualitative work, it is the respondents who “drive” the responses, based on their interests. In this pilot study, the responses to the open-ended questions were markedly different between the Venturers and Venturer Managers. The most obvious example of this was that, apart from being attracted to Raleigh for the same reasons as reported by the Venturers, five of the 12 Venturer Managers specifically wanted to work with young people as a facilitator and leader. Three Venturer Managers highlighted the importance of reviewing and reflection, whereas Venturers did not. The analysis was complicated by having two different groups of people who were, to a large degree, coming on the expedition for different reasons.

In an effort to be able to make stronger statements about the Venturers (drawing equally upon the quantitative and qualitative findings), we found it best to concentrate the bulk of the discussion on the Venturers specifically.

Quantitative discussion

The quantitative analysis showed statistically significant findings in four of the five sections of the questionnaire. No statistically significant changes were measured in the section that asked about Venturer’s attitudes towards the natural environment. Of the questions in this section, the greatest change was measured in the statement *I am a positive influence on the natural environment in which I live*, though the change was not great enough to claim statistical significance. It appears that the type of people drawn to Raleigh already consider themselves to be “environmentally aware” and remain so on their return. A further consideration here is that attitudes towards the environment may be difficult to measure with this type of instrument. Further research and development to refine this aspect of the questionnaire may be worthwhile.

It is particularly clear that participants felt that they had become more resilient and self-aware; more confident working with, and leading, others; and had become more comfortable interacting with people from other cultures. This last finding, along with the importance of changing groups for each phase, achieved very high levels of statistical significance. We are satisfied that these four sections of the questionnaire can be used in future research with a high degree of confidence.

All of the quantitative findings were based on the Venturer sample size as a whole (n = 42). As suspected, when the sample size drops to consider males (n = 26) v females (n = 16) or those referred by youth organisations, for example, the findings lose their statistical significance. There is one exception to this and that is, females reported significant increases in the statement *I am aware of how my behaviour may be perceived by others*, whereas males did not.

Qualitative discussion

The 14 dominant themes that emerged through the analysis have a strong resonance with Beames' findings from his fieldwork in 2002. Participants came to the experience looking for some sort of vague, amorphous personal growth – a number of whom were searching for clarity in the direction of their life or career. A large proportion of people saw Raleigh as a reputable agency through which they could help those less fortunate, while living in a unique social and physical setting. The variety of projects on offer and the “limit testing” nature of expeditions were also key attractions.

Three principal outcomes were reported. The first two were directly linked to personal growth and clarification of “life direction”. The third, reported by more than one third of respondents, was gaining self-confidence. By far the most critical element of the experience was living in the rural community, especially the time spent with the host families. The diverse mix of Venturers (from the UK and from the host country) was also important, as was the mental and physical challenge of the trekking phase.

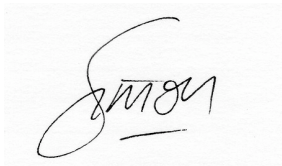
Implications for practice

The interpretation of the findings offer less of prescription as to how practice could be improved and more of an affirmation that current practice is largely effective, particularly in terms of positively influencing participants' attitudes towards themselves, the people in their project teams, and those in the distant communities in which they lived and worked. One notable exception to this list of positive outcomes is improving knowledge of, and attitudes towards, the natural environment. The findings suggest that the respondents already considered themselves to be environmentally aware. Nevertheless, Raleigh may wish to consider ways in which they may more intentionally incorporate education for environmental sustainability into their expedition ethos and practice.

Recommendations for further research

From an academic perspective the research design was strong. Three minor additions to the demographic section of the questionnaire are suggested: length of expedition, country of expedition, a tick box for Pre or Post expedition. Both qualitative and quantitative findings will have greater strength and generalisability if a larger sample size is used (e.g. 500 respondents) and the study focuses entirely on Venturers. If needed, the questionnaire's content could be slightly amended in an effort to be as relevant and useful to Raleigh as possible, without comprising the now established integrity of the instrument.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon', written over a light grey rectangular background.

Dr. Simon Beames

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T Stott', written over a light grey rectangular background.

Dr. Tim Stott

Please find three sets of documents as electronic attachments:

- A statistical break-down (Excel spreadsheet)
- Theme (aka “node”) summaries
- Typed transcriptions of the open-ended questions