Exploring Metaphors, Semiotics and Symbols in Outdoor Adventure Pedagogy:
A reflection on method

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This paper explores an ethnographic study using participative enquiry as a method. The purpose of the case study was to consider the role of narrative as a pedagogic devise in outdoor adventure courses. Recent discussions of the use of metaphor, semiotic devises and symbolic devises in outdoor adventure education are reviewed. The case study that set out to explore the role of the hero's journey meta-narrative as a symbolic pedagogic device is then summarised. The discussion considers the benefits and ethical matters that arose from reflection on the approach.

Metaphor, semiotics and symbol

I am not the first in our field to make connections between outdoor adventure experiences and the meaning and value embedded in certain personal and social narratives of the world. Bacon (1983) saw Outward Bound as a metaphor for life in which individuals could reconcile their personal potential with social roles in the community and at work. Priest and Gass (1997) recognised the way in which our minds comprehend our experience in rich, metaphoric and many layered processes. They developed activities and a facilitation style (Gass, 1995) aimed at enhancing the transfer of learning from experiential education programmes to other contexts. Metaphor is understood by these authors as a devise for making sense of one experience in the context of another. Bacon and Gass offer a form of practice in which much of the meaning can be embedded by the facilitator in the developmental experience as a metaphor. This metaphor acts as a reflection for what has been determined by the client or, often, other interested parties as the story in everyday home, community or working life. The role of the participants is to see the connections and decide on their responses in a way that takes the story forward.

Pinkard (1996) questions the apparent directive style of this approach and highlights the potential of metaphor in outdoor adventure experiences to be emergent. He suggests that both the story itself and the meaning it has can be created by the participants or co-created with the facilitator. In his view this applies to both the everyday context and the metaphors reflecting that context in the outdoor adventure world.

Hodgkin (1976) understood ideas of adventure, outdoor tasks and features of the landscape as objects that he called semiotic devises. He thought that the offering of such devises was the central role of the educator during the teenage and adult years of the student. By a semiotic devise he meant an object, part metaphor, part symbol, abstract or concrete, that seemed mysterious but intriguing to the student. The teacher, he believed, should follow this interest by accompanying the students in order to help them make their own sense of the object. The titles of his books, 'Born Curious' and 'Playing and Exploring', indicate the student centred and naturalistic approach he proposed for this process. Like Bacon and Gass, Hodgkin thought the teacher chose the object of the

lesson. However, rather like Pinkard, he believed in the importance of the meaning of the object as constructed by the student. As well as an Oxford professor, Hodgkin was a head teacher and a mountain guide and some of the examples in the books are drawn from outdoor education.

Mathur (2002) and I (Loynes, 2002) recently explored Hodgkin's idea of the semiotic devise in what we called generative forms of outdoor education. We understood the student as a creative agent constructing and interpreting an experience. We proposed a link between the modernist project of the construction of the self by the individual and the preference of some outdoor adventure 'teachers' and 'students' for story making, as modelled by Hodgkin, rather than story telling, as Pinkard interprets Gass.

Phipps (1985) recognised Jungian archetypes embedded in outdoor adventure education. In particular he drew attention to the hero, the child, the journey, the anima and the animus as archetypes that have relevance to participants. Maddern (1990) and Gair (1988) wrote about the outdoor journey as a rite of passage from their first hand experience of outdoor work with teenagers. Schoel et al (1988) called this time and space an island and recognised the potential of the experience for healing in the title of their book 'Islands of Healing'. Gillis (1998) explored an interpretation of the American Dorothy story to highlight the elements of therapy through adventure. These explanations of some of the processes of outdoor adventure education draw on an understanding of the experience as symbol. In a psychological sense symbol is thought of as a devise that has meaning at both conscious and unconscious levels. As such it can act as a conduit between the two enabling such things as growth, resolution or healing. The narratives that outline or recall the experiences of the leader, the participant or both, are, Phipps suggests, part of the symbolism along with the landscape and the characters.

Designing the case study

Phipps, Gair and Maddern are all suggesting that these narratives explore matters of identity, values and role. I have written elsewhere (Loynes, 1999) that one such narrative that can be used to interpret outdoor adventures is the Hero's Journey of Campbell (1968). I set out to find out what would happen if I used the model of the Hero's Journey as a construct for designing and interpreting an outdoor adventure course. My plan was to construct an outdoor adventure experience using Campbell's model, offer the experience intentionally as a symbolic and semiotic devise to a client and to document what occurred as a result. The subject of my research was therefore two related groups, the designers/facilitators of the experience and the participants in the experience. The first task was to find a group.

I had been working with a management team as part of a longer training programme and provided the experience at their request. The group were not what I would have initially chosen as they were adults and not young people. I had thought to address the 'rite of passage' issue for males at 19 years of age identified by Maddern (2000). On pragmatic grounds I decided to proceed imagining that this would be a pilot and that I would run other courses as my actual fieldwork. Indeed I have run and researched other courses both

for colleagues and for young people including single sex, both male and female, and mixed groups. However, this first course generated the most interesting material and so I have kept it as the case study for this paper. The purpose of the training aspect of the event was to support the managers in resolving issues related to conflicts between their home and working lives.

I designed the research project as a qualitative, interpretative study using a participative enquiry method based on the practice of Reason (1994). As I would be involving the other facilitators working with me to run the course in it's design it made sense to invite them to be both the subjects of and co-researchers into the project. I chose both colleagues because they had adventure and drama backgrounds and were capable of acting as 'teachers in role' (Bolton, 1999). This idea, from the world of drama in education, describes the task of both holding a piece of drama as director/teacher whilst at the same time taking a role in the drama. It involves the ideas of being both roles at once and the ability to move from one role to the other. I had anticipated that it would be hard for one facilitator to represent in the minds of the participants all the archetypal characters involved in a hero's journey. Even with the help of the landscape standing in for some of these it was, I thought, likely to be complicated for the delegates and difficult for me to interpret. It would be doubly complicated if the facilitator was also a researcher. By having more staff and by designating their roles within the context of the journey I could provide more opportunities for projection. At the same time I had people skilled at holding more than one role at once and moving between roles to act as the collectors of the data.

Projection is a concept that describes a phenomenon that occurs in groups. Ringer (2002) defines it as

> '..a process by which an individual reduces his or her anxiety by unconsciously disowning a part of him or herself and imagining that the unwanted feeling or characteristic belongs to someone else.'
>
> <div align="right">p. 134</div>

If the hero's journey were to work as a symbolic tool then aspects of the conscious and unconscious workings of the participants' minds would be projected onto the 'other'. The 'others' in our case would, we thought, be other participants, the facilitators and the landscape. As we would be working with this idea in the role of facilitator we decided to look out for this phenomenon in our roles as researchers. It would, we considered, be a valuable source of data especially when the projections were felt by us. All three facilitators were also familiar with this concept in group work and skilled at interpreting it.

One question we considered at length was whether or not to include the participants. This question operated at two levels. We wondered about including them in the hero's journey construct of their outdoor adventure. We also wondered whether to involve them as researchers into their own experience of this journey. Of course we had asked their permission to research the course. We were considering whether to include them in our

participative enquiry. If we asked them to be researchers we could not exclude them from the construct we were researching. We considered the gains and losses of both approaches. In the end it was the ethics of the facilitator role that decided it. We felt that performing an undisclosed role with the group would be sensed by the group and might cause friction that would interfere with our training purpose. For the sake of the best training outcome we could provide we decided to let the participants in on the idea of the hero's journey and to invite them to become co-researchers with us into their own experience of the course as a hero's journey.

Myth as a symbolic structure for outdoor adventures: the case study

We had used the archetypal hero's journey of Campbell as a structure for the course. This structure was used to introduce the participants to the idea of the hero's journey and to the stages of the real journey they made over two days along the base of the Pembrokeshire cliffs. The links made by the co-researchers between the stages of the model and the real journey are shown in table 1. A discussion of these results can be found in Loynes (2003).

In my introduction I suggested that outdoor adventures can be understood as metaphors, semiotic devises or symbols and that these understandings have pedagogic value. The first part of this discussion will consider to what degree the case study found any of these processes at work and what might be the nature of that work. No real names are used in the accounts that follow.

Metaphor

John was the team leader of the group. He seemed to us very keen to lead by example taking the proposals we offered for each session with enthusiasm. On the first day one of the sessions set out to explore the role of trust between the companions whilst on the journey. Activities gave them a chance to trust and be trusted in classical outdoor adventure ways through physical challenges in which the participants rely on others to keep them safe. John became absorbed in a blindfold task. The one female manager in the team was leading him around and over rocks. Afterwards he immediately disclosed to the team that he had discovered one enemy on the quest, his previously unrecognised lack of trust in his team members. He also acknowledged that he thought this was especially so with regard to women at work. He described in detail how the blindfold challenge had revealed this to him and how he wanted to place himself in a position of dependency on his colleagues as often as possible on the journey. Some team members commented aside to the facilitators that this was not new to them but it was great to see him name it for himself.

At the end of day two he added to his narrative of trust. He described how he had found the journey not particularly challenging. Nevertheless he claimed that one experience had been the biggest challenge of his life, sharing a dormitory with other people. He revealed how he had no memory of sharing a bedroom with anyone else other than his wife throughout his life. He commented that this had been one of the biggest challenges he had

ever encountered and that he thought it had been the reason he was thinking about trust when he set out on the journey.

This trust narrative contains three metaphoric links from the work place to the dormitory and then on to the cliffs. The connections were consciously made and the disclosure was unsolicited. The context provided an opportunity for the theme to emerge. As Priest and Gass theorise transfer from one context was established at a cognitive level to another context. As Pinkard proposes the subject of the metaphor emerged from the structure of the activity, the course aims and the hero narrative as the participant sought to make meaning of the events.

An element of a symbolic form appears in the last part of the story as John begins to reveal links to being alone as a child and the origins of the demands he places on himself to be in control and to be independent. These were not explored, as it was not part of the remit to provide this level of conversation with the client.

Semiotic devises
Steve worried all the facilitators. He had an intense and troubled manner that alerted all of us to the possibility of an issue from outside the course being transferred in to the course. In his case the consequence of this transfer was held internally but nevertheless affected the quality of his relations with everyone.

When we reached the cave at the end of the second day it was dramatic. A tight crawl into the back of the cave brought us on to a ledge above the main passage. It was possible to drop down on to a pebble beach on which three or four seal pups were hauled out. The big sea outside entered the cave rhythmically. Each wave filled the entrance completely with a wall of water back lit to a deep aquamarine by the light outside. The cave went dark and the air trapped by the wave rushed passed us squeezing out the narrow rear passages we had crawled through. The roar of the water rushing towards us filled the mind. Then it broke seemingly on top of us to roll harmlessly up the pebbles to our feet as froth and spume.

Steve, along with everyone else, was awe struck. We had to encourage everyone to leave. Steve would not until the very last minute possible on the rising tide.

He was the first to speak that night when we asked for people to tell us about their day. He described how he was an ex-marine chasing drug dealers in the Caribbean. On leaving the army he had taken this job. Despite flying round half the world he found it boring. He had married and was a father and he found this boring and a trap. His employers were aware he was not entirely happy. They had offered him a more settled position thinking it would help with the family. Steve described to us how this only made things worse in his mind. He told us how, just before the course, he had told his wife (but not the team leader) that he was going to resign, leave the family and sign up with a mercenary force.

He then described how seeing the seal pups had made him think of his children. The idea of the hero had been on his mind and he found himself considering the life of the adult

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seals taking care of these pups. He decided that he was not bored by family life but scared by it. He went on to explain that he now saw the role of father as heroic and that this had changed his attitude to the challenge of the family. He told how, as soon as he could construct the role of the father as hero he couldn't wait to return to his family to tell them he was staying with them and taking the job.

Several elements of the journey, and the seal pups in particular, worked on Steve as metaphors. However, the idea of the hero and the course as a hero's journey is best interpreted as a semiotic devise. Steve was familiar with it, mostly through the linking concept of the hero, challenged by it when it did not meet his expectations and finally intrigued by it enough to seek new interpretations that had relevance in his world.

As for John the story touches on symbolism too: the womb like qualities of the cave and the need to be heroic in his particular way for example. As for John these were not explored. Facilitation remained with the here and now. Steve did all the things he claimed he would.

Symbol
Malcolm was a middle manager. He described himself as getting close to the age at which he could retire early and that he was beginning to be a bit uncertain about it. However, he was also getting tired of all the flying around and living in hotels his job involved. He was a family man. His worry, as he put it, was that his 'slowing down' was showing and that rather than '… jumping of my own free will I might be pushed'. He was determined, he said, to look fully committed over the course.

During the second day he approached me to explain how he was feeling. He described how he has '… always been afraid of moving water. I can swim well. I do long distances in the pool. I just don't like waves and rapids.' The sea state was rough and waves were crashing against the cliffs a few feet from us. Earlier he recalled how we had been cut off by the tide for a while and how this had brought it all back. He wondered if it was a projection. I said that I thought it might be a projection and that it might be something to do with control. I asked him what he thought. He said that '… whatever it is I'd like to face it.' This we did some while later by traversing an exposed ledge together above a big sea and sitting amongst the breaking waves on a rock until he was ready to return. At the time he thanked me. Later that day he explained to the group the story and how he now felt '…. a great deal better.' Subsequently he has reported that his colleagues tell him that he is much more assertive, positive and decisive and that '…. what ever it is, facing that wave is what did it.'

Summary
The discussions of the participants and the facilitators concluded that the hero narrative had provided opportunities to work metaphorically, semiotically and symbolically. Each had provided a pedagogic service that was chosen by the participants, explored in action and conversation and led to transfers of attitude, belief and behaviour. Furthermore, both groups concluded that the decision to conduct the research in a participative way and to

reveal the hero meta-narrative had contributed to the level of benefit that was being reported.

Discussion
The ethics of the staff team led us to choose a participative enquiry approach. This choice had ontological, epistemological and methodological consequences.

The worldview of the researcher must adopt the worldview of the facilitation team and the participants. As a researcher facilitator my worldview had to adopt certain beliefs that were congruent with the research method and the facilitation style. These included:

- The need to work authentically, that is to believe in the value of the hero's journey narrative as a pedagogic devise and in the outdoor adventure context as a way to explore this. This might challenge any attempt as researcher to criticise this approach.
- A belief in the learner centred approach: that the narrative of the participant is an expression of their truth about their experience. This involves taking an interpretative stance and all that this implies.
- A constructivist view of the research and of the pedagogic approach.
- A radical approach to research that accepts that the enquiry not only changes the subject but that it seeks to change the subject as an outcome of involving the subject.

This synchronicity between the research method and the task of facilitation is seen as a strength by other researchers (Hart, 2002; Reason, 1988). Both authors consider that this is especially so in the context of education and research into education when the form of education is constructivist (Seyfried, 2002) and radical (Hart, 2002).

One problem the facilitators considered is the dilemma of a critical position when the researcher is engaged in the worldview of the facilitator and the participant. Reason (1994) discusses how it is important to treat the narratives of the participant researchers uncritically as their truths. In discussion the facilitator researchers thought that this was an issue for facilitators as well as researchers. We found that each of us as facilitators valued challenging worldviews and that we understood our role as development trainers to work in this way. We also understood the importance of establishing this way of working openly with the client before beginning the journey.

On reflection our approach was to treat with respect the emerging narratives, physical, emotional and social, as expressed through the journey. However, part of our way of showing respect was to question and challenge the narratives when we felt, at the facilitator level, that the story being told was not congruent with what was being experienced. In some way we were seeking congruence between physical, emotional and conceptual knowledges of the experience and an internal (to the facilitator) projected knowledge of the truthfulness of each participants understanding matched against their verbal and non-verbal story.

One question that is frequently asked of narrative enquiry is on what criteria its rigour can be judged. Hart (2002) explores this in the context of a participative, narrative enquiry

into environmental education. By giving pre-eminence to our ethics as facilitators certain criteria became essential to us as researchers in order to maintain congruence. These were:

- A collaborative approach that values the participant's knowledge and story as much as those of the facilitators and the researcher;
- A collective approach that questioned assertions and beliefs both for educational and research purposes;
- An approach that treated the educational outcomes for the participants as of as much value as the research outcomes;
- A collective quest for authenticity;
- An approach that understood the contextual, partial and provisional nature of the conclusions;
- An approach that provided insight that informed the practice of the facilitators involved through the experience of the case study and the outcomes of the research.

These criteria allowed us to challenge themes that were relevant as both facilitator and researcher. For example, one aim of the study had been to explore the particular understanding of the hero embedded in our course and in the minds of the participants. As it turned out the participants began to question their concepts of themselves as heroes for us. The macho hero, the hero in control and the independent hero were all questioned and transformed in the three examples given above.

It is important to recognise that these criteria emerged through the conversations held by the facilitators and participants and have been defined in hindsight. As Hart points out ethics emerge through contextual interaction between people. As such the central ethic from which to start, and fortunately we held as development trainers, is to work explicitly with our process and to treat each voice as having equal but not necessarily the same value. This value base allowed us to evolve an ethical framework as we worked and with which everyone was happy. This approach leads to benefits and constraints for the researcher. So long as the researcher is not stuck with pre-determined questions and frameworks for thinking about them it simply remains for the researcher to draw out these benefits and acknowledge the constraints.

In this example the distinction between metaphor, semiotics and symbols only emerged because we engaged the participants as researchers into their own experience. Without their detailed narratives the interpretation of the events would have remained the stories of the facilitators and the researcher would have remained focussed on symbol alone. The concern about a lack of criticality proved unfounded once it was opened up for discussion. However, Because the hero's journey was made an explicit framework of the course, it has not provided the researcher with an opportunity to make comparisons between this course and other outdoor adventure courses in which the hero narrative may be implicit.

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