

Non-formal Education in a South African Township: A Qualitative Study of an Overnight Camp
Experience

by

Russell Andrew Drummond

B.B.A., University of New Brunswick, 2011

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Dr. Darlene Clover, Supervisor
Department of Educational Psychology & Leadership Studies

Dr. Carolyn Crippen, Departmental Member
Department of Educational Psychology & Leadership Studies

Abstract

This study explores the impact of an overnight camp experience for impoverished South African youth. I worked as a Youth Development Worker with the Ukulapha Community Outreach Project for six months in 2016. My research looks at one non-formal education (NFE) program in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa through the lenses of critical theory and critical pedagogy. Emancipatory learning, social justice, and empowerment were the particular themes that framed my research.

I used a qualitative design including an autoethnographic element to conduct my research. The study included six in-person semi-structured interviews with camp participants, one year after the conclusion of the camp. Additionally, four students provided participant journals where they wrote about their experience at the camp. I wove into the study my own participation, observations, journaling, and a blog.

Findings show that the camp provided diverse skills development for personal empowerment, a new possibility to learn with and through nature, leadership development, and important intergenerational learning. Issues of gender were also highly prevalent, however. The five recommendations for future research that come from the study include the need for a more in depth follow up study with the same and more participants, involvement of a South African researcher who can conduct interviews in isi-Zulu, a longer camp, and outreach to different aged youth and youth from other South African provinces.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

We reached Hella Hella Outdoor Centre, southwest of Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, late in the afternoon, after weeks of anticipation. The day had finally come to go to camp. Upon arriving, we were greeted by antelope grazing on the slopes of the nearby mountains. It was a most precious welcome to our weekend camp in South Africa. The entire site, hectares and hectares of wilderness, a football field, an obstacle course, and a river were all ours to explore, learn from, and share for the weekend. The forty-seven leadership students did not know where to look first, the dorms, the rope swing, the fire pit; some just stood in awe slowly spinning in a circle looking up at the immense mountains. We were certainly off to a good start for a weekend that was to be full of new and exciting adventures.

For the first six months of 2016, I lived in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa and worked as a Youth Development Worker in Slangspruit Township at a local school. Thanks to Canadian government funding, I was paired with a non-profit organization – Victoria International Development Education Association (VIDEA) – in Canada and a partner non-profit organization in South Africa, the Ukulapha Community Outreach Project. Ukulapha is a grassroots organization promoting healing through education, community, and youth work in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. I worked with three other Canadian interns for the duration of my time with Ukulapha.

VIDEA received two years of funding from Global Affairs Canada (GAC) – formerly the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development within the Government of Canada – to support interns through the International Youth Internship Program (IYIP) and the Aboriginal

Youth Internship Program (AYIP). These programs offer young Canadians the opportunity to work in the field of international development in a foreign country.

As a Youth Development Worker, my role was to identify, create, and implement non-formal education (NFE) programs at the school, Slangspruit Public Primary School. Upon arriving at the school, three other interns and I spent the first several weeks integrating into our new roles. We found ourselves teaching, assisting in classrooms, and marking assignments, among other tasks that allowed us to build connections to the staff and students. It was important for us to grasp the cultural environment in the school and in South Africa as there are many differences between what we were used to in Canada and how the school and community functions in Pietermaritzburg and its impoverished township, Slangspruit.

I was tasked with identifying and implementing non-formal programs. I very quickly learned that extra-curricular programs were extremely limited in the community. When speaking with the students and teachers, I recognized a great need to provide the students with experiences outside the classroom. The lack of resources available to the school limits the activities that can be offered to the children. For example, in physical education class, students pretend to hold a skipping rope while jumping up and down to skip and the students 'learn' to swim by reading about swimming strokes in a book. Unfortunately they are never afforded the opportunity to swim in a pool to implement their learning. It is because of examples like this that teachers identified the need for non-formal programming at the school.

Throughout the six months that I lived in Pietermaritzburg and worked with Ukulapha, my colleagues and I developed and implemented several non-formal programs. We restarted an after school homework club that ran with previous interns three years prior to our time in the township. I spoke with the vice principal and immediately saw a need for extra math lessons. The

math club was formed and the demand was very high right from the beginning. I often found myself at the school on Saturdays working with students who eagerly accepted my assistance with concepts ranging from geometry to long division. Our most anticipated program was the Leadership Council. For years, the school had been hoping to implement a student-led council, similar to those found in Canadian elementary schools. When my co-interns and I learned about this, we consulted with a few of the interested sponsor teachers and began to piece a leadership council together. For the second half of the internship, one of my co-interns and I supported the Leadership Council with its two sponsor teachers and fifty students.

The highlight of our time with the Leadership Council was a weekend camp retreat, the focus of this study. My qualitative study explores the learning of our largest non-formal education program, the overnight camp at Hella Hella Outdoor Centre, noted in the beginning of this section, for forty-seven leadership students. The purpose of this qualitative study allows me to gain insight into the pedagogical potential of this program from the perspective of the participants. I complement the findings of this study that used interviews from students with my own experiences as the facilitator, through the use of my blog and journal, adding an autoethnographic aspect to the study.

Statement of the Problem, Purpose, and Objectives

Structural poverty, largely due to the Apartheid era, plagues South African urban and rural areas (Bray & Brandt, 2007). Children are affected by poverty but also by the AIDS crisis where orphan-hood is commonplace throughout the country (Cluver, Gardner, and Operario, 2009). These factors, along with several others – single parent headed households, violence, rape – place a burden on South African children and caregivers. Money is often unavailable for extra-

curricular activities yet my experience showed that many children were eager to participate in non-formal learning, after school and even on the weekend.

Non-formal education programs are one way in which the community can offer connection and purpose to impoverished youth. Konantambigi, Meghani, and Modi (2008) position non-formal education as “used for learning that is contrived outside of the school context to meet specific purposes of the people for whom it is meant” (p. 68). As a Youth Development Worker with Ukulapha, we provided non-formal education programs specific to the children of Slangspruit. Perhaps the most important example of a non-formal program, and the focus of this study, was the one we developed for the children, an overnight camp for the leadership students. We drew from Allen, Akinyanju, Milliken, Lorek, and Walker (2011) who suggested that good camp programs combined “academic learning with the development of positive social skills in young adolescents” (p. 15).

My research, however, went deeper than just looking at the camp. It explored the challenges and potentials of learning for underprivileged black children through this non-formal overnight camp program within an impoverished setting of South Africa. As there are a limited number of overnight camp programs in South Africa, there are few studies that focus on how non-formal education strengthens the social, cultural and intellectual capacities of children who live in poverty. We therefore do not understand the problems or the potentials, or the pedagogical implications of these types of non-formal activities on the lives of children deprived of extra-curricular activities. My study aimed to fill this gap but also to provide a contemporary, empirical – evidence based – study of non-formal education for youth. There is a paucity of literature on non-formal education with children, with most coming from the 1970s and 1980s.

While the world stays the same in many ways, it also changes and we need contemporary studies to keep us abreast of new work that can contribute to new knowledge.

The primary question that informed this study was: How did the non-formal overnight camp program impact the learning and the lives of the young participants from Slangspruit, South Africa? As noted, it specifically focused on Ukulapha's overnight camp experience with the children. Data came from our time together at the camp through observations and my personal journaling, and from interviews one year later when I returned to South Africa to interview the participants. I illustrate throughout this study how this non-formal education and learning program for children worked as a form of critical pedagogy but also provided the youth with skills and knowledge seldom provided to them in the context of their impoverished lives and schools in South Africa.

South African Context

While I am not a specialist on the culture and politics of South Africa – I am a non-formal educator and facilitator (and I will speak to this in Chapter Three) who has spent a great deal of time – six months initially and one month when returning for interviews – in South Africa. This amount of time and experience has given me some important insights. Specifically, I came to realize that it was critical for this study to provide a context, particularly of the areas where I worked, as it enables us to better understand why there is a need for non-formal education programs for young people to be implemented in the first place. The context that I provide, of course, is not meant to be exhaustive, but simply to ground the study and provide legitimacy for the critical framework I have used to think through the experiences.

History plays a large role in South African children's lives. Prior to 1994, the Apartheid government ruled the country for decades, implementing racist policies benefiting white South Africans and disadvantaging 'coloured' (people of mixed races) people, Asian South Africans, Indian South Africans, and black people. Inferior education was delivered to black South Africans, if they received it at all, and the effects are still being felt today with only half of black students passing their grade twelve exams (e.g. Amtaika, 2010). Bray & Brandt (2007) describe the AIDS pandemic, along with apartheid, as fundamental causes of childhood poverty. Dorrington, Johnson, Bradshaw, and Daniel, (2006) found that there were approximately 2.2 million AIDS orphaned children in South Africa in 2015. This too has an impact on culture and education.

Social inequality, primarily due to racism, is another persistent issue that plagues South Africa. Among other things, social inequality, Amtaika (2010) argues, has brought about a rise in violence and crime. Wealthy, gated neighbourhoods stand juxtaposed with poorer urban dwellings, breeding resentment in the low-income communities which can result in crime and backlash. Maisonnave, Chitiga, Decaluwé, Mabugu, Robichaud, Shepherd, and Fintel (2015) describe the vicious cycle of poverty that exists when children grow up in poverty and cannot break away from it. This tragedy persists as "childhood poverty also leaves a mark in terms of poor human capital and lower productivity later in life, thus creating the risk of a vicious cycle of poverty" (Maisonnave et al, 2015, p. 177). The outcome is a life of few opportunities with a higher potential for negative activities.

Childhood poverty is yet another serious problem in the deeply inequitable South Africa. Noble, Wright and Cluver (2006) state "that a significant number of children do not have their basic needs of food, housing, education, safety, and health provision met, there is no doubt that

an absolute and multidimensional measurement of child poverty is essential for South Africa” (p. 44). For example, using the 2001 census data, 37.7% of children do not have running water at their home (Noble, Wright, and Cluver, 2006). Furthermore, poverty restricts access to education due to the high cost of school fees, uniforms, and books. Financial barriers affect South African children’s opportunities, personal growth, and development.

The barrier that poverty creates is one reason non-formal education programs such as overnight camps are so important. These types of activities augment the inability of schools, due to their lack of financial resources, to provide children with skills, knowledge, and experiences that can contribute to empowering them to begin to think about how to break the cycle of poverty, build skills, and participate in a different style of learning, for example. It is these three aspects that contribute to the role that non-formal education programs such as overnight camps, and their possibilities, youth empowerment and the disempowerment of poverty that each play a vital role in this research.

The School

The Slangspruit Public Primary School, where I worked, is a fee exempt school for kindergarten to grade seven students. As alluded to above, resources are limited with only enough textbook copies for one class per grade when there may be three classes in each grade. This leaves teachers in a difficult place, restricting the homework they can assign for example. Compounding the problems is the fact that classrooms at Slangspruit Public Primary School are very basic – without technology, lacking supplies beyond pencils for each child, and often not enough desks for the students – and the school constantly experiences vandalism and petty crime resulting in limited technological devices such as computers available for student use. As

previously mentioned, life orientation [or physical education] classes do not have equipment to use such as skipping ropes. The school staff believed that extra-curricular programs, such as overnight camps, especially when provided free of charge, would be an important supplement to the formal system and benefit students underserved by their school.

Working with the school leaders prior to June 2016, my co-intern Brynn and I arranged a three-day overnight camp experience for the leadership students at the Hella Hella Outdoor Centre, located about one hour by bus from the school. Facilitated by the school, we spoke with parents and caregivers of the children to get their permission, and raised 100% of the funds online through crowdfunding to pay for the camp. The aim was to set this up so it could be an annual event for the school, where the two teachers with whom we worked would take over the organization and leadership of the camp following the conclusion of our internship.

Hella Hella Outdoor Centre offered Ukulapha a discounted rate as we had volunteers to run our own activities rather than hiring their staff to facilitate our time on the site. The camp program consisted of three meals per day, activities in small groups, and 'all camp' activities where everyone present for the weekend participated in an activity or event such as an evening campfire. The participants were also able to experience a nature walk, paddling in a boat on a slow flowing river, a challenge course, rugby, football, netball, gymnastics, and a writing workshop. We had a mixture of structured and unstructured time included in the three-day schedule. When I come to the findings, I will talk about how often participants stated their enjoyment of the flexibility and freedom of the camp program. The food, bunk beds, and activities were constantly discussed as highlights for the children.

Design of the Study

This study consists of seven chapters, including this introduction. Chapter Two contextualizes my study in the discourses of critical theory and in critical pedagogy. I chose these because critical theory and critical pedagogy offer an explanation and insight that relate to the lives of the participants and black South Africans in general. Chapter Three describes the methodologies and method I used, including blogs, journals (mine and the participants) and interviews. In particular, I used a constructivist approach, which included the use of semi-structured interview questions. Chapter Four outlines – in as much detail as possible – how the camp evolved and what it was like for everyone involved. Chapter Five shares the findings of this study from my own blogs, and the interviews and participant journals. Chapter Six analyzes the findings and the final chapter concludes my research as well as provides recommendations for future studies.

Significance of this Study

This research is important for several reasons. Firstly, using the lens of critical pedagogy, it transforms a fun weekend away for some deserving children into a much deeper, more critical study about the inequalities and injustices in our world and how they can be understood and improved through non-formal education. Secondly, this study looks at non-formal education in a contemporary African context, something that is seldom done, especially in the last few decades. This study therefore expands our understandings of the importance of non-formal education in the lives of children and also for educators like myself. Thirdly, this study acknowledges and gives a voice to children who are all too often forgotten in today's neoliberal world. Finally, this study provides the school and community with a document that advocates for non-formal

education experiences, hopefully enabling them to argue why they should be able to provide more camps and out-of-classroom experiences for the students of Slangspruit, South Africa.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of the theoretical framework for my study, focusing on issues of power, social justice, and emancipation and then move to the literature of critical pedagogy and non-formal education – including a discussion within an African context. I also explore studies of overnight camps and what they have found about their effects on the children who take part in them.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework I have chosen for this study is critical theory. For Kincheloe and McLaren (2002), “critical theory is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system” (pp. 436–437). Critical theorists such as these, therefore view reality and knowledge as shaped by politics, history, and social circumstances.

In the literature, power often has many sides, two being domination and empowerment. Domination, in a South African context, relates to the history of oppression within that country. Take, for example, the students of Slangspruit primary school who are products of a racist, unjust system that through no fault of their own, find themselves with limited educational opportunities. Flip domination to empowerment of emancipation and power plays an important role within the lives of impoverished groups such as black children.

In analyzing the work of Foucault, Meehan (2004) argues for the rejection of this binary understanding. Indeed, “power always involves both of these possibilities, for at the moment it

constrains, it also enables” (p. 378). Emancipation is part of the aim of critical theory so disadvantaged groups can determine courses of action that will affect their future (Bradley-Levine & Carr, 2015). In research contexts, this means that researchers and participants construct reality together through the contexts of their interactions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Critical theorists argue that as researchers, it is our responsibility to uncover the power relationships in our research and look to reconstruct the power dynamic.

Social Justice

Another discourse central to critical theory is social justice. Bell (2013) provides an important definition or characterization of social justice. Social justice has no one definition, but Bell believes there are a number of components that are critical to understanding what it is and how, as educators in my case, we might begin to try to work towards it. For Bell (2013), a primary goal of social justice “is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs” (p. 21). Bell’s explanation here is inclusive, emancipatory, and collective. Bell continues, “Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure” (p. 21). This allows people the opportunity to express themselves and live whatever life they feel fit. For example, amongst the impoverished, Bell calls for opportunities to be shared across income levels, not just for those who can afford them. The remainder of Bell’s quotation is below:

We envision a society in which individuals are both self-determining (able to develop their full capacities) and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with others). Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others, their society, and the broader

world in which we live. These are conditions we wish not only for our own society but also for every society in our interdependent global community (Bell cited in Robbie, 2017, p. 21).

Above Bell speaks to agency which can be linked to emancipation where individuals have the knowledge and ability to determine their path and work towards a fair and just future.

Critical Pedagogy and Emancipation

Drawing on critical theory, and another framework for this study, is critical pedagogy. Farrow (2017) suggests that, “critical pedagogues aim to encourage independently minded learners who question the status quo and engage explicitly with questions of truth, power and justice” (p. 130). Critical pedagogy importantly goes beyond the act of teaching to incorporate how one learns, what is being taught, and how one teaches (Giroux, 1997). In South African society it is crucial that citizens who live in townships – oppressed by societal forces – question what is happening around them to challenge the status quo, rather than not asking questions and preserving it. In our case, this was our goal with the camp participants.

Critical pedagogy has been propelled to the spotlight in recent decades thanks to the work of Paulo Freire and other adult and community education scholars. Central to critical pedagogy is the idea of emancipation, defined by Cranton (2013) and Robbie (2017) as, simply put, freedom from oppression. In this sense, oppression can be described as freedom from external forces or beings – such as colonial, financial, or various other forces. Rhem (2013) describes Freire’s views of what emancipation can look like as teachers lead students through critical pedagogy, “accepting the status quo and seeing or feeling powerless to change it becomes part of a “culture of silence” in Freire’s view, and it falls to the teacher to end the culture of silence by helping

students find a voice” (p. 2). Freire called this learning how to “read the world” so that people may use what they’ve learned to “write the world” in a new, fairer, more just and equitable way” (p. 2).

Using the framework of critical theory and pedagogy allowed me to think more deeply about the children in Slangspruit who face such societal barriers due to their race, the historical context of South Africa, and the economic situation present in South African townships. The aim of critical pedagogy is to engage learners to question the status quo and seek truth, justice, and power. Educators use reading, writing, media, and various other educational practices to go beyond the surface to encourage students to critically consider society, context, ideologies, subject matter, and all aspects of education (Farrow, 2017). Critical pedagogy underpins my research as the participants at the camp are presented with a unique opportunity to learn through non-formal education programs and recognize how this empowers them, but also it allows me to think about my own practice and engagement in that community as a facilitator. What did I learn and how will it shape who I am and how I practice non-formal education in the future? I share this in later chapters.

Non-formal Education

Another lens and literature that grounds this study is non-formal education, a relatively generic term, but one I use as the best fit for my own work. Three decades ago, La Belle (1982) explained the introduction of non-formal education in the 1960’s as “...a need for creating out-of-school responses to new and differing demands for education” (p. 160). He felt this was a critical form of teaching and learning due to the gap that existed between in-school and out-of-school educational demands. Non-formal education grew in developing countries throughout the

1970s as it was able to fill a gap that the formal system was not meeting. When students were being underserved by the school system, non-formal education programs were implemented to complement the formal system.

While there are multiple definitions, for the purposes of this thesis I take up La Belle's (1982) definition of non-formal education as "any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children" (pp. 161-162). Thus non-formal programs are structured outside the realm of the formal school system. Non-formal education spans diverse subjects, catering to the needs of its participants. Flexibility, unstructured learning, and contextual relevance are all beneficial aspects of non-formal education (Konantambigi, Meghani, and Modi, 2008). Non-formal education can serve populations of people widely such as indoors or outdoors, for younger people or older people, in any place, at anytime, anywhere. Coombs (1976) states that non-formal education programs can adapt to the changing needs of its participants. When the learning needs of a group are diverse, non-formal education can change to meet those needs.

The concept of non-formal education is often described alongside life-long learning. These two concepts work in parallel with one another as non-formal education offers opportunities for learning on a wide range of subjects to participants of any age. Coombs (1976) says that even hundreds of years ago non-formal education was used to transmit values, customs, beliefs, and skills from one generation to another. These life-long learning opportunities took place in the form of tribal rituals and ceremonies. Socially, still today in some traditional societies and economies throughout the world, these conventional non-formal education practices still exist and thrive.

Youth Participants within Non-formal Education

My search for literature on non-formal education with a child-centred approach turned up fewer results than I expected. The studies that I did find were often out-dated or very specific to a certain population or realm. For example, there are many non-formal education studies about adults and life-long learning. The limited research that has been studied, specific to children, usually highlights a narrow scope such as one country in only one field, for example science.

Non-formal education programs are used for children with an emphasis on growth and development in a society. La Belle (1982) states that parents seek out non-formal education for their children that promote positive values that closely relate to their own. Children are enrolled in certain programs that encourage learning relevant to the child's age, sex, and social status. Konantambigi, Meghani, and Modi (2008) include citizenship, understanding societal problems, sports, hobbies, health, among other topics, as components for non-formal education for youth between the ages of 15 and 25. Non-formal education serves a purpose to a young participant – usually identified by the parent – shaping the child and their future.

Non-formal education is dynamic. Oftentimes the participants themselves are brought into the planning process (Coombs, 1976). A decentralized approach is recommended with engagement of youth seen as empowering and motivating. A non-hierarchical structure is common where participants can share their ideas and contribute to the planning, implementation, and execution of non-formal education. Furthermore, van der Linden (2015) relates the learning needs of a society as a whole as a consideration of non-formal education. A holistic approach to non-formal education, inclusive of individual participants and the larger community, will serve the growth of participants and future participants to a greater extent.

Economics Related to NFE

One of the ideas taken up in the literature about non-formal education is cost. While scholars argue that there are many positive outcomes cited for participants and communities engaging with non-formal education programs, the cost associated with programs is a vital consideration. The literature varies around costs of non-formal education. La Belle (1982) acknowledges that, “Social class lines tend to dominate the characteristics of those who participate in such activities, especially the private-for-profit programs” (p. 168). While this is part of the truth, there is also evidence about the importance of providing access to non-formal education for disadvantaged groups. This effort bridges non-formal education with critical theory as it allows for disadvantaged groups to realize the injustices in place in a society and work toward challenging the status quo. Non-formal education programs are growing in popularity in developing countries in an effort to increase access to education (Datzberger, 2016).

Caution is advised as non-formal education programs that are developed and implemented with a high cost, must be maintained (Coombs, 1976). This can become especially challenging in developing countries where affordability of the program plays an important role. Non-formal education does have its financial advantages too. For example, programs can be executed with little to no cost as building space can be borrowed and existing facilities – often schools – bring formal and non-formal education together to collaborate (Coombs, 1976).

NFE on the African Continent

There are a limited number of non-formal education studies done on the African continent. Many, as has been mentioned previously, are conducted on adult learners and due to the sheer size of Africa, there is substantial variety in the outcomes of the studies. In Senegal,

Kuenzi (2006) specifies powerful details of non-formal education in an Senegalese context, that positively influences participants. It is primarily on this study which I plan to build. He argues that NFE programs are taught in local languages, cultural knowledge is valued, the facilitator is often from a nearby community, and an overall sense of community can be instilled in the program. Each of these considerations adds significance to the non-formal education program for the participants and community.

Overnight Camps as Pedagogy

There is growing literature on overnight camps, the context of my study. As seen through the number of studies since the year 1999, the growth in camp literature includes researchers such as Dettmann-Easler & Pease (1999); Michalski, Mishna, Worthington, and Cummings (2003); Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, and Henderson (2007); Allen, Akinyanju, Milliken, Lorek, and Walker (2011), and Dahl, Sethre-Hofstad, and Salomon (2013). Scholars note that overnight camps have been in operation for decades, providing children with an opportunity to leave home, learn new skills, and make new friends. The first residential camps were implemented as a way to teach youth skills that schools were not (e.g. Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, and Henderson, 2007). Allen, Akinyanju, Milliken, Lorek, and Walker (2011) add that the primary purpose of camps is to encourage growth and learning as well as provide experiences for participants. Camps have now expanded to include a wide range of topics and experiences, such as special population camps, sports camps, and outdoor education programs. Each of these more specific camps has a variety of learning outcomes. Dahl, Sethre-Hofstad, and Salomon (2013) state that camps are not academic and do not need to be. They can facilitate learning in other ways, non-formally or through play.

Personal Growth and Learning

The personal growth and learning that occurs throughout camp programs is well documented in various current studies. Dahl, Sethre-Hofstad, and Salomon (2013) describe camp as a place with a healthy amount of risk and reflection are present and where participants can experiment. Dahl et al, (2013) note that camps allow people to be themselves. Participants feel supported at camp due to the availability of staff and freedom to choose their activities. Michalski, Mishna, Worthington, and Cummings (2003) explain some of the reasons for growth that they discovered, stating, “Another common area of growth for most of the children consists of increased independence and initiative at each child’s own level” (p. 75). The flexibility that camps offer for each participant to grow in a way that fits each child is one of the many benefits of children being a part of and learning in a non-formal camp setting.

Participant personal growth, as reported by Michalski et al., (2003), continued up to six months after camps were completed. Additionally, growth through camps was found to be larger for participants than maturation alone. Much of this is due to an overnight camp’s immersive nature; personal growth and skill development is possible during the intense time that participants spend at camp. Overnight camps have multiple aspects of growth where participants can develop and mature throughout their time in the camp setting (Thurber et al., 2007).

Relations with Nature

Critical theorists and non-formal educators who focus on the environment note the many benefits of being and learning in nature. For example, Bratman, Daily, Levy, and Gross (2015) describe the affect that nature has on people, “Benefits from nature exposure have also been observed across varying durations of exposure; from a few minutes of viewing images, to hour-long or multi-day wilderness experiences, up to life-long proximity to greenspace. The diversity

of findings suggests that the impact of nature experience on psychological functioning may be both widespread and robust” (p. 42). There is also an emphasis in the overnight camp literature. Scholars argue that one of the many benefits of a camp experience for children is the proximity to nature, although Dettmann-Easler & Pease (1999) take this further than ‘proximity’. They argue that camps “allow more time for students to be “in” nature, longer education programs with more instruction time available (evenings in addition to days), and greater flexibility in the types of programs offered” (p. 34). The outdoor, natural landscape offers learning opportunities not available inside a classroom. For example, informal learning – in an outdoor, natural setting – can be enhanced due to the learner’s intrinsic motivation of their surroundings, the multiple modes available in the setting, the opportunity to explore, and the opportunity for the learner to develop their worldview (Brody, 2005). Additionally, learning in nature goes beyond cognitive benefits and also includes feelings of attachment. Bexell, Jarrett, and Ping (2013) introduce Rachel Carson, one of the founders of the environmental movement and discuss her efforts to introduce people to the natural world in an effort to increase the emotional attachment people can feel toward nature. Dettmann-Easler & Pease (1999) found that residential camp programs do increase participants’ knowledge of the environment. This non-formal learning is a beneficial by-product of a camp experience.

Mentorship

Another theme from the literature is mentorship within camps, the value added of the closer relationships between adults who can act as role models for the youth. Anderson-Butcher, Cash, Saltzburg, Midle, and Pace (2004) discuss the far-reaching impacts of an adult-child relationship, academically, socially, and behaviourally and the profound effects that a mentor can

have on the child. For example, Anderson-Butcher et al (2004) found that mentorship of youth enhanced self-esteem, self-worth, and self-recognition. This is especially apparent for youths who do not have regular access to adult role modeling. Grossman & Bulle (2006) found that children can connect with mentors in a variety of settings, including at school, in their extended families, in the community, or through their extracurricular activities such as at camp. Finally, mentors follow through for their participants by delivering the program, being consistent, and clearly communicating expectations (McLaughlin, 2000).

There is a substantial portion of mentorship literature that focuses on behaviour modification and changing the negative behaviours of children. Taking a critical approach, it is necessary to challenge this literature that frames impoverished youth as a problem that needs to be 'fixed'. For example, one section of Anderson-Butcher et al.'s (2004) article discusses youth adopting pro-social behaviours. Studies such as this one consistently focus on impoverished children and the inherent idea that they need to change. I opt to challenge this throughout this study as the children of Slangspruit – while impoverished and many lacking stable households or family incomes – are not a problem that needs a solution, they are children that have hopes and dreams for the future, just like any other child, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds.

Conclusions

With my study, I aimed to contribute to the non-formal education literature, specifically overnight camps, as, noted above, this is not a field of study that has received much attention in the past. I also wanted to challenge the very 'neutral' and in fact problematic behaviour modification orientation of so much of the writing, by using a critical theoretical and pedagogical lens which draw attention to the oppression, exclusion and marginalization of these children, and

what we could do about that in terms of empowering them not just personally, but also collectively.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

In this chapter, I begin with my research approach and then introduce the methods that I employed throughout my study. Early on in this chapter I discuss reciprocity, trust, and rapport, as these are of utmost importance in working in a foreign culture and context. The majority of this chapter describes the data collection methods I used and details how I collected and coded my data.

The Qualitative Research Approach

The question that guided this study was: How did the non-formal overnight camp program impact the learning and the lives of the young participants from Slangspruit, South Africa? I wanted to explore my experience in South Africa because for me, it was an eye-opening one, and for the children involved, it felt very powerful but I needed to gain a better understanding. To explore this question, I combined three approaches. The first was participant interviews, the second was an analysis of my own journal and blog posts, and thirdly, I analyzed the journals participant kept. Together, these approaches capture the experiences and data of how the overnight camp impacted the lives of the participants.

My study was conducted within a qualitative framework. Hathaway (1995) defined a qualitative approach as research that formulates a question, uses narration, and epistemologically attempts to understand both the researcher's and the participants' everyday life. To capture data from my own experience, I used what Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) call an 'autoethnographical' approach defined as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural

experience” (p. 273). In particular, I used two tools. The first is journaling and second blogging, to capture but more importantly, to ‘construct’ meaning from my situation as it unfolded. I wrote my blog as a way to share my experience with my family and friends at home and around the world. I wrote one blog post per month for six months. I used my journal writing as a time to be by myself with my thoughts on this new life I was experiencing. I wrote throughout my time in South Africa, totalling nine entries, many of which were multiday entries that I expanded on for one week or more.

The use of blogs and journals provided me with constructivist moments around my time in South Africa, and therefore, this thesis is framed within a context of constructivism, what Golafshani (2003) sees as an approach where individuals define their own socially constructed, continually changing knowledge. I used this constructivist approach to help me understand my time working in Slangspruit, what I was seeing, feeling, learning and experiencing. As I wrote in my journals and blogs, I became very aware of my pre-existing assumptions and experiences working in these types of programs in other settings, mainly in Canada. From this personal ‘lived’ perspective, I fully support after school programs, youth groups, and camping experiences for young people. I believe in the power of non-formal education, outdoor programs, and bringing people together to learn, experience, and share in a communal, outdoor setting. I have worked with after school programs, youth leadership groups, and overnight camps in the past, as noted earlier. Creating these programs in South Africa was a joint venture between Ukulapha and the Slangspruit Primary School administration and was recognized as an opportunity to engage the children in learning that they rarely have the opportunity to experience, learning outside the classroom. Being aware of my biases and acknowledging the use

of qualitative study and autoethnography as a method of subjective inquiry, I will provide credibility checkpoints that I will use in my research in the following section.

While I was interested in understanding my own perspective of my temporary life in South Africa, as noted above, I was more interested in the experience of the children with whom I worked, particularly their experiences in the overnight camp and for this I took a qualitative approach using interviews and journals. In other words, I gave them also a space to ‘construct’ their own stories and knowledge about the camp. Baxter & Jack (2008) understand qualitative study as “an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood” (p. 544).

There are several components to this qualitative study including interviews with the children, the children’s journals, my blog which focuses on my experience at the camp and observations of the children, and my journal which I wrote as a personal, reflective outlet while in South Africa. Observations are naturally built into my blog and journal as these sources are of my experience working with the children, observing their behaviour, their lives, and their joys and struggles.

Reciprocity, Trust, and Rapport

An exciting element of my research is the participants themselves. Time and time again when I was working in Slangspruit I heard from the children that they often felt forgotten in a big world where the reality was that they did not have a lot of the same opportunities as other South African children and children from more developed countries. As an educator, I wanted to

explore the children's experience further. I was interested in the cultural and social factors that affect Slangspruit children and how non-formal education can be a part of their learning and growth. In terms of access to the participants' experience and learning, I have my blog, journal, and photos to use as field notes and as part of the autoethnographic descriptions of my experience. In May 2017, I returned to Pietermaritzburg and Slangspruit Public Primary School where I was able to interview past participants and collect participant journals to gain more insight into my research questions. My role as a researcher and Youth Development Worker is complex as ethical considerations and research bias come into question due to the subjective nature of my experience.

In the Slangspruit community I worked hard to build trust and rapport with students, teachers, and community members in my position of Youth Development Worker. I did this by following through on what I promised, listening to the children and community members, and by putting the people of Slangspruit first. As a researcher, when I traveled back to the community, I spent time re-establishing trust within the community, as I visited with different priorities this time around. It had only been ten months since I left Pietermaritzburg so the children all remembered me and were excited to learn about why I was back so soon. Upon arriving back in Pietermaritzburg, I distributed information about my research to caregivers of the Hella Hella participants. This made for a smooth transition back into the community.

Reciprocity was one way of navigating this new territory and something that researchers using a critical theoretically informed approach argue is necessary – to give back to the community. For example, Maiter, Simich, Jacobson, and Wise (2008) define reciprocity as “an ongoing process of exchange with the aim of establishing and maintaining equality between parties” (p. 305). This is important in a township setting when a foreigner enters into the

community with an academic project. It must be a reciprocal relationship between the community and myself as the foreign researcher and guest. I established reciprocity by being open, transparent and disclosing my research before I arrived and throughout my time on the ground. I obtained all the proper consent and held an explanatory parent meeting in the local language, isiZulu. My aim is to share my research findings with the school and community upon completion of my Master's thesis.

Data Collection Methods

Journaling

Throughout my time in South Africa, I kept a digital journal on my laptop. I had multiple purposes of my journal: to have a place to record my memories, the good times and the more difficult ones; to critically consider what I was experiencing while living and working in a foreign culture and context; and even though I did not know what type of research I wanted to do until I returned to Canada, I wanted to create a space that I could return to when writing my thesis. My journal is eighteen typed pages with nine entries. As mentioned above, some of the entries are multiday entries. I discussed daily life issues such as how to safely take a taxi to more critical subjects such as the leadership styles of the teachers at the school.

Blogging

I wrote one blog post each month – for a total of six posts – during my time in South Africa. The main purpose of my blog was to communicate my experience with friends, family, and the UVic community, at home and around world. I wrote about my daily life but focussed mostly on the children I was working with and their lives. I also included details of my travels

and adventures on the weekends. I shared my blog through emails and social media posts upon completion each month. Often times I was able to engage people that I did not realize would be so interested in my experience living and working in South Africa. I did not write as critically in my blog as I did in my journal due to the nature of the audience. However, there are still many issues, photos, and memories that I was able to draw upon as contextual data throughout this study.

Interviews

To capture the learning of the camp participants, I conducted in-depth interviews with six of the children who attended the camp at Hella Hella Outdoor Centre. The interviews were in-person and I also facilitated participant journals – discussed in more detail below – when I returned to South Africa in May and June in 2017, one year after the camp at Hella Hella. The original camp dates were June 3-5, 2016. The individual interview approach I used is defined as semi-structured. For O’Keeffe, Buytaert, Mijic, Borzovic, and Sinha (2015, p. 1911) semi-structured interviews “are organised around a topic guide, which helps lead the conversation in a standardised way while allowing sufficient opportunity for relevant issues to emerge.” In this approach, the participants have the opportunity to reflect upon their experience, in my case attending the camp and its implications for who they are now. No single experience can definitively change a child, but if this type of learning activity is important, as the school and I believe it to be, then we need to understand the learning that has resulted from it.

A sampling of semi-structured questions I asked included:

- 1) Why did you take part in camp and what do you remember most about camp? What were the most important things you learned? How did you learn these? What were the moments or activities?
- 2) What did you tell your family and friends about camp when you returned home?
- 3) What things in the camp challenged you? How do you approach or meet these challenges?
- 4) Would you go back to camp again if you had the chance? Why or why not? What was it that would draw you back or keep you from going again?
- 5) What would you change about the camp?
- 6) What kinds of relationships did you build during camp? Have they grown and changed? What impact did they have?
- 7) What skills do you continue to use that you learned in camp? What ideas?

In addition to these questions I provided a space for the children to lead the conversation and take it in any direction they felt important. In total, I interviewed six children, three girls and three boys. In Chapter Five, each student, including those who wrote a participant journal, is given a pseudonym in order to protect his or her identity.

In order to conduct the interviews, invitations written in isiZulu were sent to the children's homes for caregivers to get an understanding of my research. I identified the participants for the study in conjunction with the leadership teachers and the criteria included their having attended the camp, their being old enough to stay after school to take part in the interview and then walk home on their own, as well as their having a level of English that is sufficient to convey their perspective on the camp.

Participant Journals

As noted to above, written journals from four additional participants were also used. These journals were from grade eight students that attended the 2017 camp as Leaders in Training. The six that were interviewed were still students at Slangspruit Primary School, where the four that provided written responses are all currently in high school now. The high school students have a better command of the English language, with stronger written skills and they require less prompting. Thus I found it suitable – as I was looking for another way, other than interviews, to capture the children’s responses – to provide written journals to some of the interview questions. A second annual camp was held at the end of my time in Pietermaritzburg in June 2017. These journals were a chance for the grade eight students to reflect on what last year’s camp meant to them. I asked each Leader in Training to record their thoughts and memories of last year’s camp as well as encouraged them to consider their personal growth, if any, due to the camp. I used several strategies including triangulation to increase the justification of the themes present in the data as well as to increase the validity of the research (Golafshani, 2003).

Data Analysis Procedures

As noted above, I had a wide variety of data to include in my qualitative study. I began by grouping the themes of the children’s interviews and pairing them with content from my blog and journal entries. The themes that emerged from the interviews were: skills development through personal empowerment; learning with and through nature; leadership development; and intergenerational learning. Each of the above themes also have subthemes that I discuss in

Chapter Five. The mention of the food at the camp was also widely discussed and I include some mention of this topic following the above themes. These themes were confirmed from my blog posts as I had written about each of them in 2016, allowing me to seamlessly use my blog and journal as data from my 2016 trip to South Africa. Additionally, having previously immersed myself twice now in a South African camp setting, I was able to provide a thick description throughout the study, which (Lewis 2009) argues is the best way to ensure validity. Throughout the next three chapters, I insert excerpts from my blog and journal detailing my account of experiences that the children discuss in their interviews. Additionally, in Chapter Four, I provide a detailed account of the children, the camp, and pertinent details for the reader to best understand the impact of this experience.

I transcribed the participant interviews and student journals to have them all within one document. This led me into the analysis of the themes and findings where I am able to discuss the wider implications of the camp and the affect it had on the participants. Creswell (2014) describes coding as, "... taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant (called an *in vivo* term)" (p. 198). After I transcribed each of my interviews, I sorted the responses into categories as described above. One important note is that I allowed the themes to emerge, rather than having predetermined codes to fit the data into (Creswell, 2014). The questions that I asked the participants in the semi-structured interviews were designed to encourage conversation. Within each response I coded for themes and noted aspects within my critical framework.

Ethical Considerations

It is important to anticipate and discuss ethical issues that may come up in research (Creswell, 2014). I had several ethical concerns for the research that I was undertaking, all of which had pathways to ensure an ethical outcome. Firstly, I submitted an ethics application to the University of Victoria to openly discuss my intentions in using human subjects in my research. Additionally, before leaving for South Africa, I gathered approval to interview the students, from the principal of Slangspruit Primary School and the Founding Manager of Ukulapha. Upon arriving in Pietermaritzburg, I immediately had my interview waiver form translated into isiZulu to help the caregivers understand my research as I sought the permission of the participants and their caregivers involved in my research. Furthermore, I will honour the participants and community by sharing my findings with them upon completion of my thesis.

The majority of ethical considerations came up when I returned to South Africa. To begin, I thoroughly explained the purpose of my research and ensured that participants and their guardians understood the background and intent of my study. Two of the teachers briefly served as translators to fully inform the participants about my research and what it is that they would do if they chose to take part in it. I respectfully watched for language and cultural differences and consulted the teachers I worked when I needed guidance. When conducting interviews, I began by explaining to the participants that I was in a different role for the time being. My role as a researcher was something that the students understood and a few of them did ask questions about what it was I was doing, and again, in the name of reciprocity I was as open as I could be. It was important that I allocated certain times for interviews and other times for participating in activities with the students as I did in my role as Youth Development Worker.

The issues of power and deception are closely related to ethical considerations (e.g. Crewswll, 2014) but equally, this is inherent in critical theory that recognises the ‘power’ I had over these children, as much as the power society has. I was constantly aware of the power imbalance that I possessed with the students at Slangspruit Primary School. Simply being a researcher there was a power imbalance, however I am also aware that the colour of my skin, gender, nationality, my level of education, and my economic advantage also contribute to power in my case. As critical theorists and researchers, such as Creswell (2014) and Lewis (2009), suggest, I was clear about my intentions with the interviewees and I encouraged them to speak openly, honestly, and respond or refuse to respond, however they saw fit. Furthermore, I was prepared for the potential that harmful information could have come up in an interview setting when the students had the chance to discuss their experiences, although I also recognised that because I was one of the facilitators, they may not always come forward with ‘problems’. However, many students did openly discuss aspects of the programs they did not learn from or enjoy.

My aim at the conclusion of this research process is to communicate my findings in a clear and concise manner to the participants. I will prepare a summary of my findings and the themes in the form of a short report. I will also provide a copy of my thesis to the school for the teachers to read and share with any of the older students that are interested in the research findings. I will encourage the adults to hold some kind of forum, should there be enough interest among the children and their caregivers, if I am unable to return myself to take part in a discussion. The children are the centre of this study and I want to share the finished product with them. I have kept the raw data in a safe place after researching at Slangspruit to safeguard the findings and conserve the participants’ privacy. There are a large number of ethical concerns

with my research but with proper management, each consideration can be anticipated and taken care of at the appropriate time in the research process.

Limitations

While qualitative research, unlike quantitative, does not use the idea of ‘limitations’, there is something I need to say that I feel is important to this study. To fully understand the impact of the non-formal education program on the children, I feel it would be necessary to do a longer-term study. While I gave it one year, and I extensively explored each aspect of the program and their implications on the children that attended, this research would need to be expanded upon to further understand the implications for the participants.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Validity is a technique used in qualitative research to ensure accuracy of the findings (Lewis, 2009). Throughout my research I used several validity techniques to ensure trustworthiness. The main techniques that I employed were triangulation, presenting my biases, and using detailed descriptions of my findings. Triangulation involves identifying themes from a variety of data sources to ensure validity (Golafshani, 2003). Furthermore, throughout this study, I have mentioned my biases and beliefs to give the reader a sense of my background and where I am coming from. Finally, in the following chapter, I describe in detail the setting in which I worked in Slangspruit. This is because “the qualitative researcher must present the entire picture, thus transporting the reader into the environment, setting, and situation” (Lewis, 2009, p. 12).

There are two other validity procedures that assisted me in ensuring a valid representation of my findings. Member checking allowed me to follow up with participants to review

interviews and observation notes to clarify accuracy. I was able to briefly member check with the students that I interviewed, however due to the short duration of my trip to South Africa, I did not have all of my data analyzed by the time I left the country. In terms of member checking, I verbally clarified responses with the interviewees and followed up the day after each interview. The other validity technique that I used in my research is spending prolonged time in the field. “Through prolonged engagement in the field, the researcher becomes more a part of the environment and less of a novelty” (Lewis, 2009, 12). I lived and worked in Slangspruit for six months in 2016 and visited as a researcher for several weeks in 2017. Living and working in the local community has provided me with insight into the lives of my research participants that I would not otherwise have.

I now move to Chapter Four where a detailed description of the camp and participants is provided. My blog and journal entries are woven throughout the next three chapters to illustrate my autoethnographic portion of my research, my life as the facilitator.

CHAPTER FOUR

In my research, context matters. This chapter therefore, provides rich detail about the setting and the camp. It looks at how it was developed, who was involved, where the camp was located, and why it was deemed important. Within this chapter, I include excerpts from my blog and journal, always italicized – the autoethnographic portion of my data collection for this thesis. For the headings in this chapter I use questions as a way to specifically elaborate on every aspect of the program, ensuring that the reader has a deep understanding of what occurred before, during, and after the weekend at the Hella Hella Outdoor Centre.

Why a Camp?

Journal Entry, January 23, 2016

Homework is often left untouched, as households unintentionally don't support education due to parents lacking education themselves, chores needing to be completed, long walks to and from school, and child-headed households where the parents have likely passed away from HIV. These challenges accompanied with the lack of technology in the classroom (requiring students to copy everything off the board, using up precious instruction time or verbally repeating the lecture) illustrate a less than optimal learning structure.

The weekend away at the leadership camp came together organically. It was not something that felt prescribed, unnatural, or out of place. Before leaving Canada for South Africa, we had heard briefly from Ukulapha's director that the school and community was interested in utilizing the time during school holidays to engage groups of children in activities. However, other than this quick comment over Skype, there was not any thought of camp until much later in our time working in the Slangspruit community.

A student leadership council had always been a dream of the Senior Management Team of Slangspruit Primary School. Extra-curricular activities and out of class groups, sports, or activities are rare at Slangspruit School. A lack of funding and children needed at home after school to complete household chores were but two of the reasons why the Leadership Council had never materialized before 2016. Another was how overworked and underpaid the teachers felt. Johnson & Naidoo (2017) speak to the stress, trauma, and burnout among South African teachers. Teachers are leaving the profession citing fatigue and stress. Johnson & Naidoo (2017) also look at the positive that, “In many schools in poor, low-resource areas of South Africa, the teacher is the one adult who can be a solid anchor for the child” (p. 77).

In a school setting it is of paramount importance that teachers are involved and engaged and not burnt out. We were fortunate to have the support of the staff and teachers from the beginning. The school principal jumped at the opportunity of our help, and connected us with two potential sponsor teachers who had energy, were excited, and moved to make the Leadership Council group a formal entity at the school. After deciding how students would be selected for the Leadership Council, it took off. The students were eager, the school staff were supportive, and the ideas about what the purpose of this group could be exploded!

After about two months into our time living in Pietermaritzburg, the Leadership Council was fully formed. The students were selected, weekly meetings were underway, and excitement flowed from students to teachers to Canadian interns. It was this group of children that inspired the camp; it was their energy, gratitude, and thirst for new experiences that motivated the adults involved to consider such a large yet important endeavour.

My co-intern and I have a background in overnight camps and non-formal education. When the school administration and director of Ukulapha learned of our experience organizing

and leading overnight camp programs, we all saw great potential in what we could offer the children on the Leadership Council. The overnight camp evolved from there.

The Leadership Council

The Leadership Council is made up of a unique group of highly motivated students aged nine to thirteen. Due to circumstances such as limited parental encouragement, hunger, as well as scarce school supplies at township schools, many students are not able to focus or receive adequate support to achieve their potential at school. The leadership students defied the odds. They were determined to change their destiny, shape their future, and positively affect their community. Considering the circumstances of these children, taking a critical stance as a group is educational, practical, and forward thinking. Due in part to their academic achievements, for many of the leadership students, school is seen as a safe place, and they are happy to be there, engaged, and involved. The creation of the Leadership Council boosted their confidence and gave them purpose.

What?

For an entire weekend, the Slangspruit Primary School Leadership Council had full access to the Hella Hella Outdoor Centre, southwest of Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Prior to the weekend away, my co-intern, the teachers at the school, and I prepared necessary documents in order to take the students away with us for the weekend. The forms all went home in isi-Zulu and a caregiver information session was held.

It was very important to hold a meeting for the parents and caregivers to create a space for them to ask questions about what exactly it was that we were doing with their children. Overnight camps are not common outside of North America. Furthermore, many of the adults

had never met the Canadian interns; they had just heard stories about us from their children. This was an opportunity for them to come and meet us.

Once we had the formalities taken care of, it was time to go to camp! Camp was exciting! Camp was unknown! All of the children who attended, except one, had never been away from home besides visiting family. Many of the kids did not know what to expect. Camp was real! Several kids [and parents too!] thought we were joking about taking the Leadership Council students to camp. As one student stated one day, and as I captured in my blog, *“Russell, my mum still doesn’t believe that we are going to camp! She couldn’t come to that parents meeting you had, are you sure we are going? And will we stay in tents or cabins?”*

Where?

Hella Hella Outdoor Centre is located one hour from Slangspruit Primary School and the city of Pietermaritzburg. The drive to the property led us along a meandering rural route with banking corners and beautiful scenery. The final eight kilometres were incredibly steep, on a gravel road, en route to the bottom of a valley. The property has an extensive assortment of activity equipment, space, and everything needed to run a great camp program. The surrounding landscape contains steep cliffs, green, brown, and sandy in colour, a river, lush vegetation, and a feeling of freedom that the students instantly felt upon arrival.

The property is expansive. A football field, pond, cabins up against the hillside, and an obstacle course are all bordered by the steep cliffs and the river. The buildings are not intrusive but give way to the natural surroundings. The property evokes a sense of adventure and wonder, something, I learned throughout the interviews that the children looked for but rarely experienced at home in the township. When we arrived, many students could not control their excitement and went running around the property, others just stood in awe.

We were blessed with several options for activities. Because all of the participants had never experienced an overnight camp before, we were able to mix in some traditional camp activities and keep things flexible for the students to ultimately choose what it is we would do. There was a lot of football and netball on the field, we used the rope swing over the pond, the zipline into the river, and the surrounding forest for the nature walk. When we split into small groups, there was ample space available for groups to spread out. Below is a photo of the football field, the cabins on the very left edge of the photo, and surrounding cliffs at the Hella Hella Outdoor Centre.



Image One: Photo of the field amongst the mountains at Hella Hella Outdoor Centre

By Russell Drummond

When?

Camp ran for a weekend. We left after school on Friday, June 3, 2016 and returned back to Slangspruit in the afternoon on Sunday, June 5, 2016. June is approaching winter in the southern hemisphere so we had to consider how cool the evenings could get. This is important as most buildings are not insulated in South Africa and many of the children's families cannot afford sleeping bags and other luxuries. We made an arrangement with the camp that, for \$1 CAD more per child per day, it would provide sheets and blankets for each participant. This was essential as the nighttime low when we were at the camp was generally around five degrees Celsius.

June is a dryer time of year in KwaZulu-Natal, so we were fortunate to have no precipitation for our weekend away. The students write mid-year exams at the end of June so the timing of the camp was planned to be several weeks before these exams to ensure there was time to study for these tests. Because the exams are province-wide, we were told that June was a quieter time of year for schools to book the camp. This worked out well for us and gave Hella Hella's owner the opportunity to reduce the cost for our group.

How?

Blog Entry, May 16, 2016

At the moment, the teachers are translating the registration, waiver, and medical forms from English into isi-Zulu. We will spend the June 3-5 weekend at camp. The other day four of us went to see Hella Hella Outdoor Centre. The setting is nothing short of spectacular with a river winding through a valley with Drakensburg-style mountains on every side of the camp. The kids won't have seen anything like it before.

The weekend will consist of further teamwork and leadership training for the students. To our knowledge, all fifty students are able to make it and we will use a variety of facilitation techniques to engage the kids. Between the groups of adults attending, we will draw on North American style summer camp ways, leadership techniques from my Master program, local Zulu traditions, and social work ideas from our intern who has a social work background. And of course, being in a camp setting, this learning will be surrounded by fun, laughter, and support.

To make the camp happen, it took effort from a variety of people. As previously mentioned, the idea evolved organically, and once approved by the school, the other interns and I were committed. Fundraising was the most critical task because without the funds, there would be no camp. The fundraising was completed online through a crowd funding website. We launched a successful campaign, raising more than \$1,000 above our target. Our request for donations went out to friends, family, and colleagues at home in Canada and any other networks we had around the world. We shared our fundraiser on social media, through email blasts, and with word of mouth.

As the financial aspects of the camp came together, mainly from Canada, my co-intern and I were busily working on logistics in Pietermaritzburg. After securing the camp with the owners of Hella Hella Outdoor Centre, organizing transportation was a top priority. Later in the planning stage our attention shifted to determining a menu, liability forms, and arranging a meeting for caregivers and students to come with their questions about the weekend.

We learned of the Hella Hella Outdoor Centre from a contact we had in the community. As soon as my email was returned from the owner, I knew that we had found a place that would be a good fit for our group. The owner was community-minded, mentioning his desire to include township schools in the programming and spoke of the importance of non-formal, environmental

education opportunities for children. He concluded his email with a message of support that he would do his best to keep the cost as low as possible for our group.

Who?

Taking a weekend trip is not a normal venture from South African townships. Day to day life for the children in Slangspruit consists of school, chores, taking care of younger siblings, and playing sports such as football and netball. Due in part to the AIDS crisis, many families have lost a parent, thus leaving the emotional, financial, and general security of the family all at stake. Cluver & Orkin (2009) highlight the struggles faced by children that lose a parent – particularly depression, posttraumatic stress, psychological distress, and anxiety. Time and time again, I would hear stories from the children about their hopes, dreams, and wishes for the world. So often they could not imagine such things coming true. I captured one such story through a blog post found below.

Blog Entry, May 16, 2016

“Russell, my mum still doesn’t believe that we are going to camp! She couldn’t come to that parents meeting you had, are you sure we are going? And will we stay in tents or cabins?”

Three weeks ago we told the group of fifty Leadership Council students that we were going to spend a weekend at a camp at the beginning of June. The group got on their feet and screamed. They hugged each other and jumped up and down, unable to control their excitement. They didn’t believe us that they would have this kind of opportunity and at no cost to their families.

To provide some perspective for you, most of these kids have never had a weekend away. There is the odd school trip for a few hours but vigorous fundraising has to be done, putting pressure on the students and a financial burden on the families. But a weekend away with rope

swings, a challenge course, a zipline, a river to swim in, and lots of friends to share it with is practically unheard of here. I am someone that believes in the power and magic of camp (are you surprised?), getting a group of likeminded people together in a wilderness setting to learn, experience, and share. I cannot wait to see our 50 hardworking leadership students arrive at Hella Hella Outdoor Centre where the cabins, field, river, and mountains are all theirs for an entire weekend!

I responded with, “Yes Bayanda, we are going to camp, we wouldn’t tease you with something like that. And we will be staying in cabins; there will be three groups of boys and three groups of girls.”

“So we will get our own cabins then?”

“Yes, they each have bunk beds.”

I didn’t receive a verbal response following my answer. The smile said it all as Bayanda’s eyes wandered to the other side of the room. I could see him imagining what this camp could possibly look like. He was happily daydreaming.

As a result, telling the students that we were going to camp saw many of them cautiously optimistic that the weekend away would actually materialize. We were told that trips like this were sometimes promised and did not actually happen. All but one of the children had never been on a weekend away. With this in mind, we had some very eager, kids on our hands. They were excited, grateful, and so curious! What would camp be like? What would we do? What does the property look like?

When we got to the camp, there was a feeling of freedom in the air. All the stresses of life at home, the fear of being bullied, beaten up, or worse, were gone. This group of children was so happy to play outside, be with their friends, and explore a place filled with natural beauty and

wonders. The river was clean, not filled with plastic and waste like in the township. This ignited conversation amongst the students, inspired them, and had them questioning how rivers in townships and cities could be cleaned up to look like the one at Hella Hella.

Journal Entry, February 5, 2016

Life at school is so different for township kids versus suburban kids. Today (Friday, February 5, 2016), one of the teachers came and spoke with the four of us and told us all about JP (Junior Primary) kids being forgotten after school. This week she drove four kids home on separate occasions. Parents are either deceased, working, separated and stressed out, or just simply not involved. We have been told numerous times that the kids love us being at their school because they receive positive adult attention from us. They may receive this from time to time from their teachers (or not) but they may not receive any attention at all at home. It is such a contrast from the children brought up in the suburbs (or other western countries) where parents are often very involved in their child's life.

The Participants – In Detail

I returned to South Africa in May 2017 to interview six camp participants and facilitate written responses from four other participants. The students were all one year older as a year had passed since the camp. The six in-person interview participants were interviewed at the school, in a classroom that was not in use. I had questions on hand but, having chosen a semi-structured approach to the interviews, I encouraged the students to take the interview in whatever direction they wanted, sharing their experience of the camp. These six students are in grade six and seven this year, 2017, and were chosen as interviewees due to their English ability and continued involvement in the Leadership Council. There were three males selected and three females selected. All students who were invited to participate accepted the invitation and their caregivers

signed the consent forms. The four students who provided written responses had graduated from primary school. These four were all females and were invited back to this year's camp as Leaders in Training to assist with the operation of the camp.

All of the students involved in this study are South African Zulus. English is an additional language for all the participants – a second or third language that is spoken only at school and in the city with non-Zulu speakers. The ten students all live in a township, either Slangspruit or a neighbouring township. Many live in single parent homes with their grandparents as a result of the AIDS crisis facing KwaZulu-Natal or due to other external societal factors. Financial challenges are a regular issue faced by families in the township resulting in priorities such as food, education, transportation, and security all competing for scarce resources. Barnes, Noble, Wright, and Dawes (2008) found that 81% of South African children experience material deprivation. It is important to consider these factors, as the themes presented below may be different than themes of a camp in a different context such as in a suburban Canadian community. Below is a journal entry of mine highlighting language in South Africa. I was very sensitive to language and race throughout my time in the township and throughout the country.

Journal Entry, February 20, 2016

Speaking of learning Zulu, this is something that I think is very important as a foreigner coming to South Africa, especially a white foreigner. The white South Africans that I have met here don't seem to be interested in learning Zulu. English is very much the language of business and cross-cultural communication, as it is everywhere in the world. Sadly, I have not noticed any attempt at all for white people to even say hello or thank you in Zulu. I find this incredibly disrespectful and unfair. When people talk about South Africa moving forward from apartheid,

growing as a young democracy, and coming together as a rainbow nation, it is little steps like this that would go a long way. Reverting back to Durban for a moment (and I've certainly seen this in Pietermaritzburg too), there does not seem to be interracial couples here or even friends from different racial backgrounds. In Durban, white people are seen hanging out with white people, blacks with blacks, and South Asians with South Asians. This pattern is rarely broken. It is difficult to see a more connected future with such visual divisions.

I now move to Chapter Five where I will introduce the findings of my research and link them to my theoretical background.

CHAPTER FIVE

Findings

In this chapter I present the findings from the interviews I conducted one year after the camp with the participants who had attended the Hella Hella Outdoor Centre as well as journal entries kept as part of my research. And as I have done in the previous chapters, I continue to weave in blogs and my personal journal as ‘autoethnography’.

A number of major themes emerged from the interviews. The first was skills development through personal empowerment. This included confidence and self-esteem building, learning about themselves, making new friends and ‘becoming brave’ which included in particular taking calculated risks during activities and in social situations. The second theme was learning with and through nature. The participants discussed feeling at ease from the dangers and burdens of home life in such a natural environment. Within this section, I included three subthemes – calm and tranquility, a break from the stresses of real life, and escape. The third theme was leadership development where the students continually commented on learning about leadership traits and skills. The final theme was intergenerational learning, as many students discussed their experiences connecting with and learning from their teachers and principal in new ways.

I begin this chapter, however, with a critical element that emerged throughout the interviews: Food. In a world where children are often hungry, food was so noteworthy that I decided it needed to be included. As much as anything, it links itself to critical theory and pedagogy in unique ways. Within the final theme of intergenerational learning, I end the chapter with another critical element that emerged throughout the interviews – issues of gender. This

topic links directly into the subsequent discussion chapter where I will discuss the findings of the study.

Food as Learning and Well Being

Many scholars today speak of ‘food security’ as essential to life and to wellbeing (Crush & Battersby, 2016). Poverty and hunger are foci of critical cultural theorists such as Hidalgo-Moratal (2013). As this journal entry from early in my time in South Africa shows, I had in fact been introduced to the importance of food scarcity months before the camp at Hella Hella, but it became more entrenched for me, as time went on:

Journal Entry, Sunday January 24, 2016

Each day at school we grow a little more confident and gain a little bit more perspective on the lives of the kids and teachers at Slangspruit Public Primary School. A teacher had me observe the lunch line up with her. Each day the kids are fed a hot lunch provided by the school. I believe that the menu is weekly and the day that we were observing on was one of the less popular days (the meal wasn't a huge hit). The teacher said that all the kids eating that day are ones that do not get meals from home. Many kids do bring sandwiches and on Fridays when fish is served with the meal, they will line up for food as well as eat their own. However this day wasn't a Friday and it was only the hungriest of kids lining up. Another comment that stuck with me was that many kids do not bring containers to collect their food in. They then wait until the majority of the food has been dished out and then dive into the large bucket.

Food is a complex issue in the township. As a privileged westerner, I have never personally dealt with food insecurity, although I now recognise that many in my own country of Canada do. As for the children in Slangspruit Township, food scarcity is a daily reality. To provide some perspective, Monson, Hall, Smith, and Shung-King (2006) note how it is:

It is estimated that 63% of black children live in ultra-poor (households earning under R800 per month – approximately \$80 CAD) households while this is the case for only 4% of white children; by contrast, only 1% of black children live in the most affluent households with earnings of more than R16 000 (approximately \$1,600 CAD) per month, compared to 29% of white children (n.p.).

Most, if not all of the children attending Slangspruit Primary School would be categorized as ultra-poor and therefore, do not reliably have three meals per day in their households. Before departing for Hella Hella, the children displayed a great deal of anxiety about not knowing what to expect from what we were about to do. During our preparation meeting two weeks before the camp, the first question that was asked was, ‘Do we need to bring our own food?’ When we answered that the food is provided, I noticed that several of the children’s worries subsided. A very different pre-camp concern than from here in Canada where there is an expectation that every overnight camp would absolutely provide food as part of their program.

Even more than relieving their anxiety, I began to notice that food actually became an exciting unknown about our weekend away, rather than a troublesome one as I captured in my blog post below.

Blog Entry, Monday, June 13, 2016:

Another memorable aspect of Hella Hella was the food. From the moment we told the kids about camp, food was a source of concern and an anxiety due to the nature of hunger and cost associated with not only camp but whether or not they would have to provide their own food. We assured the kids that they did not bring any food at all. Thanks to the generous support of so many people that made this camp possible, we had a bit of extra money to put towards food to include things like meat in our menu that we would not have been able to eat if we had just

raised the bare minimum amount. On the Saturday evening we had a BBQ with bratwursts and the campers were thrilled. Food was another major highlight for many of the kids.

Taking Responsibility

In diverse ways, food became part of the teaching and learning process at the camp and one part was to take responsibility. This is not to say that the children did not have this sense of responsibility. The girls were likely to have had to do much of the work at home, even around food preparation. But it would have been newer to the boys. Each cabin group of children was responsible for cleaning up one meal on the weekend. We had a rotating schedule to ensure that it was a fair arrangement as the boys often tried to pawn off their duties to the girls because the problematic issue of gender – roles for males versus females – is present even in younger children.

We also made connections to the adults around food, which I will also take up in more detail below. In particular, we connected with two ‘aunties’ from the school who graciously agreed to attend the camp, prepare the food, and supervise the children on clean up. Food preparation for a group of approximately sixty-five people is immense so the aunties were a vital part of the weekend operation. They were proud to be a part of the Hella Hella team and they openly shared that although they had to work hard throughout the weekend at camp, they rarely, if ever, get a chance to go away for the weekend, so it was well worth it.

The term most often used to describe the food in my interviews with the participants, whenever I mentioned the food from Hella Hella, was ‘delicious’. The participants even likened it to things which of course, they never would have experienced. Charlie wrote of one of her most memorable moments: “The food that was prepared by the aunties was very delicious. It felt

more like a five-star hotel than just a camp”. These children are a long way from staying in this type of hotel, but of course, they can and do imagine it. Additionally, Carol informed me that she told her family and friends about the food from Hella Hella as this exchange illustrates:

Russell: What else did you tell them about the food?

Carol: The food that we were eating was good.

Russell: What do you remember was good?

Carol: The cornflakes and the eggs.

What is interesting about this exchange is that it was so often the small details students noticed with regard to the food. Sheila appreciated the snacks that we provided throughout each day, as this was not something that she was used to at home. Casey spoke about how this food was very different from what she was accustomed to: “The food at camp was not the same as the food I usually eat because there was a lot of ingredients that were in there and it was not cooked by the person that usually cooks for me.” I can only suspect that this person was his mother or grandmother who would be unable to afford the diverse ingredients which we could at the camp. The quality of the food at Hella Hella was something that stuck with the participants long after the bus departed the camp. In the next chapter I will revert back to the topic of food and whether or not providing ‘five-star hotel style food’ is of benefit or detriment to impoverished children.

Skills Development through Personal Empowerment: Writing the World

The ten students who participated in the interviews and journaling exercises all mentioned some kind of important learning they had experienced at the camp. Responses were varied but various sub-themes materialized. Coming from an impoverished background, many, if not all of the activities were new, leaving the children full of excitement and wonder. And as

critical scholars note, there are underlying societal factors that withhold these learning opportunities from disadvantaged groups such as township youth (e.g. Rhem 2013). How then do we help these children to learn, as Freire & Macedo (2005) suggested, to ‘read the world’ in new ways in order to ‘write the world’ from a new perspective on that world? In the case of the camp, much of it was learning about themselves in new ways from the new adventures.

Gaining Confidence

Blog Entry, Monday, June 13, 2016:

I feel that it was these above simple pleasures combined with challenging and new activities that made the camp as successful as it was. During our rotational group activity time, the kids got to experience a nature walk with sensory games, a teamwork challenge obstacle course, a writing workshop where the kids got to express their views of leadership, and a little rafting trip up the river. So much valuable informal learning for all!

I asked all ten interviewees about what they learned about themselves and one of the main responses, as this excerpt shows, was about confidence.

Cameron: I learned that I can do things that I didn’t think I could do.

Russell: Can you tell me an example of that?

Cameron: The zipline.

In fact, the zipline that stands high above the river and opposing bank proved to be one of the most empowering learning aspects of the trip and was part of the discussion for many of the children throughout our weekend at Hella Hella. The zipline was of course totally unknown as no child had ever tried one before, or likely even seen one. It was intimidating at first as it takes riders from a rock bluff high above the river to the middle of the river where you must release

your grip and plunge into the chilly waters below. None of the students were confident swimmers, which added to the intimidation of the activity. For those who conquered their fears and attempted the zipline, the excitement and sense of accomplishment were palpable for the remainder of the weekend. As noted above, this activity became a pivotal point in each participant's growth of self-confidence, giving them a chance to learn about their own boundaries and challenge these boundaries. Most of the participants attempted the zipline and even for those who did not, they still felt the excitement and sense of bravery required to gather the courage to try it. Rachel and Charlie both discussed their experience observing the zipline. Rachel recalls, "What I remember most about the camp is the zipline. It was very exciting even though I did not try it. I was very scared to try it when I saw the other kids jumping." Charlie has a similar memory of the zipline, "The scariest part for me was riding the zipline. I did not ride it because I was very scared. I thought that I was going to struggle a bit as I was not used to it."

There was a sense of 'leadership' that was developed, and this was a form of self-confidence, as Cindy articulated in her journal:

I got time to see the other positive side of me. I'm helpful as all the teachers used to say and learnt that I also have some good leadership characteristics. My personality changed when I went to the camp because I started to teach people how to behave like a truly faithful leader.

Charlie built on this when she told of a personal struggle that she had with her weight and taking part in activities: "I remember the obstacle course. It was very hard for me to finish climbing the net because of my weight but I think that it was a good form of exercise because I have an open mind and I try to see a better version of challenges that I face". For her, the camp activities gave her the boost she needed to face her obstacles and to move beyond them. Kirk & Day (2011)

remind us that overnight camps can in fact propel a participant's confidence far beyond their time at camp, into their life at home, school, and in society. How this new found confidence will manifest later in life is difficult to say, but there is no doubt for me that this camp planted some seeds of change in how students saw themselves and their own abilities. I will take this up further in the discussion chapter.

Fun, Friends and Risks

Another aspect of personal development emerged from having fun and making friends through the camp experience. And the social learning from activities stemmed as much from risks as it did from the enjoyment that the students experienced while participating in the activities. Many students began their statements with how much fun the activities were and followed up with what it was that they learned. For example, Casey explained, "I came [to camp] because I knew that it was going to be fun and there would be a lot of kids to play with and lots of activities to do. I remember that we went to the zipline and the water was cold. We did lots of activities, which were fun". Increased learning can be a result of children engaging in extracurricular activities in which they are interested and find fun (Pence & Dymond, 2015).

Casey also went on to describe the friendship that she made with one of the students in her group and how camp and its activities had allowed her to forge a connection with someone that she might not have had the chance to get to know. Cameron too focused on the friendships that he made at the camp, stating, "I remember that it was fun and that things were creative and we met lots of friends". Mike went one step further and talked about how he made new friends: "By talking to them when we were in the groups. We talked a lot, we discussed those things, at school that we do (referring to the projects the leadership council undertakes)". The students in

fact had two groups that they rotated between, their activity groups and their cabin groups.

Before the camp, the students were able to select up to three friends that they wanted to be with in their groups and then we mixed the ages and genders in the activity groups to allow the students to meet a wide range of other campers.

Several students stated that they met friends from different grades that they did not know from the school. When asked, these students told me that if they had not attended the camp, they would not have met these new friends. Mike explained that he made new friends that were in grade seven and although they are all one year older, and the grade sevens have gone off to high school, they are still in touch. The opportunity for younger children to connect with older children provides the younger ones a chance to gain from mentorship and role modeling.

Becoming Brave

Linked very closely to the theme of confidence was the number of times students talked about feeling 'brave'. In fact, bravery was a topic that came up many times throughout the weekend at Hella Hella. For example, Carol made a link between her classroom learning in the past, and how the camp was strengthening this:

Russell: Is there anything you learned from the camp that you are still learning now or you are learning more now?

Carol: To be brave, even in class. If I make a speech and talk in front of the class, the thing I have never even done.

Russell: From the camp you said that you learned to be brave to talk in front of people?
The camp helped you?

Carol: Yes, because they tell us if you are a leader it must be something that you use to be brave. Like maybe they are going to choose me to speak in front of the school but I must learn it.

It was also something I noted in *Blog Entry, Monday, June 13, 2016*:

I led the rafting trip where the kids got to experience paddling for the first time. We began up the river and immediately tested the group by encouraging them to slowly and carefully switch from one boat to the other. They got a kick out of this and did a great job and no one fell in! Our final adventure in the rafts was scoping out the zipline. The daunting cliff where the zipline begins hangs over the river. Zipliners must bravely jump off the rock and swing down over the chilly river below. Before reaching the bank on the other side, you must drop into the water and swim back to shore or hop into the awaiting boat.

Just above I mentioned the word 'bravely'. We discussed being brave in our opening ceremony and it was a task that the kids didn't take lightly. They were brave and bold all weekend long in trying new things and conquering any task thrown their way. All the adults mentioned the bravery witnessed on the weekend and we were very impressed with the students.

Learning with/through Nature

Another major theme was the importance of learning with and through nature. Five of the students discussed in detail the importance of nature in the camp and what they had learned through and about the natural environment. This is very important because the township is not a place that has large amounts of green space yet environmental education scholars remind us there is much power and value in, about, and through nature (e.g. Bratman et al, 2015). It was interesting therefore to note how, upon arrival at the camp, so many students took note of the

surrounding landscape. And one of the small group activities was a nature walk with instructional learning and games built in throughout. One of the students (Cindy D) wrote this about her experience on the nature walk:

We got a chance to explore the nature, how things work in the biodiversity and that information helped us in most of the times in the natural science classes. Going on the camp helped us a lot in many school projects because we used to make use of the things we learnt about on those projects.

Like Cindy D, a number of students in fact made the connection between this informal learning and their formal learning environment. This is important because Slangspruit Primary School students rarely, if ever, have the opportunity to connect their learning from the classroom to outside the classroom. There are simply not the resources available in the fee exempt public school system in South Africa for students to take field trips, engage in extracurricular learning, or even perform experiments in science class. Yet Konantambigi et al (2008) remind us that non-formal education can be way to help students connect more positively with school learning. And throughout the interviews, the students made connections of their experience at Hella Hella to their schoolwork.

Calm and Tranquility

A central aspect from the study about learning in nature was calm and tranquility. Kellert (2005) describes the human need for calm and tranquility and how nature can provide for this. Kellert argues that “participatory involvement in the natural world can also engender feelings of calm, peace of mind, and a sense of timeless and boundless absorption. The greater the involvement, the more likely a person feels alive and attuned” (p. 52). I went through my journal

looking for instances of calm in the township or students' lives but interestingly, I could not find one. However, I did find entries of mine relating to neglect, a lack of respect, water shortages, and abductions. When we arrived at Hella Hella this all changed. A number of the interviewees stated how calm they felt, speaking of a sense of relaxation on, for example, the nature walk. The following is an excerpt from the interviews:

Russell: What activities were new to you that you got to try?

Steve: Looking around on the nature walk.

Russell: Is the camp different than here [at home]?

Steve: Yes.

Russell: What makes it different?

Steve: The river, the zipline, it was quiet.

Russell: Why is it important to have camp?

Steve: So that we can relax our minds and to learn from the activities and to learn about nature.

Also, for Amber, "The nature walk was so relaxing; it was incredible". These references to the natural world are not surprising as the literature continues to support the need and importance of children connecting with nature. Chawla (2015) states, "Natural areas provided opportunities to engage in creative play alone and with friends, set self-paced challenges, find quiet retreats, learn about the environment from direct experience, and form emotional bonds with places and the natural world" (p. 445). Feeling relaxed was a constant theme throughout the interviews and nature was one of the ways the students felt a sense of ease at the camp.

A Break from the Stresses of Being ‘Mature’

Linked closely to the above was the idea of ‘breakage’ from stress. Soon after arriving in South Africa, I noticed the maturity of the students that I was working with at Slangspruit Primary School. Because these children face dangers, obstacles, and responsibilities that I and many Westerners never have to endure, township youth are forced to grow up quickly. This maturity impacted me at different times. For example, I would see it when older siblings would look out for their younger brothers and sisters. I met teenagers and preteens that were partially or fully responsible for heading their households due to absent or deceased parents. At times grandparents are the only adults present in children’s home lives. They play a large role in raising the youth of South Africa as they were not as affected by the AIDS epidemic.

The maturity that I noticed within the participants spread to what I would describe as a type of wisdom that they were afforded due to their upbringing and personal circumstances. The deep appreciation of the natural environment that the children displayed at Hella Hella was a sign of their maturity and experience. The freedom that the camp presented these kids was tangible. You could see it in their eyes, in their smiles, and in their step. They were free from their long list of daily chores, from any pain or suffering presently in their lives, and from the fear of physical violence that so many of them described to me.

The fresh air, clean water, and natural beauty of Hella Hella were captured throughout my interviews with the participants. The children found solace in the natural and community environments, which led to a relaxing and peaceful weekend away. They mentioned that they were able to relax, that they did not feel the normal stresses that they had back in Pietermaritzburg, and that their minds were free.

Several students identified the peaceful nature of the camp and property. They expressed their enjoyment and the ease that they felt while spending the weekend at Hella Hella. Steve mentioned that he learned more at the camp due to his 'relaxed mind'. For example, he found that spending the majority of time outdoors at Hella Hella enhanced his knowledge of the natural world. While Mike stated that the camp schedule was quite busy, it was still relaxing for him to be at camp as everything that we did at camp was enjoyable to him. Cindy D stated that she was thinking more clearly at the camp. She found Hella Hella to be a place where students could relax their minds. She felt that more students should get the opportunity to have a camp experience so they too could realize the benefits of camp, just as she has.

Escape

If the participants told me that they felt relaxed at camp, and were able to take a break, I asked them why and how. Many of them talked about the escape that they felt they had from their chores and responsibilities at home. They could forget about these things briefly, and just be in the moment. Cameron stated that he has lots of chores to do at home, but even though he had to do one meal of all the dishes, it was a welcomed change compared to his responsibilities at home. He was grateful for being able to have a limited number of chores and be able to play soccer immediately following meals when it was not his turn to tidy up. He noted that again, although he plays soccer at home, 'it's special here' when referring to playing soccer at Hella Hella.

Steve told me that it is hard for him to relax his mind at home due to the many priorities that he has there. As previously mentioned, Steve touched on the learning environment that was created at the camp due to the relaxed nature of Hella Hella. But he also compared the chores he

has to do at home versus the chores he had to do at the camp, “But it’s different, it’s not hard at camp. You could do other things, it’s not hard and you can relax your mind”.

Leadership Development

As noted in Chapter Four, the group of students attending the camp at Hella Hella Outdoor Centre were all selected by their teachers to join the Leadership Council. It is not surprising, therefore, that leadership, in many forms, was a key topic of conversation for the students at our weekly meetings. For the purposes of my research, I took up this definition of leadership: “the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for the shared aspirations” (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 30).

In her interview, Carol spoke about what a leader was to her and how she learned more about leadership at the camp. I cannot reiterate the importance of Carol’s comments here as women and girls are often not thought of as leaders, and they are certainly not encouraged to follow that path. I will revisit this in the following chapter within my discussion. One of the main reasons Carol came to camp was “... because I wanted to learn more about being a leader. We learned that a leader is not selfish, is brave, and disciplined.” She then compares learning these traits at camp and how she is able to put them into action with learning them at school – and within the Leadership Council – where the concepts are merely theoretical. Throughout her interview, Carol referred to her interest in sharing her learning with those at school. For example, she stated that she learned about the unselfish nature of leadership from the camp, something that does not come up much at school.

Finally, Charlie reflected on the personal learning that the activities offered, “Camp is important because everyone learns leadership skills and some even find their strengths and

weaknesses through the activities that are done at the camp” – this is about leadership again. These students saw the educational value of the camp and the informal learning that happens outside of the classroom.

Intergenerational Learning

Heydon (2017) describes the benefits of intergenerational learning as, “... the establishment of a ‘sense of continuity’ in fractured lives, an ‘increase in self-esteem and usefulness’, the ‘opportunity for ... lifelong learning at every stage of development’, and the growth of ‘understanding’ between generations that can help to ‘diminish fears’ each generation may have of the other” (p. 36). Several participants, namely the girls, brought up the intergenerational learning they experienced at the camp. There was a memorable moment for so many of us when the principal of the school joined in to play netball on the field at Hella Hella. There is a fair amount of background context that needs to be provided here before I share the children’s experience. Firstly, the principal always supported the idea of an overnight camp, however it was an unknown venture for him as well as the parents and students. He was the only staff member – outside of the sponsor teachers – from the school that made the trek to visit Hella Hella and judging by his reaction upon arrival, the continual lengthening of his stay, and his eagerness to continue the camp in the years ahead, I can confidently say that his visit left a positive influence on him.

A planned few hours for his afternoon visit quickly turned into staying for dinner and returning to Pietermaritzburg in the darkness of night. During the free time block of the Saturday afternoon schedule, many of the students spontaneously began a netball game. Netball is a popular South African sport, especially among girls. I had never heard of netball before arriving

in South Africa, but to explain it in simple terms, it seems to be a combination of handball and basketball. The background of the principal playing netball continues below, after I also weave in issues of gender within athletics.

The Issue of Gender

As alluded to above, gender is ever present and there is probably no other area that expressed itself more than sports. Sport is in fact a very gender divided activity in South Africa, as it is in many parts of the world. While girls must stay home to assist with housework, boys, even in the townships, are able to go out and play sports (Shisana, Rice, Zungu, and Zuma, 2010).

In this area, the boys play football and the girls, netball. If there is only one playing field, the boys usually will not share the space with the girls. It was refreshing to see a few of the boys playing netball with the girls at Hella Hella. Furthermore, there was enough room for multiple games as the field space was immense. The final detail that is needed to understand the significance of the principal playing netball with the students is that he is a stoic man carrying the burdens of over one thousand students within an education system that is drastically underfunded. His daily routine at Slangspruit School does not allow him to take time to play games with the children. And that is where the importance of this camp's intergenerational interaction at Hella Hella comes in.

At one point, a game of netball began and the principal chose to join in. He was so at ease, content, yet competitive too! The students were blown away. Many of them told me that they had never seen him play before. The excitement that many of the girls outwardly showed, resulted in a more upbeat, face-paced game. Charlie explained her experience, "I also liked playing netball with our principal because for the first time ever I saw him happy and smiling

without worrying about the school or how we behave.” Rachel had similar memories about her experience playing netball, “What I remember most about camp is the activities that we did even though I didn’t do the zipline but it was fun to watch people doing it and the most incredible thing is that we had a lot of fun playing netball with the principal.” Sheila and Casey also discussed the enjoyment that they experienced on the Saturday afternoon with the zipline followed by netball.

I now move to Chapter Six where I will discuss the findings from this chapter, relating them to theory and literature found throughout my research.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

The research question I posed for this study was: How did the non-formal overnight camp program impact the learning and the lives of the young participants from Slangspruit, South Africa? After completing the participant interviews, transcribing them, compiling my journal entries and blog posts, I have a solid base in which to answer this question. While it would be possible to remain superficial here and take the interview answers provided and state that the participants clearly enjoyed their time at Hella Hella, had lots of fun, and learned new things from the activities, my aim for this chapter is deeper than that. There were several instances when the students had significant milestone moments where they connected their learning to their society and the world, where they touched on critical elements of their own experience, and where they opened up about topics such as gender, leadership, confidence, among other personal subjects, that can be related to the literature and theory. I take several significant points from my findings and discuss them in detail. Many of these I flagged in the previous chapter as areas I could come back to due to their depth and complexity. The first such finding and one that is multifaceted in nature in my study is the issue of gender. I will discuss this first and continue with the remaining significant findings thereafter.

The Issue of Gender

It is important to return to issues of gender, given the patriarchal context of our world. It is also important to note that critical theory and pedagogy, in and of themselves, have fallen short on issues of gender as many feminists have suggested (e.g. Diko, 2014). Yet gender and gender

roles are present in our society, span across countries and continents, cultures, races, and language groups and of course, emerged in this study.

Rispel and Popay (2009) describe the impact of gender disparity in impoverished communities in South Africa and the effect of poverty reduction strategies, “if poverty reduction strategies result in a situation where gender disparities are aggravated rather than reduced, it is quite likely that the epidemic will not be curbed. For example, if poverty reduction strategies aimed at income generation, consciously or not, target men at the exclusion of women, the economic and political powerlessness of women is likely to be enhanced” (p. 97). While I was not directly working within a poverty reduction strategy methodology, Rispel & Popay’s research can easily be transferred to youth empowerment and the role that gender plays in working with youth. Throughout the interviews, the participants brought up these same issues. Our patriarchal world places males in one role and females in another. Any deviation of the expected behaviours for each role is often met with resistance in our society.

At Hella Hella the girls spoke up about gender. The boys showed signs of acknowledgement but the girls were more aware and energized. From a critical feminist approach, males do not need to contemplate gender roles as they are in a position of dominance in our world. However, on the other hand, females must and already do know their role in society due to the oppression they face as a gender. It was reassuring to hear that participants brought up issues of gender around athletics, domestic duties, and leadership. Each of these areas have specific expectations of boys and girls and the girls were challenging them!

Historically speaking, females are not generally seen as leaders, when compared to their male counterparts (van der Linden, 2015). Therefore, and this was present in the township, the ‘natural’ [read patriarchal] tendency is for girls not to be placed in leadership positions. This was

turned upside down at Hella Hella where we tried to ensure that every child, every group, was given equal opportunities. As Diko (2014) discusses, greater gender equality is the hope of the post-Apartheid South Africa and it “is pursued through the constitution, the establishment of a Commission on Gender Equality, the gender policy framework and the various strategies and policies in particular departments, and the establishment of the Department of Women, Children and Persons with Disabilities” (p. 826). This awakening at Hella Hella occurred when the girls began to realize that they are capable of so much more than they thought and so much more than they were told. Non-formal education plays an integral role in bridging the gaps in gender inequality, where in a camp setting, participants learn to critically analyze their learning, their roles, and their ability to become leaders in our world.

And yet while we gave the girls and boys equal opportunities, this unraveled in the kitchen. The aunties who came with us from the school did all of the meal preparation. Therefore, without even thinking and with no consideration, we were supporting the gender role stereotype present in our world. We did try to ensure more gender equality intentionally and fairness in the kitchen by having each cabin group responsible for fully cleaning up one meal over the weekend. Each cabin group was either all male or all female. Yet also problematic was that if the cleanup groups were mixed gender – which at times they were after a snack or for the first or last meal of the weekend which did not have a group scheduled, the boys would end up disappearing and the girls will be left with the dirty burden. We thought we had this taken care of but the boys still tried to convince the girls to assist them when it was the male’s turn to clean up. Our persistence to ensure everyone took their turn was welcomed by the girls as we disallowed their presence in the kitchen on the days that the boys were in charge. Conversations around this gender education took place as well as role modeling from the adults present. For example, I

ensured I was present for dish duty when it was my cabin's turn and I also assisted on other occasions when a female cabin was in charge of clean up. This led to some males also coming to help when it was not their turn and a better understanding of gender equality that we expect not only at the camp but in the community at home as well.

Food

I began the previous chapter with a discussion of food and I return to it again in this section. As I noted, one comment in the participant journals that referred to the quality and quantity of the food caught me so totally off-guard. It was when Charlie made mention of the food being like a 'five star hotel'. The complexity of this comment, coming from an impoverished child, is significant. This child likely has never seen a five star hotel through her own eyes. She may never see one, or if she does, it would likely be from afar, not as a hotel guest. Was providing such an array of food – one that could be considered 'five star' to impoverished children – of benefit or detriment to the participants? While there is extremely limited literature on this specific topic, Rusting & DeHart (2000) suggest that a positive experience for a person can benefit that person in the future when they are struggling with a negative mood. Finishing at the camp, many of the participants would go home to basic food, some even to hunger, after eating like 'royalty' at Hella Hella. Food security is one of the largest concerns for the youth of Slangspruit. It is estimated that 800 million people go hungry, around the world, every day (Serageldin, 2002). A break from the uncertainty or monotony that food brings in this community is more than welcomed, it is celebrated. The memory of the food from Hella Hella is likely one that the children will cherish for a long time.

The Importance of Confidence

Throughout the interview process, the children alluded to growth and activities where they felt they gained confidence. Enough, therefore, cannot be said in terms of how important it is that non-formal education is highlighted in the many unique ways it was done. Many children in South Africa lack confidence which is of course attributed to a number of circumstances. Poverty and race are two factors that I believe play a large role in the children's initial lack of confidence, although as noted above gender is equally part of this. But poverty and racial discrimination affect South African children's ability to believe in themselves and accomplish goals that they have for their future (Humble & Dixon, 2017). Moreover, the media, and its maintenance of derogatory cultural beliefs, also work to drain these children of any confidence they may have as they see on television and hear in the community that they are lesser than other children and other groups of people (Mutman, 2013). The problem of low self-confidence is perpetuated with generations of this confidence abuse – from the Apartheid government, to Western media underrepresenting minority groups, to the children being told they are incapable at school, as they are not given the support needed to succeed in the classroom.

To hear that many of the participants felt that they 'could' rather than 'could not' accomplish, for example, the zipline and then what that did for their confidence is one of the reasons that camps exist. Camps exist to foster connection and community yet the secondary benefits of a place like Hella Hella, such as building the participant's confidence could be more important in the long run for each individual child.

There is ample literature on this topic, weaving confidence, non-formal education, and critical pedagogy together. Breunig (2005) simply describes how adding an experience complements formal learning. This is built upon by Humble and Dixon (2017) where, "Students'

personal belief about their own capacity and self-esteem have been shown to impact greatly on motivation and hence learning in school” (p. 95). The connection between confidence and the diverse educational activities at Hella Hella is important; trying new activities and finding success within those activities, students were able to build their confidence.

The Importance of Risk

Throughout my research, both in the interviews and in the autoethnography, risk was an integral and commonly discussed part of the participants’ experience at Hella Hella. I have not found that taking risks and choosing to be vulnerable are often studied in critical pedagogy and non-formal education. Of course there is a difference between risk taking as risky behaviour and risk taking as taking a chance. Much of the literature on risk within non-formal education seems to focus on risky behaviours (e.g. Gordon, 2000), whereas my study looks at risk in a more positive light, more like critical pedagogy, where taking risks means taking chances to grow personally but also collectively. My study brings a focus to the importance of taking risks within non-formal education, especially the skills and confidence things like the zipline gave to these children. It highlights the need for youth, including underprivileged youth, to have the opportunity to challenge themselves through outdoor activities in a semi-structured environment. It brings about a conversation around being vulnerable, taking chances, and the rewards that a small amount of risk can bring to a child who, for example, finds the courage to take part in one of the adventure activities at Hella Hella.

The risk taking did not end with the children. Organizing the camp was a risk – especially with the funds required to rent Hella Hella, purchase the food, and arrange the bus transportation. This financial risk, along with the risk of the participants, teachers, or community not welcoming

the camp, were two of the risks that I had to take with my colleagues. These were risks that, looking back, were all vital to the smooth operation of the camp and its resounding success. The camp and the growth that the participants experienced – through taking risks – also extended to myself and likely to the other adults in attendance.

Honing Leadership

Leadership was a central theme and talking point with the children before, during, and after the weekend at Hella Hella Outdoor Centre. The conversation began before the camp was even an idea when my colleague and I worked with two Slangspruit School teachers to form the Leadership Council. The group of fifty students brought the theme of leadership to the forefront as they identified leadership opportunities at their school and in their community, and that momentum continued into the camp at Hella Hella. Throughout every one of my interviews and in the participant journals, leadership was a topic of interest to the students.

Empowerment and growing leadership skills are common themes throughout non-formal education literature (Etling, 1994). However, as I noted in Chapter Two, many of the most influential scholars in the subject area have outdated work from the 1970's and 1980's. My study and the literature on creating leadership skills within non-formal education programs have some parallels. Firstly, when discussing the topic of leadership at Hella Hella, the adults present not only engaged the participants in conversations about leadership, but also actively role-modelled leadership styles that are current and desired. For example, creating a space for the children to lead to encourage a flat rather than top down approach to the weekend at Hella Hella. In her work, van der Linden (2015) presents the importance of leadership within the community and this is modelled by 'trainers' within the community that lead workshops – for women – in

Uganda. Konantambigi et al (2008) provide an even more comparable example in their camp study in India. The participants were given tours of local buildings, workplaces, and they were exposed to places they would not otherwise have had the opportunity to experience. The goal of this program was to build confidence and leadership skills for the participants, just like the goal at Hella Hella.

Another similarity between non-formal education literature on leadership and my findings takes a different approach than the above example. While mentorship and role-modelling are key for participants to develop skills within non-formal programs, another way in which participants develop their leadership skills is as the term indicates, non-formally (Coombs, 1976). We scheduled some unstructured time at Hella Hella but we quickly learned that the participants wanted more time than we allotted. This unstructured time gave way to spontaneous activities such as a netball game with the principal where comments about gender equality and females in sport arose. Coombs (1976) captures the importance of unstructured learning with non-formal education programs, “There is no designated ‘teacher’ or ‘discussion leader’, just ordinary villagers learning together and teaching each other. The professional teachers are at the other end of the circuit” (p. 290). Leadership skills are taught and acquired throughout non-formal education programs intentionally and unintentionally, from teachers and participants, benefiting all of those in attendance.

Why the Camp was Critical Pedagogy

As discussed in Chapter Two, critical pedagogy is one of several theoretical platforms for this study. But what makes this study critical? And why is that important? Firstly, critical pedagogy occurs in the qualitative study portion – where the camp participants are the focus – of

my research and the autoethnographic portion, where I reflect on my learning as a non-formal educator. My aim of this study was to take evidence of the learning of the participants and deconstruct and analyze it, looking for critical elements of the learning. The students do not know what critical pedagogy is, so it was my job to identify critical aspects of their interviews and relate them to theories such as critical pedagogy. Throughout the interviews I found, time and time again, that the students thought deeply and critically about their camp experience and the themes throughout my thesis demonstrate this.

The aim of critical pedagogy is to reach beyond the surface of an educational experience to challenge societal beliefs (Farrow, 2017). Within the realm of critical pedagogy, emancipation and agency were present within the camp participants throughout the weekend at Hella Hella and then highlighted again in the interviews where the children acknowledged and elaborated on their critical learning. Several emancipatory themes were shared with me by the participants, such as building self-confidence through skill development, and leadership development where many female participants felt empowered to display and cultivate their own leadership abilities.

Simply put, Jónsdóttir and Gunnarsdóttir (2017) describe agency as, “the control individuals have of their actions and lives” (p. 29). Hella Hella empowered the participants to believe in themselves – their dreams, hopes, and wishes for the world, sending those students back to Slangspruit with an energy they may not have known they had within themselves. This energy and excitement came up throughout the interview responses. Furthermore, Shor (1992) includes experiences, processes, events, and subject matter as areas where understanding of meaning take place within critical pedagogy. Whether it be an organized program that was arranged for the camp – such as the writing workshop or nature walk – or an impromptu game of

netball with the principal, the students responded to interview questions about these activities with a sense of agency that I never saw when I was working at the school or in the community.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions and Recommendations

Writing this thesis has been an overwhelmingly rewarding process for me as an educator, learner, and globally-minded individual. As an educator, this study gave me a reason to ask questions that I have always wanted to ask participants of the programs that I have worked with. Furthermore, it has given me motivation and some specific understanding that I need to better serve the population that I am still connected with even though my position with Ukulapha has finished. As a learner, writing this thesis helped me to understand and make sense of some of the questions that I had while working with the participants at Hella Hella. For example, did this camp experience make a difference to these children? Should Ukulapha keep offering programs like this after I leave Pietermaritzburg? I can now more confidently answer these questions. And finally, this thesis helped me immensely to make sense of my experience living and working in South Africa. As a foreigner, coming from a place of privilege, I had a lot to learn. On the ground in 2016 while I was in Pietermaritzburg, I was learning everywhere I went. However I found that when I returned home to Canada, I was left with unresolved issues and questions. This thesis helped me to face these issues and questions and make sense of them.

From the start of my time as a Youth Development Worker with Ukulapha, I wondered if a camp experience would serve the children of Slangspruit to promote learning and growth for those who attended. Camps are a largely North American concept and it was both the students and teachers that ventured into the unknown when agreeing to the idea of holding a camp at Hella Hella. Was this going to be a beneficial experience for all in attendance or was it just me extending what I know and love from my life at home? Interviewing the participants showed me that this was a worthwhile venture. Now that I am back living in Canada, I recognize the value of

continuing programs like this. The teachers with whom I worked have the knowledge and tools to continue organizing camps and non-formal education programs into the future. Writing this thesis helped me understand what matters the most to the participants. For example, as noted earlier, food is a vital component and must be considered from the moment the program begins to after the program ends. But most of all, it showed me that children, no matter what country they are from, what socio-economic background they are brought up in, they all want/need/deserve the same things – safety, fun, a place to be curious, and a place where they feel they belong.

Throughout this writing process, I learned about myself. Centering my thesis on the participants' camp experience motivated me to keep writing, even on days when I had very little drive to carry on. I am reassured that I am more engaged in an activity or project if the end result is not something that I solely gain from but something that a community of people gains from. This is what kept me motivated to finish my thesis.

When I returned home from South Africa at the end of July in 2016, I went down a path I had never experienced before. After a few months of being home – when the honeymoon period of visiting with family and friends ended – I quickly encountered reverse culture shock unlike anything I had ever experienced. There were days I could not get out of bed. I was disenfranchised with the western world and our individualistic culture. Writing this thesis was one of my outlets, a way to stay engaged in this life that had transformed me as a learner, educator, and global-minded individual. When I began this thesis, I was still struggling to make sense of my experience. Now that I am finished my thesis, I have made peace with the two very different worlds I was torn between.

Recommendations

As a result of this study, I want to make five recommendations to propose for future research. While I did discover sufficient information about the participants' experience, there are avenues of research that could be explored to enhance the data and further the study. The most practical of these and my first recommendation is to do a follow up study on the same participants several years from now, perhaps at the end of high school. With a similar intent to my study, I propose to explore the implications of the camp experience after several years away from the camp, rather than just one year as I have completed here. This study could be taken one step further by interviewing students that I did not interview and see if they provide similar responses or different ones due to never having been interviewed previously.

Similar to the recommendation above, another pathway to exploring the impact of a camp experience on South African youth would be to research a population of high school youth that attend a camp program. It could be interesting and of value for South African society to compare and contrast a study of South African high school youth that participated in a camp in the past, for example at Hella Hella with Ukulapha. Should a camp experience be emphasized due to its significance in a child's life? High school students may be more articulate in their responses and opinions of their experience and better able to fully describe and discuss what the camp meant to them. This leads me to my third recommendation that is for a South African researcher to perform a similar study to this one and interview the participants in isi-Zulu. This would give the students a better opportunity to fully express themselves. At times during my interviews, the students gave shortened answers and I would ask them to elaborate. Communication in a person's first language, especially during an interview, would benefit the interviewee – and in

turn, the interviewer – to allow them to fully articulate their responses in a language that they are most comfortable using.

My fourth recommendation is to hold the camp for a substantially longer period of time and look into its impact on the campers. Would the participants that attend a camp for one or two weeks, for example, have different responses to the same interview questions or would they be similar? The goals of the camp could be different and topics explored in much more detail. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they would like to see the camp held for a longer period of time. I am interested to know if holding the camp for a longer time would change the outcomes or did the participants just want a longer camp because they were enjoying themselves?

My final recommendation is to study a similar group of children in a different South African province, for example. This would be of interest to see if the themes and findings are similar to what I found in Pietermaritzburg. This could be taken further to another country or slightly different socio-economic background of the participants. And the purpose of looking to another province or country? To look for similarities and differences in participant outcomes between countries, for example.

Next Steps for Me

In the past two years, I have spent seven months in South Africa. Six months of this time was for my internship with Ukulapha and the one additional month was to return one year later to interview participants for my thesis. The kids at Slangspruit Primary School, and many more that have now gone on to high school, are a part of me and their future is of utmost importance to me. I feel privileged to have spent time and connected with the local community in Slangspruit

Township. Having established this connection gives me the opportunity to stay involved in the lives of the children and continue to provide opportunities for their growth and development.

When I returned to interview ten of the participants in South Africa in 2017, we ran a second camp. This camp was at a new location but was structured similarly to the camp at Hella Hella. In choosing to lead another camp, I made a commitment to myself – and indirectly to the children of Slangspruit Primary School – that we would aim to hold one non-formal program per year into the future. At this point, we have talked about holding camp every two years and a different program in the off years. This different program could be a field trip, event, or any other type of non-formal education experience that is hopefully new and full of learning and memories for the participants. This year we are planning for the Leadership Council to go to the Drakensberg region of South Africa, an area with beautiful mountains, wildlife roaming freely, and rugged, steep cliffs. There is a famous school there called the Drakensberg Boys Choir School where students from grade four to nine perform weekly concerts to practice for larger international events. Recently I received confirmation that the Drakensberg Boys Choir School would be able to give us a substantial discount for the Leadership Council to attend a concert. We will build our 2018 leadership outing around this experience. At the moment, I am also looking into the possibility of a guided hike through the Drakensberg Mountains.

In order to sustain the program and these annual trips, there are two groups of people we need to continue supporting us. The first is on the ground support from the teachers, principal, and staff such as the aunties from Slangspruit Primary School, as well as other community members that we have engaged. The other factor is the funders. So far all of the funding has come from online fundraisers, with the majority of funds being raised in Canada and the remainder being from the odd overseas donation from friends and family. For the time being, this

model is sustainable, as I have kept the generous donors informed about the programs that they are supporting. Engagement of the donors is key as it allows them to stay in touch and involved in their donations. I have every reason to believe that we will be able to maintain an annual outing for the Leadership Council at Slangspruit Primary School.

Final Thoughts

I chose my thesis topic with the children of Slangspruit Township in mind. In a way it was an avenue for me to honour them – to thank the students for having me and welcoming me to their school and country – in another way, it was my chance to give a voice to one that is most often silent. Our weekend away at Hella Hella did leave a mark on the participants as I experienced firsthand and one year later in the interviews. The themes that I uncovered in my research are unique to Slangspruit Township. From the literature that I have read about camps, youth, nature, non-formal education, and other relevant topics, the themes in my study are different. The children's appetite for learning, attention to the food, and sense of peace that they found while attending the weekend at Hella Hella are specific to an impoverished African context, one that is under researched and often not considered.

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