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Exploring challenge by choice in an adventure setting

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ABSTRACT

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Since its inception, Challenge by Choice (CBC) has been regarded as a foundational principle and standard operating procedure for challenge ropes course programs. Although CBC is the primary mechanism for facilitating intended ropes course outcomes and widely accepted in the adventure education field, until recently, it had remained an untested assumption.

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of challenge by choice (CBC) in an adventure setting. Specifically, how was CBC understood and enacted, and did it appear to play a role in participants' involvement? Further, this study was guided by four specific sub-problems. First, what was the instructor's view of CBC and in what manner did he share that view with participants verbally, and through activities? Second, what were participants' understanding (comprehension, approval, and degree of importance) of CBC, and was this understanding related to their involvement? Third, were activities designed and presented as outlined in the CBC literature, and was this related to participants' involvement? Finally, did non-CBC factors (e.g., classmates, weather, and personal events/issues external to the course) have a bearing on participants' involvement?

This study used a qualitative research design and investigated 33 students from three, eight-week challenge course classes taught by the same instructor at a mid-size university. Data collection methods included: formal interviews; informal interviews; instructor's audio-taped presentation of CBC; student journaling; and field observations.

Utilizing a general inductive data analysis approach, the following three themes emerged: instruction, atmosphere, and challenge. Instruction positively influenced involvement while atmosphere and challenge both positively and negatively influenced involvement. These findings suggest that CBC might be necessary but not sufficient in explaining students' involvement. Findings also suggested that the three components: instructor, participants, and activities, seemingly influenced the CBC climate. Future research questions include: what are the most salient components of CBC, would expected outcomes differ when sharing CBC only through actions and not verbally, and what factors influence negative challenge course experiences?

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Most research conducted on challenge ropes courses focuses on favorable outcomes for groups and individuals (Goldenberg, Klenosky, O'Leary, & Templin, 2000; Hatch & McCarthy, 2005; Glass & Benshoff 2002). Examples of individual outcomes include increase resilience, (Green, Kleiber, & Tarrant, 2000); improvement in sense of hope (Robitschek, 1996); increase in individual functioning (Marsh, Richards, & Barnes, 1986); and increases in critical thinking skills (Noland, 2003). Collectively, these studies support the benefits of ropes course experiences. However, findings should be viewed with some skepticism given that all of the studies are founded on several untested assumptions.

Wolfe and Somdahl (2005) argue that ropes course research has been guided by several fundamental assumptions or beliefs and that related hidden biases may have restricted the understanding of challenge ropes course programs and research. Two key foundational beliefs/untested assumptions are that (1) risk (real or perceived) leads to positive outcomes, and (2) benefits are transferable. Despite considerable focus on benefits-based research, there have been no studies investigating potential negative outcomes of challenge ropes course programs. Challenge-by-choice (CBC) is the primary mechanism for facilitating intended outcomes; yet, it too is an untested assumption. This study specifically examined the assumption that CBC was presented to and understood by participants in ways that influenced their involvement.

Since its inception, the concept of CBC has been regarded as a foundational principle and standard operating procedure for challenge ropes course programs (Itin,

1992; Lisson 2000). The term, originally developed by project adventure and coined by Karl Rohnke in the mid 1980's (Rohnke & Grout, 1998) was envisioned as a way to invite, rather than force or coerce participants to engage in challenge activities. According to Rohnke (1989), CBC offers participants:

- "The chance to try a potentially difficult and/or frightening challenge in an atmosphere of support and caring.
- The opportunity to "back off" when performance pressures or self-doubt become too strong, knowing that an opportunity for a future attempt will always be available.
- The chance to try difficult tasks, recognizing that the attempt is more significant than performance results.
- Respect for individual ideas and choices" (p. 14).

Although Rohnke's description of CBC appears simple enough to understand, multiple interpretations have made the implementation process quite complex. Rohnke and Grout (1998) described how, over the years, practitioners frequently have misconstrued the concept of CBC, depicting such misinterpretations as "misses": misapprehension, misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and miscomprehension (p. 16).

As a first step in addressing the issue of "misses," Rohnke and Grout found it necessary to re-clarify the original intent of CBC and reminded readers that from the outset CBC was designed as a way to invite participant involvement in challenging activities. It was believed that, by offering choices among different levels of challenge, participants would be inclined to join in various activities voluntarily, if not eagerly. Unfortunately, and perhaps to the dismay of Rohnke, some participants would listen to a

facilitator's instructions and then respond with, "I choose not to participate." Ostensibly, when facilitators emphasized choice per se, participants viewed this as a way to opt out of activities.

Years after Rohnke and Grout clarified the original intent of CBC, Lisson (2000) noted ongoing confusion about its interpretation. He tells a story about a common response from conference audience members when asked if anyone could tell him what challenge by choice meant. One student raised his hand and responded that it was a philosophy that allowed participants to decline taking part in a challenge if they wanted to. Further evidence of such misinterpretation is found in a comment by James Neill who claims that "a participant may choose to sit out an activity and this right must be respected by others in the group and instructors" (Neill, retrieved online December 21, 2007, p. 1). Neill is not alone in his thinking. Haras, Bunting, and Witt (2006) suggest that, when facilitators are working with a group, they should remind the group members that "challenge by choice allows them to do as much of an activity as they want and choose how, if at all they will participate. They are told that it is important to feel comfortable and they may step out of the activity" (p. 341).

Connected with the issue of misinterpretation are the different ways in which facilitators use CBC to design and implement their programs. Some facilitators only mention CBC in a cursory manner to frame their programs while others apply and revisit the concept throughout their programs. As a way to offer opportunities for all participants, Lisson (2000) noted that CBC should be included in all aspects of the program design, planning, and implementation. He further described recommendations to help facilitators apply CBC throughout the process of their entire program. His

recommendations included: clarifying goals; include activities that open the way to varied roles for participants; offer roles that create meaningful challenge opportunities for everyone; provide opportunities for equal participation in completing tasks; invite participants to make choices throughout the program; and be aware that language implies expectations.

Part of this process of including CBC throughout program design and implementation should include ways in which facilitators' actions will be congruent with what they say. As noted by Itin (1992), this congruency appears to be lacking in many programs. In fact Itin has described how facilitators sometimes use CBC as professional enabling, which he describes as permitting participants to continue with their old behaviors by simply agreeing with them when they do not want to continue in an activity. In these instances, facilitators may think that they are honoring participant choice when, in fact, they are failing to confront participants' ongoing, unchanging behaviors, thereby assisting them in avoidance behavior.

Participants not only sidestep choosing an appropriate level of participation, but they are allowed to avoid participating altogether. Itin also notes that non-participation frequently occurs when facilitators ascribe more importance to successfully completing a physical challenge than to attempting it. By assigning more significance to performance than to effort, a facilitator's message may be received more as a demand than an invitation. Indeed, the essence of CBC is to provide an invitation to risk in a supportive setting. But if facilitators are either misinterpreting CBC or not applying CBC correctly and consistently (e.g., using CBC as professional enabling), the perceptions and actions of some participants may contradict anticipated outcomes.

In light of the above concerns, several questions arise. First, how well do participants understand CBC, and how much importance do they assign to it? For instance, CBC often is presented at the start, and only at the start, of a program. Moreover, it is not unusual that facilitators check for understanding by requesting merely a simple thumbs up or head nod, without determining the extent to which participants truly understand and accept the philosophy. In this manner, facilitators may mistakenly assume that all participants comprehend CBC in the way it was intended. Second, in what manner is CBC presented? How is it explained, how often is it re-visited, and how aligned are activities and facilitator comments and actions with the initial explanation?

If CBC is to remain a foundational tenet of challenge ropes course programs, research is warranted on how this concept is being presented to and understood by participants. Furthermore, with choice being such an integral component of CBC, and with no examination of how choice per se is perceived by challenge course participants (Wolfe & Somdahl, 2005), a careful examination of how CBC is incorporated into challenge course programs is overdue.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of challenge by choice (CBC) in an adventure setting. Specifically, how was CBC understood and enacted, and did it appear to play a role in participants' involvement? Further, this study was guided by four specific sub-problems. First, what was the instructor's view of CBC and in what manner did he share that view with participants verbally, and through activities? Second, what were participants' understanding (comprehension, approval, and degree of importance) of CBC, and was this understanding related to their involvement? Third, were activities

designed and presented as outlined in the CBC literature, and was this related to participants' involvement? Finally, did non-CBC factors (e.g., classmates, weather, and personal events/issues external to the course) have a bearing on participants' involvement?

Need for the Study

This study focused primarily on CBC; an untested assumption guiding challenge ropes courses. Although this assumption is widely accepted in the field, it has received little scrutiny. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the assumption that CBC was presented to and understood by college students in an elective eight-week challenge course class in ways that influenced participant involvement. Investigating each of the four sub-problems created an opportunity to address issues associated with existing challenge course research.

For instance, not only has there been an absence of studies exploring untested assumptions about CBC, but research on challenge courses has provided little detail about the actual events or interactions occurring during challenge course activities. This study carefully detailed those interactions through the use of qualitative methods, which scholars in the field (McKenzie, 2000, 2003; Allison & Pomeroy, 2000) have advocated; but, quantitative approaches continue to be most prominent. Qualitative methods are useful for examining the how or what type questions and provide rich, thick description. Further, unlike quantitative methods, an aim of this qualitative research was to discover meaning.

Overview of the Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design. Patton (1990) suggests that qualitative research methods are especially appropriate where little empirical research exists. Thus, with little known about the CBC philosophy related to participants' involvement, deducing from the literature possible explanations and testable hypotheses was not a viable approach. Also, considerable time interacting with participants was necessary to acquire useful data. In order to construct and describe students' understanding of CBC as related to their involvement, data collection and analysis used an emergent (as opposed to pre-determined) design. That is, because I observed and interpreted meanings in the context of a natural setting, it was neither possible nor appropriate to finalize research strategies prior to the start of data collection (Patton, 1990). However, primary questions were outlined to help guide data collection strategies. Data were collected during several scheduled classes. The specific data collection procedures used in this study included: (1) observation and audio-taping of the instructor's presentation of CBC, (2) formal and informal interviews, (3) student journal responses, and (4) descriptive field notes from observations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Challenge courses, also referred to as ropes courses, are becoming increasingly popular. There are an estimated 12,000 courses throughout the United States and they are being used in school, recreational, therapeutic, corporate, military, and "edutainment" settings (Damboise, 2007). Described as a subcomponent of adventure education and rooted in experiential learning, ropes course programs have been linked with a number of favorable outcomes for groups and individuals. Examples of individual outcomes include positive change in self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Wolfe & Somdahl, 2005; Green, Kleiber, & Tarrant, 2000; Noland, 2003), as well as sense of hope (Robitschek, 1996) and critical thinking skills (Noland, 2003). Although many studies support the benefits of ropes course experiences, all of the studies are based on several untested assumptions and, therefore, findings should be viewed with some uncertainty. Challenge by choice (CBC), the primary mechanism for facilitating intended outcomes is one such untested assumption. CBC has been regarded as a cornerstone of adventure education and challenge course programming (Panicucci, 2003). Hence, there is a need to examine the assumptions surrounding CBC.

In order to help explain the theoretical basis that guides challenge course programming, key literature describing the characteristics of adventure education-based programs will be presented and linked with experiential learning. Other literature reviewed in this chapter will pertain to challenge ropes course program activities, fundamental challenge course components, prior benefits-based research on challenge

courses, associated research shortcomings, and generally presupposed foundational beliefs related to conducting challenge course programs.

"It is only in adventure that some people succeed in knowing themselves - in finding themselves."

-André Gide

This section will provide a definition of adventure education and a description of adventure education-based program characteristics. Also presented is John Dewey's (1938) educational philosophy, combined with a definition of experiential learning. Finally, an overview and description of how experiential learning is linked with adventure education programs is presented.

Definitions and Program Characteristics

Adventure education has been defined as "direct, active, and engaging learning experiences that involve the whole person and have real consequences" (Prouty, 2007, p.12). Inherent in adventure education is the inclusion of activities and experiences, which often involve a sense of danger and uncertain outcomes (Ewert & Garvey, 2007). Like other approaches to education (e.g., traditional) the core of adventure education is learning. Perhaps unique from many approaches to education, adventure education is primarily student centered and focuses on the process of the experience rather than the outcome. The adventure education process includes key features such as establishing goals, presenting deliberate and sequenced activities, using challenge and risk, taking into consideration the group context, fostering program atmosphere, and applying the experiential learning cycle (Hirsch, 1999).

Goals and Sequencing

Adventure education is goal directed and primarily concerned with the development of interpersonal relationships and intrapersonal factors (Hirsch, 1999). Interpersonal relationships refers to how individuals get along in groups and focuses on issues such as communication, cooperation, and trust. Intrapersonal factors refer to psychological factors and are concerned with how individuals understand and accept themselves and include issues such as self-concept, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and spirituality. Developing interpersonal relationships and intrapersonal factors is consistent across all adventure education programs. However, because groups differ (e.g., group needs, size, age, gender, member roles), their specific goals will vary. These goals are identified by means of a basic needs assessment that is conducted sometime prior to program delivery. The important point is that adventure experiences should be viewed as the vehicle for developing interpersonal relationships and intrapersonal factors (Rohnke, 1990).

Another key feature of the adventure education process is the use of deliberate sequenced activities; just as goals are considered prior to the program, so too are the sequence of activities. Individuals and groups are presented a series of increasingly difficult activities in a calculated sequence to progress them through the stages of group development. Traditionally, activities would be presented in the following order: getting to know one another, solving group problems, and taking risks. The intent of sequencing is to allow participants the opportunity to develop the skills necessary for continued success throughout the duration of the program (Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe, 1988). Despite beginning with a deliberate plan, effective educators are flexible and will change

or modify an activity as needed based on the information they receive from participants. Participants' goals and group commitment can change at any moment, and by "reading" individuals and groups, programs can and should be adjusted. Activities should not be completed for activity sake; they should be continued and completed to facilitate learning.

Challenge and Risk

Challenge and risk provide fertile ground for growth and learning. Activities need to be presented in an environment that encourages fun, safety, excitement, learning, challenge, and risk (Hirsch, 1999). Overcoming a challenge that seems insurmountable leads to individual growth (Luckner and Nadler, 1997). These challenges and the program environment create a state of dissonance for the participants. That is, after being presented an activity that appears insurmountable, participants often experience a psychological conflict. This conflict is a result of an individual simultaneously holding incongruous beliefs and attitudes. Furthermore, this dissonance occurs as a result of participants experiencing a state of anxiety, a sense of unknown and the perception of risk. Overcoming this state of dissonance and being successful at completing a difficult task or challenge participants are believed to experience positive outcomes (Nadler, 1993).

Also associated with challenge is risk and although in some adventure education settings risk can be real, most often it is perceived risk. Perceived risk can be emotional, social, and physical and holds different meanings for individuals (Hirsch, 1999). For instance, one person may perceive speaking in front of peers as highly risky while another would think there was no risk in that at all. Effective educators (facilitators) hone

in on individual and group feedback to risk and challenge, and they then respond to that feedback in order to create and nurture opportunities for growth (Gregg, 2007).

Priest (1986) described the use of risk in adventure settings through his adventure experience paradigm. The paradigm posits that adventure programs attempt to foster adventure for individuals by matching an individual's competence level with their perceived level of risk. When balance exists between a person's perceived levels of risk and competence that person moves into a state of adventure. When a person's competence is high and the perception of risk is low, the person experiences exploration and experimentation. Moreover, this paradigm also states that when a person's competence is low and the perception of risk is high, the result is misadventure and devastation. Without a balance between competence and the perception of risk, experiences lack optimal learning opportunities. Conversely, when a balance exists between a person's level of competence and perception of risk, (adventure) optimal learning and positive outcomes are possible. This balance is similar to what is commonly referred to as the stretch zone.

Zones of Experience

People tend to dwell in three primary zones of experience: comfort zone, panic zone, and stretch zone (Panicucci, 2007). The comfort zone is a state in which people feel a sense of calm, there is no disequilibrium, and usually not much learning occurs. We all are familiar with this zone; it is where we feel safest. Educators should prevent students from entering what is sometimes described as the panic zone whereby an individual's stress level is too high in order for them to process and integrate information necessary for proper learning. This is similar to Priest's (1999) description of misadventure. The

stretch zone is the zone adventure educators desire to bring their participants. It is marked by piqued interests, heightened senses, with a degree of disequilibrium. Used properly, stretch zone experiences are considered the catalyst for promoting learning in adventure education (Panicucci, 2007).

Role of the Facilitator

The ways in which individuals approach risks occurs in group settings and can be impacted by the group context and the program atmosphere. Group context can be one of the most significant aspects of an adventure program. The interaction of group members can be a major source for individual and group growth, but also can be a source of conflict and frustration (Hirsch, 1999). While individual and group growth is an intended outcome, depending on how it is resolved, group conflict and frustration should be viewed as a source for potential growth. Adventure educators play an important role in this group context since they have at their disposal a number of different pedagogies. The most often used approach to teaching in adventure education is facilitation. Facilitators have multiple roles, including: helping to establish and maintain a safe and supportive environment; and, allowing participants to explore, understand, and develop the skills necessary to promote group development. The role of the facilitator should remain flexible and should change as the dynamics of the group change. For instance, the facilitator may teach through guided discussions, may enforce safety rules, or may lead by modeling appropriate behavior. Regardless of the teaching approach used, facilitators should always maintain a keen eye on individual and group safety.

Critical for adventure to exist in an educational setting is the inclusion of a safe atmosphere. In a safe atmosphere individuals will be more inclined to speak their minds

and to push themselves. Thus, developing and maintaining a safe atmosphere increases the possibility for individual and group growth. This is often accomplished when facilitators create situations wherein challenges match the student abilities, and when the challenges are combined with focused, supervised, thoughtful reflection. The intentional inclusion of thoughtful reflection distinguishes adventure education from adventure recreation. Another distinguishing aspect between adventure education and adventure recreation is the fact that experiential learning is fundamental to the delivery of adventure education (Prouty, 2007).

Experiential Learning Theory

As part of the progressive education movement of the 20th century, John Dewey was one of the first to stress experience as a form of meaningful learning; he often, therefore, is referred to as the "father" of experiential education (Goldenberg, Klenosky, O'Leary, & Templin, 2002). Dewey's theory of education was based on the idea that the relationship of knowledge and action, situated in a realistic environment and accompanied by sharing of experiences enhanced learning (Dewey, 1938). Dewey also suggested that experience arises from the interaction of two principles, continuity and interaction. Continuity refers to the idea that each experience a learner has influences his/her future. Interaction refers to the situational impact on a learner's experience. To explain this a bit clearer, Dewey suggested that a learner's present experience is a function of his/her past experiences and present situation (Dewey, 1938) These two principles imply that a learner's experiences and habits influence their current and future educational experiences. A key element of Dewey's educational theory and thoughts

about experiential education is the idea of reflection. Thinking, action, and reflection are linked to produce further learning, resulting in future action (Dewey, 1938).

Experiential education is an educational philosophy that focuses on a student-centered approach to learning and that emphasizes learning by engaging students in meaningful hands-on experiences. Furthermore, a key feature of experiential education is the use of physical activity (Jensen & Guthrie, 2006). Although experiential education has been defined simply as learning by doing (Priest & Gass, 2005), this definition fails to connect the importance of reflection as an instrument in the process of understanding and learning. The importance of this connection is highlighted in the Association for Experiential Education's (AEE) definition: "a philosophy and methodology which educators purposefully engage the learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values" (AEE, 2004).

Inspired by Dewey's work, David Kolb (1984) developed an experiential learning model, which provides an effective way to understand the experiential learning process. Kolb's model emphasizes four learning elements: concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The following figure illustrates the cyclical experiential learning process.

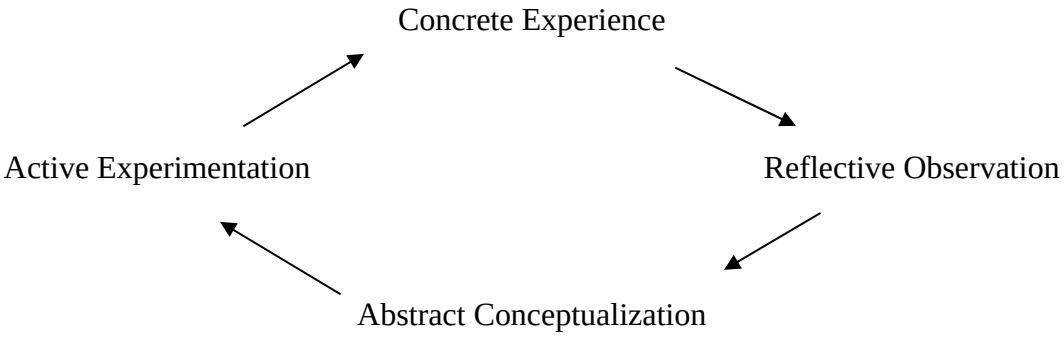

Figure 1. Kolb's Experiential Learning Model

According to Kolb, this learning cycle can start at any of the four points; but, it typically begins with a concrete experience. In an adventure education setting a concrete experience pertains to a challenge presented to and attempted by the group. Following the concrete experience, the group proceeds to the next stage, reflective observation. Reflective observation is achieved through facilitator-guided thoughtful reflection. A pause in the activities allows group members to present personal thoughts and reflections before moving on to the stage of abstract conceptualization. Similar to reflective observation, abstract conceptualization expands the reflection process by abstractly connecting it to other settings and life experiences. Moving from abstract thinking, active experimentation actually applies new concepts to fresh experiences.

There are three important points that warrant mention regarding Kolb's learning model. First, there is an integration of knowing and doing. "Doing" refers to the concrete experience and "knowing" refers to the development of abstract concepts based on reflections of the experience. Second, within the learning model's cyclical process, experiences lead to new knowledge which, in turn, generates new experiences. Third, thoughtful reflection is a critical aspect for allowing learning to take place. Generally people are not instinctively reflective; therefore, Kolb stresses the importance of facilitating this part of the process. Kolb's model has been presented by others (Panicucci, 2007; Rohnke, Tait, & Wall, 1997) more straightforward via its aspects of "what?", "so what?", and "now what?" Presenting these aspects to participants during the start of a program can help them embrace the process as part of the elements or activities themselves. The "what" refers to the experience participants are engaged in, the "so what" refers to the reflection time after the experience, and the "now what" refers to

the application of learning from experiencing and reflecting to the external world (Rohnke, Tait, & Wall, 1997).

Kolb's model is the most commonly cited learning theory in adventure programming. Although there is some empirical support for the model (Tennant, 1997) the model is known for its conceptual strength. The model's particular strength lies in identifying different learning styles as a way to understand experiential learning. Kolb narrowed the many learning styles down to four preferred types of learners: accommodating, diverging, assimilating, and converging. Accommodating refers to learners who rely on active experimentation and concrete experiences. They enjoy getting things done, taking risks, initiating, leading, and being adaptable and practical. Diverging refers to learners who rely on concrete experiences and reflective observation. Diverging learners are imaginative, understand other people, recognize problems, enjoy brainstorming, and are open-minded. Assimilating refers to learners who rely on reflective observation and abstract conceptualization. These learners enjoy planning, creating models, defining problems, developing theories, and are patient. Finally, converging refers to learners who rely on abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. They enjoy solving problems, making decisions, reasoning deductively, defining problems and being logical.

These styles or learning preferences highlight the idea that individuals can learn in many different ways. By assessing the different learning styles or preferences of individuals, educators gain insight about participants' learning abilities and should use this information and be flexible in creating teaching situations that address the diverse

learning styles. Adhering to a single teaching style often leads to frustration or boredom among some students.

"Challenges are what make life interesting; overcoming them is what makes life meaningful."

-Joshua J. Marine

The following section offers an historical overview of challenge course programs, essential challenge course activities, and fundamental challenge course components. Challenge courses have become a popular approach to delivering adventure education. As a subcomponent of adventure education, challenge course programs embody all of the characteristics and key features of adventure education and are also guided by experiential learning. Challenge course programs are based on the same theoretical principles of adventure education. According to Rohnke, Tait, Wall, & Rogers (2003), "a challenge course program is an experiential adventure program which offers groups and individuals the opportunity to participate in a series of activities involving mental, physical and emotional risk taking" (p. 3). Challenge courses are seen as the setting in which adventure education takes place.

Historical Overview

In the 1960s, the first ropes course was constructed for the Colorado Outward Bound program. When compared to some of the elaborate courses seen around the world today, the original course might appear primitive and out-of-date. Although the Outward Bound program was considered educational, the initial ropes course and program was modeled after military obstacle courses and was intended to build physical skills. Later in

1971, Karl Rohnke, a Colorado Outward Bound instructor and a founding member of Project Adventure, integrated the ropes course model into high school physical education classes in Massachusetts. This integration spawned a new trend of including adventure education in high school physical education curriculum.

Moving away from the Outward Bound military approach of forcing participants through a course, Rohnke introduced the concept challenge by choice as a way to invite students to participate in adventure activities in physical education classes. Instead of focusing solely on developing physical skills, high school courses included ropes course activities that required the use and development of problem-solving skills. Success in these activities depended on the positive development of individual and group dynamics. Adventure and experiential education were hands-on curriculums that were recognized as a way to pique students' interests in communicating effectively, solving problems, and learning to trust self and others (Rohnke, 1999).

In the 1980s and 1990s ropes courses were further developed to provide alternative sites to wilderness-based adventure education programs and were created to simulate the challenge experience. The advantages of using these alternative sites included shorter program duration (1/2 day versus week long), could be located in urbanized areas, had fewer real risks, could accommodate higher numbers of people, and were far more accessible (Jensen & Guthrie, 2006). As mentioned in the introduction, ropes courses are becoming increasingly popular and are used in a variety of settings and serve diverse populations. Not only are the settings and populations becoming more diverse, the design of activities is becoming increasingly complex with the use of newer

and safer materials. For instance, original courses were built primarily out of rope and wood while today's' courses are built using steel cable.

Essential Challenge Course Activities

Just as activities were mentioned as a key feature of adventure education they are also an important component of challenge course programs. There are four essential types of activities used by facilitators in ropes course programs, each type addressing specific goals. Activities are presented in a carefully sequenced order with a gradual increase in difficulty. The activities are traditionally presented in the following order: (1) name games and ice breakers; (2) group initiatives and trust activities; (3) low elements; and, (4) high elements (Rohnke, 1989). Often all four of these activity types will be included in a program; but, depending on program or group goals, some programs may only include name games and initiatives. Others may add low elements or high elements, or both. All of the activities used in the series of the challenge course experiences can be adapted or modified to meet various program goals.

Name games and ice breakers, also referred to as deinhibitizers and warm-ups are activities used to promote initial interaction. Ice breakers, which are fun, uncomplicated, brief activities, allow group members to get to know one another and to feel comfortable with the group as a whole. Further, ice breakers are designed to avoid placing an individual's abilities in the spotlight, thereby helping to create a safe atmosphere. An increasingly safe atmosphere helps participants let their guards down. Facilitators typically participate with the group at this point and serve to model fun, uproarious behavior. The facilitator's focus is on warming up the participants socially and physically, and preparing them for group initiatives and trust activities.

Group initiatives and trust activities are team-based and incorporate team problem-solving activities. Initiatives are considered to be a great tool to develop interpersonal problem-solving skills because the activity presented usually cannot be completed by just one or two individuals; it takes the power of the group to be successful. Trust activities are presented as a way for group members to develop a sense of reliance among one another. Again, the sequence of activities is important. Unless a high level of trust already exists in the group, it would be remiss of a facilitator to present activities requiring a great deal of trust before first introducing name games and initiatives. Facilitators should encourage group members to develop trust, not test it.

Similar to initiative activities, trust activities are team-based and are used as a means to expand interpersonal relationships. They also help foster a safe program atmosphere. Throughout these activities facilitators need to be constantly aware of the groups' development and should be evaluating the group for their readiness for a particular activity. Presenting an activity at the wrong time when the group may not have the requisite skills may have negative consequences and could weaken the development of trust and interpersonal relationships (Rohnke, 1989).

The next set of activities in the sequence of the adventure experience are referred to as low ropes activities and are presented as a way to extend group cohesion and a higher level of trust. This higher trust level is required in light of an increased level of risk. Low ropes course elements are any intentionally designed apparatus used in adventure education and are built close to the ground, from one inch to approximately 12 feet above the ground (Rheingold, 2007). These low ropes course elements are team-based and group success depends on social, physical, and emotional support from group

members. The entire group could be on the low element at the same time attempting to accomplish the task; or perhaps as few as one person could be attempting the task while the remaining members ensure safety (Rohnke, Tait, and Wall, 1997). As part of the learning process facilitators will usually conduct a review session (sometimes referred to as debriefing or processing) that most often occurs after participants complete each low element activity. The review serves as a way to help participants reflect on their experiences as they work toward established goals. Facilitators use this type of review session throughout the presentation of the low and high element activities.

High elements are usually constructed out of trees or telephone poles between which are steel cables and logs suspended 20to 50 feet in the air. Aside from their height off the ground, high elements differ from low elements in the requirement for a belay system (Rohnke, Tait, & Wall, 1997). The belay system is a safety feature that prevents climbers from falling to the ground. High element activities can be climbed or navigated by an individual or small group. Likewise, an individual or a small group can participate in belaying the high element activity. Similar to initiatives and low elements, high elements aim to develop interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

It is important to note that, without careful reflection, high element activities lose their learning potential becoming more akin to a cheap amusement ride. Reflection refers to the methods facilitators use to guide participants in learning. Providing time for reflection allows participants to discover their own learning through, goal setting, and self-discovery. In regards to both high elements and low elements, completing the activity should not be the ultimate goal. Rather, the process of navigating the ropes

course and attempting activities should be embraced as the vehicle to learning. As stated previously, guided reflection separates an education program from a recreation program.

Fundamental Challenge Course Components

Throughout the facilitation of challenge course activities, facilitators establish, apply, and reinforce four fundamental components. These four components are the cornerstones of successful programming and include: challenge by choice (CBC), full-value contract (FVC), sequencing, and processing (Panicucci, 2007). Each of these components is explained in the following section.

Challenge-by-choice

CBC is a philosophy and a traditional tool used in adventure-based programs. It has been regarded as a foundational principle and standard operating procedure for challenge ropes course programs (Itin, 1992; Lisson 2000). As an instructor for the Colorado Outward Bound program, Karl Rohnke sought ways to include aspects of this program model into traditional physical education classes. Although he wanted to include adventure activities from Outward Bound, he also wanted to avoid force or coercion as a means to gain participation. His solution was to introduce a seemingly simple philosophy, CBC. According to Rohnke (1989) CBC offers participants:

- "The chance to try a potentially difficult and/or frightening challenge in an atmosphere of support and caring.
- The opportunity to 'back off' when performance pressures or self-doubt become too strong, knowing that an opportunity for a future attempt will always be available.

- The chance to try difficult tasks, recognizing that the attempt is more significant than performance results.
- Respect for individual ideas and choices" (p. 14).

It is important to remember that the CBC philosophy was envisioned as a way to invite participant involvement and not as a means for opting out. Confusion surrounds interpretation of the philosophy (Haras, Bunting, & Witt 2006) and its application. This confusion was brought to light by Christian Itin (1992) who claimed that facilitators misuse CBC when they present it in a manner that is, in his point of view, professionally enabling; that is, facilitators reinforce participants' self limitations. When participants are professionally enabled, they are allowed to follow patterns of behavior instead of actually making a choice. A number of reasons exist for facilitators using CBC as professional enabling. One reason is that facilitators may fail to confront participants' old behaviors as they occur. Another more likely reason is that facilitators regularly focus more on the outcome (i.e., they ascribe success to completing a physical challenge) rather than concentrating on the process of learning.

Viewing CBC in regard to challenge it is important to note that perceived challenge is specific to the individual. Effective facilitators will recognize individuals' different levels of challenge and will remain true to the CBC philosophy by offering many levels of challenge within the same activity. On the other hand, when choices are made available, those choices must be appropriate. Since it is difficult for a facilitator to decide what is appropriate for all individuals, choices along a continuum should be offered. Further, the appropriate choice needs to promote a participant's personal growth.

However, participants must attribute this personal growth to their own effort and not to facilitator manipulation.

Full-value contract

The full-value contract (FVC) is another tool traditionally used in challenge course programming. The FVC is used to help establish an atmosphere of trust, fun, and learning (Schoel, Prouty, and Radcliffe, 1988). FVC is a behavioral contract and has been described simply as a means to providing "full value" for each participant by promoting a feeling of physical and emotional safety within the group. As mentioned earlier, this atmosphere is critical for helping an individual move from the comfort zone into the stretch zone. The FVC also is used to establish norms, both attitudinal and behavioral, that all group members agree to maintain throughout the duration of the program.

Most challenge course facilitators will introduce FVC at the beginning of the program and, to be most effective, participants are included in its creation. Specifically the FVC asks group members to create a safe and respectful environment, to be committed to this safe and respectful environment, and to accept a shared responsibility to maintain this environment. It is common in most educational ropes course programs, but not used specifically in recreational programs. Perhaps not described by facilitators directly as a part of the FVC, appropriate sequencing is a way in which facilitators can help maintain a safe learning environment.

Sequencing

Again, sequencing refers to how a facilitator chooses appropriate activities for the group at any given time. The sequence of activities is a vital part of the challenge course experience. If activities are not sequenced appropriately, an activity could be potentially

harmful to participants both physically and emotionally. For example, a facilitator would not involve participants in an activity that requires a great deal of mutual trust without first developing that trust. Although facilitators begin with a sequenced draft of activities to be presented, they need to be aware of group and individual process and be flexible to change. As noted by Rohnke and Butler (1995), facilitators need to be able to plan, observe, and adjust throughout the program based on their experience and instincts. Facilitators should not present activities for the sake of completing activities; they should use them for learning opportunities. In addition to presenting activities, reflection is also a part of sequencing and commonly is referred to as processing.

Processing

Processing, reviewing, debriefing, and reflecting are terms often used to explain the methods facilitators use to guide participants in learning. Instead of telling or selling the group on what they should have learned from an experience, reviewing is a technique that allows participants to discover their own learning through thoughtful reflection, goal setting, and self-discovery. There are many different approaches to reviewing. The most common approach is to use open-ended questions and to prod participants for answers that can guide group reflection (Rohnke, 1989). Ultimately facilitators attempt to get the group members to initiate and guide the review sessions. Based on observable feedback sometimes the facilitator and group members recognize that it may be beneficial to let the experience speak for itself rather than having a formal review session. Yet other times it may be beneficial to stop and review an activity prior to the completion as a way to harness a learning opportunity. Reviewing is a facilitator competency that takes years to

refine. One recommendation for facilitators is this, only take participants to a place you know you can comfortably bring them back from (Rohnke, 1977).

"Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts."

-Albert Einstein

The final section of this chapter offers results from previous benefits-based challenge course research and identifies shortcomings associated with challenge course research. Finally, this section includes information about the need for researchers to critically examine and to test the fundamental assumptions guiding challenge course research. The call to examine and test these fundamental assumptions supported the need for this particular study.

Previous Research Results

A considerable amount of research has been conducted on challenge ropes courses, much of it focused on positive outcomes for groups and individuals. Some examples of outcomes include increases in resiliency in minority youth (Green, Kleiber, & Tarrant, 2000); identification of personal and group benefits (Goldenberg, Klenosky, O'Leary, & Templin, 2000); improvement in sense of hope (Robitschek 1996); increase in individual functioning (Marsh, Richards, & Barnes, 1986); and increases in critical thinking skills (Noland, 2003). Studies have also reported significant increases in group functioning scores from pre-test to post-test (Hatch & McCarthy, 2005) and indicated increased scores on group cohesion from pre-test to post-test (Glass & Benshoff 2002). Finally, a meta-analysis conducted by Hattie, Marsh, Neill, and Richards (1997) indicated

that adventure programs are generally beneficial, noting that longer programs were more effective than shorter programs. The following paragraphs will elaborate on the specific details of these studies, including a number of shortcomings.

Green, Kleiber, and Tarrant (2000) examined how participating in eight high- and eight low-ropes course elements affected resiliency in minority youth. Twenty-five minority youth from a camp program participated in ropes course activities for four hours, once per week over a six week period. Results indicated that the participants in the ropes course activities increased resilience from pre-test to post-test when compared to a random group of minority youth from the same camp not participating in the ropes course activities. The study did not reveal, however, any specific components of the ropes course activities that assisted in increasing resilience.

Goldenberg, Klenosky, O'Leary, and Templin (2000) identified a number of personal benefits associated with participating in ropes course programs. The results of their study were based on participants' responses on a self-administered laddering procedure. The 125 participants from two ropes courses identified different levels of benefits. For instance, trust, teamwork, and communication were some of the higher level benefits while effectiveness, developing understanding, setting goals, developing accomplishment, self-fulfillment, and enjoyment of life were lower level benefits. Although this study added to the literature by identifying another level of benefits, the small sample size and data collection procedures may have impacted the study. Specifically, the laddering procedure is commonly used with interview techniques versus self-report techniques.

Another study utilizing pre-test/post-test scores includes Robitschek's (1996) investigation of the effect challenge course participation has on minority youths' sense of hope. After participating in a one-day challenge course program, post-test scores from the Hope Inventory Scale indicated that youths' sense of hope increased from pre-test to post-test. This study did not provide any details on facilitator interaction nor about what aspects of the ropes course program were attributed to increased hope scores. Furthermore, the short time between the pre-test and post-test could have impacted the scores.

Hatch and McCarthy (2005) examined the long term effects of ropes course participation on group functioning. Sixty-seven college students participated in a half-day, low-elements ropes course. The students were separated into four groups and all students completed a questionnaire that measured group cohesion, group effectiveness, and individual effectiveness within the group. This questionnaire was administered on four different occasions; one week prior to the course, immediately before the course, immediately after the course, and two months later. Results indicated short term gains on all measures; however, there were no long term gains. The fact that not all students were presented the same activity can be seen as a limitation. Perhaps some students would have reacted differently to different activities. This study also failed to describe particular details regarding the activity and the way in which it was presented to the students.

Glass and Benshoff (2002) also investigated the effects of participation in a low ropes course program. Their study examined the effects of a low-element course on adolescents' perceptions of group cohesion. One-hundred sixty seven students participated in this study and each completed a pre-test and post-test questionnaire on

group cohesion. Although the questionnaire was developed specifically for this study, results supported the idea that group cohesion increased due to the participation in a one-day, low-elements ropes course. Results also indicated that race, age, and gender were not factors affecting students' perceptions of cohesion. This study did not focus on which aspects of the challenge course increased group cohesion scores. For instance, there was no mention about the sequence of activities or any details about the instructors.

The results from studies conducted by Hatch and McCarthy (2005) and Glass and Benshoff (2002) demonstrated that learning did not transfer to participants' daily lives. Luckner and Nadler (1993) contend that the lack of transfer of learning is attributed to the fact that facilitators do not necessarily teach participants how to transfer this learning. In response to the lack of longitudinal support for the transfer of learning and benefits, Priest and Lesperance (1994) found that the use of supplemental lectures and other classroom activities supported long term benefits. As stated earlier, the appeal of a ropes course program is its relative short duration, so adding supplemental lectures would be too costly and time consuming for most programs.

Hattie, Marsh, Neill, and Richards (1997) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis which examined the effects of adventure programs on a variety of outcomes. Forty major outcomes were identified and collapsed into six encompassing categories: leadership, self-concept, academic, personality, interpersonal, and adventuresomeness. Although their meta-analysis did not include ropes course studies per se, it is important because the studies included in their analysis all were guided by experiential learning theory. Specifically this meta-analysis was based on 1,728 effect sizes, drawn from 151 samples and included 96 studies. The majority of the studies involved Outward Bound

programs which were separated into two categories: longer (lasting more than 20 days) and shorter (lasting less than 20 days).

The average effect size was .34, indicating approximately a 15% gain in learning (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997). This study also indicated that as the age of participants and length of program increased, so too did the effect size. Although overall effect sizes were comparable to typical educational interventions, researchers had difficulty making empirical connections between program outcomes and characteristics. This was due to the fact that many of the studies in their meta-analysis failed to include detailed descriptions of the program characteristics. However, the meta-analysis confirmed that adventure programs are generally beneficial and also noted that longer programs were more effective than shorter programs. These findings continue to indicate that adventure programs are beneficial, but because prior research has not detailed the actual program characteristics, an explanation for these benefits remains unclear.

Challenge Course Research Shortcomings

Alan Ewert has claimed for over two decades that adventure program studies have been one-dimensional, focusing solely only the positive outcomes without looking at the possible relationships with programmatic factors such as, activities, group size, gender, and staff (Ewert, 1983). Ewert described this as the “black box.” That is, researchers know that something positive is happening, but they cannot pinpoint why. Despite Ewert’s suggestion that research studies should also focus on what the positive outcomes are attributed to, most research continues to be one-dimensional and focuses primarily on documenting positive outcomes and benefits

After reviewing the literature on how adventure program outcomes are achieved, ropes course research remains problematic. According to Mckenzie (2000), the most difficult aspect is that "the literature indicates that the current understanding of how adventure education program outcomes are achieved is based largely on theory, rather than empirical research" (2000, p.1). Martin and Leberman (2005) suggest that the one-dimensional approach (benefits-based) to challenge course research has continued because it easily satisfies different stakeholders' demands for the documentation of positive program outcomes. As noted above, the challenge course literature is lacking in two areas. First, it has been unsatisfactory in linking intended outcomes with any specific intervention. Second, it has not provided enough detail about specifics of program delivery. For example, research has not linked outcomes with the length of program or the activities used, and it has not described the facilitators' roles or provided a thorough description of group interactions. Researchers need to carefully review the impact specific challenge course characteristics (activities, group, individual, facilitator, environment, etc.) have on program outcomes.

One way for researchers to convert the current uni-dimensional approach to a more holistic multi-dimensional approach is by going into ropes course settings in order to interview and observe both participants and facilitators as a means of investigating the different factors that may influence certain outcomes. These factors could include the setting, individual participants, group members, facilitator, sequencing, and so forth. Another justification for conducting field-based research is that each ropes course program and experience is unique. Field-based research can assist in determining which factors contribute to the uniqueness of a program and how these factors may affect

program outcomes. Generalizability should not be a focus; rather, increased understanding should guide the research. Not only do researchers need to consider the shortcomings of current research, they also need to consider the number of untested assumptions that continue to guide ropes course programs and research.

Need for Testing Assumptions

The assumptions that guide ropes course practice and research warrant careful evaluation. Collectively, studies have indicated and supported the benefits of ropes course experiences; however, these findings should be viewed with some skepticism since all of the studies are founded on some untested assumptions. Wolfe and Somdahl (2005) argue that several beliefs and related hidden biases may have restricted the understanding of challenge ropes course programs and research. Two key foundational beliefs include risk, whether real or perceived, leads to positive outcomes; and, benefits are transferable. In order to strengthen challenge course research and programming, associated biases and assumptions need to be made visible so that they can be tested.

The above two beliefs have been integral to the design of ropes course programs. However, Wolfe and Somdahl (2005) argue that these have been accepted as foundational tenets, neither challenged nor tested. The preceding section on previous challenge course research results has indicated a number of studies contributing to the literature on positive ropes course outcomes. All of these studies used quantitative designs, collecting data via questionnaires immediately before and after the ropes course program. These studies have also confirmed other scholars concerns (McKenzie, 2000; Ewert, 1987), that ropes course research continues to lack in providing enough

information about the ropes course as an intervention variable, making it difficult to critique and examine the research results.

The reviewed literature also showed that the studies were designed in a manner which prevented researchers from being able to challenge the value of the intervention. Again, the designs were looking for positive outcomes, not negative outcomes. Although studies reported positive results, such as increased resilience, critical thinking skills, and increase sense of hope, no study has looked at the possible detriments related to participation (e.g., decrease in resilience, critical thinking, etc.). As a facilitator, I have witnessed many participants feeling unsuccessful when compared to a peer. When CBC is embraced, success is supposed to be determined by individual goal setting and not by comparisons to other group members' attempts; however, no study has examined the impact that peer pressure may have on an individual's perception of success and failure. If participants embrace the CBC philosophy, success should be determined by an individual's attempt and own goal. However, no study to date has investigated how CBC is presented to and understood by participants. After conducting the literature review it is apparent that gaps still remain. For instance, many components of challenge course programming have received little if any attention and researchers have not been critical of the assumptions guiding challenge course programs.

With the growing popularity of challenge course programs, research directed at bridging gaps in the literature can benefit the challenge course field by developing a greater understanding of the mechanisms associated with intended outcomes. This study, therefore, was designed to explore an important, but untested assumption about challenge course programming (i.e., CBC is the primary mechanism for facilitating intended

outcomes. Specifically, the study investigated whether CBC was presented to and understood by participants in a way that influenced involvement. Using a qualitative approach, this study also explored other potential influences on program outcomes (e.g., challenge course characteristics, and group interactions).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Using qualitative methods (Merriam, 1998), this study explored the role of challenge by choice (CBC) in an adventure setting. Specifically, how was CBC understood and enacted, and did it appear to play a role in participants' involvement? Specific to observing activities, I determined whether they were being presented according to recommendations outlined in the literature. Furthermore, this study was guided by four specific sub-problems. First, what was the instructor's view of CBC and in what manner did he share that view with participants verbally, and through activities? Second, what were participants' understanding (comprehension, approval, and degree of importance) of CBC, and was this understanding related to their involvement? Third, were activities designed and presented as outlined in the CBC literature, and was this related to participants' involvement? Finally, did non-CBC factors (e.g., classmates, weather, and personal events/issues external to the course) have a bearing on participants' involvement?

This chapter provides a description of how data were collected, analyzed, and connected to the development of categories that helped describe the instructor's and students' understanding of CBC in an elective eight-week challenge course class. The remainder of this chapter presents the theoretical stance that framed the study and then provides an overview of the methods and procedures utilized for data collection and analysis; including, (1) participants, (2) research site, (3) data collection, (4) trustworthiness, and (5) data analysis.

Theoretical Stance

A critical aspect in designing qualitative research is to explain the epistemological framework used to conduct the study. According to Crotty (2003), the epistemology adopted by the researcher is the lens through which the study is conducted and explains "how we know what we know" (p. 8). A constructionism framework provided philosophical grounding for this study. Constructionism maintains that meanings are not discovered or created; rather, they are constructed by people interacting with one another and with the environments and settings around them (Crotty, 2003). This understanding of knowledge posits that meaning can be constructed differently by different people.

Constructionism was a fitting framework for this study because it is congruent with the research focus of understanding subjective experiences versus identifying a limited question related to a specific outcome. This study was based on learner-centered practices and placed the students' understanding of their experiences as central to answering the research questions. Further, the instructor in this study accommodated a variety of learning styles, guiding and supporting students as they constructed their own understanding through experiential-based activities. This study examined how each student understood CBC as they interacted with others. More specifically, this study examined the assumption that CBC was presented to and understood by participants in a way that influenced involvement.

Participants

During this study I observed and interviewed a challenge ropes course instructor teaching three challenge course classes. There were 13 students enrolled in class #1, 11 students enrolled in class #2, and nine students enrolled in class #3. All of the 33 students

were observed during each data collection period; however, not all participants were interviewed. Two separate interviews were conducted with 10 of the 13 students from class #1, four of the 11 students from class #2, and four of the nine students from class #3. Thus, I interviewed 18 of the 33 students twice. These students were chosen for interviews based primarily on their willingness and availability to participate in this phase of the research. Moreover, in my estimation, these particular students appeared to be quite representative of the remaining students and no particular differentiating characteristics seemed evident to me during the course of the study.

Students

Specific biographical details about the students are outlined below. All of the students freely elected to enroll in the one-credit challenge ropes course class. There were six males and seven females in class #1; four males and seven females in class #2; and six males and three females in class #3. Students enrolled in the three classes were traditional students (18-21 years old). Although it was found that students had many different levels of experience with challenge course programs (ranging from no prior experience to having taken this class previously) the majority had little (half – one day program as a child) to no prior experience. Students also reported a variety of reasons for enrolling in this class. Twenty seven out of 33 students responded to the question, “Why are you taking this class?” Some of the reasons reported included: easy A; needed one credit to be a full-time student; required and looked fun; to have fun; fill graduate requirement; this class sounded like fun and I like physical activity; took this class because it sounded like a blast; and, had fun last time to name just a few. All 27 of the responses can be found in Appendix A.

Instructor

As part of the interviewing process I gathered background information from the instructor. The following is a description outlining specific biographical details pertaining to the instructor. This instructor has been instrumental in challenge course programming since the course was constructed in 1989. At that time, a colleague invited him to the course and he immediately saw possibilities that the ropes course could offer beyond those available in a regular classroom. Having a background working with special populations, this instructor started bringing to the course people with special needs, and he immediately saw the difference that ropes course experiences had on those folks. Collaborations with his colleague were strengthened over the years and they were both heavily involved with programming for community groups during the summer months. Since his colleague departed in the mid-1990s, this instructor has been responsible for scheduling all programs and activities for the course. He continues to be involved with programming for the academic courses, special populations, community groups, and facilitator training. This instructor has maintained membership with the Association for Challenge Course Technology and attends their annual conference. Aside from that, this instructor also noted that most of his time, effort, and interests have been spent working on furthering the challenge course program.

Research Site

The challenge course is constructed out of telephone poles, steel cable, rope, wood, and the like. It is located in a grassy area behind the university baseball field and is somewhat secluded on three sides by trees, bushes, and the baseball outfield fence. The

course includes high elements and low elements. The high elements include: pamper pole, dangle duo, multiline, pirate's crossing, zip line, vertical playpen, climbing tower, cat walk, and high tension traverse, among others. Low elements include a climbing wall, whale watch, triangular tension traverse, Mohawk walk, swinging log, and a number of portable low elements such as trolleys and fidget ladder. The course also includes an open space area for conducting icebreakers, initiatives, and portable low elements. A description of the elements and activities used for this study and the particular way in which they were presented are included in the observation section.

Philosophy and Purpose

According to the challenge course website, the challenge course in this study is an adventure-based educational enterprise intended to facilitate personal and group growth through a learning experience that incorporates both theory and practice. As a component of an academic program area, the mission of the challenge ropes course is to serve the university through courses and programs designed to promote individual and group growth. Further, the course is a catalyst for challenging people to go beyond their perceived boundaries, to work with others to solve problems, and to experience success.

The atmosphere of the challenge course is designed to be fun, supportive, and challenging with the intent of fostering cooperation rather than competition. In line with the CBC philosophy, this course ascribes success to the simple act of trying, giving more attention to an attempt than performance. As reminded by Rohnke (1989), part of his definition of CBC is providing students with the chance to try difficult tasks, recognizing that the attempt is more significant than performance results. Typical challenge course

activities such as non-competitive games, group problem-solving initiatives, low elements, and high elements are used to help individuals and groups achieve their goals.

Challenge course staff members employ strategies that encourage trying without generating excessive pressure and also guide participants to learn similar ways of providing support without pressuring their co-participants. Guided by the CBC philosophy, each person is encouraged to voluntarily and freely engage in any activity, and the degree and extent of participation remains the individual's own choice.

Entry to the Research Site

Letters of informed consent (Appendix B) were signed by participants in all three challenge ropes course classes. The letter of informed consent outlined the purpose of the research and the participants' rights. Risks inherent in this study were no greater than those normally encountered by participating in challenge ropes course activities. Student numbers were used in place of participants' names to provide anonymity and the participants' responses remained confidential at all times. Participants received my assurance that I would not share data from any of the sources (e.g., observations, interviews, chats, journal responses) with anyone other than the external auditor. All written materials were kept in a locked filing cabinet. Further, participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from this project at any time in the event that they felt uncomfortable about any part of this research. Furthermore, students were informed that their decision regarding their involvement in the study would not be associated with their course grade.

Data Collection

With approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), data were collected to provide "rich, thick description" of the instructor's and students' understanding of the concept CBC as they engaged in an eight-week challenge ropes course class, and the impact that understanding had on students' involvement. This account included the instructor's and students' words and descriptions of participation, and excerpts from my observational field notes. Data were collected to examine both the instructor's and students' understanding of the concept CBC and whether this understanding had a bearing on students' involvement. Moreover, data were collected as a means of exploring the degree to which CBC philosophy was reflected in the design and presentation of various activities; that is, what actually took place relative to CBC principles.

Data collection occurred during the first, fourth, and eighth week of the scheduled classes. The specific data collection procedures used in this study included: (1) observation and audio-taping of the instructor's presentation of CBC, (2) formal and informal interviews, (3) student journal responses, and (4) descriptive field notes from observations. Each of the specific data collection techniques are outlined in the following subsections.

Instructor's Presentation of CBC

Part of the initial investigation of this study examined what the instructor said to students by way of explaining or describing the concept of CBC. Therefore, I observed and audio-taped his presentations. I also observed students' body language, comments, and responses related to the instructor's presentation. My observations also focused on the demeanor and tone of his delivery. I specifically listened for whether or not the

instructor communicated the critical components of CBC as outlined in Rohnke's (1989) definition. These critical components include: offering participants the opportunity to try a potentially frightening challenge in a supportive atmosphere; allowing participants to back off when self-doubt becomes too strong, yet realizing a future attempt is possible; attempting a difficult challenge is more important than performance results; and, respecting individual ideas and choices.

The audio- taped presentation was transcribed verbatim and provided documentation to verify what the instructor communicated. This transcript was revisited at a later point to compare the instructor's explanation and presentation of CBC to the students' interpretation of the instructor's presentation, as noted in their journals. Furthermore, the transcript was used to compare and verify whether or not the instructor later adhered to CBC principles in the manner in which he initially explained it. This was accomplished by checking whether the instructor "walked his talk"; that is, did he attempt to create an atmosphere of CBC throughout the eight-week class?

Formal Interviews

Throughout the eight-week course, formal interviews were conducted with the instructor and students at pre-specified times. All of the interviews, both instructor and student, followed a semi-structured format to allow for flexibility in gathering interview data. More specifically, I began the interviews with general questions and topic areas. By not adhering to a prescribed set of questions, I was able to remain more open to participants' responses and was able to better pursue topics that participants' themselves found most important.

Two formal interviews were conducted with the instructor and both were held in his office. The first interview was conducted one week prior to the start of the classes in order to gather biographical information (e.g., number of years involved with ropes course instruction, types of students taught and clients served) and information on his particular views and understanding of the concept CBC. This interview lasted approximately 35 minutes and followed an interview guide (Appendix C). Data collected from this interview were compared to the audio-taped presentation of CBC and were used to determine the degree of congruency between the instructor's discussions about CBC, first with me and then with the students. Data from the instructor's interview, his presentation of CBC, and my observations of his presentation were used to develop an in-depth description of the instructor's viewpoint of CBC. Data from my observations were also beneficial in conducting member checks with the instructor. A second, 40 minute interview with the instructor was conducted one week after the scheduled classes ended. The interview, following an interview guide (Appendix D) focused on his perceptions of students' involvement.

Prior to conducting the study it was difficult to determine how many student interviews I would conduct. According to Merriam (1998) the number of interviews should be based on the question asked and the resources available. Thus, the number of interviewees was determined as the study progressed, and selection was based mainly on students' willingness to participate. Initially I had conservatively approximated interviewing three students from each class on two separate occasions – once near the start of the course and once again near the end of the course.

Based on the students' impressive willingness to participate in this research project, I was able to increase the interviewees to 18 out of a possible 33. I interviewed all students on two separate occasions and interviews lasted approximately 20-25 minutes each time. I interviewed 10 out 13 students from class #1; four out of nine students from class #2; and four out 11 students from class #3. Interviews with students occurred during the fourth and final (eighth) week of the classes. All of the student interviews followed interview guides (see Appendix E & F) and were conducted at the university student center. Both of the student interviews lasted for approximately 25 minutes.

The first interview was conducted during the fourth week of classes and focused on students' understanding of CBC and their involvement in the ropes course for the first two weeks. The second interview was conducted during the eighth and final week of classes and focused on students' involvement throughout the entire eight-week course, but particular attention was devoted to their involvement with the high elements. Initially I intended to analyze each of the three class periods separately, thereby allowing for future cross case analysis of individual cases.

However, in my estimation there were no apparent differences between the three classes; each was presented with the same activities over the same time period and in the same fashion, and observations and interview responses did not warrant a cross case analysis. Instead of analyzing each class independently, I used one class as the primary case because I interviewed almost every student from this class on both interview occasions. I then used the other two classes to corroborate findings from the primary class.

This study focused on examining students' understanding of CBC related to their involvement; therefore, all students involved in the interview process added to the depth of understanding. Since no study to date has examined how students understand CBC related to involvement in a ropes course setting, interviews with 18 students on two separate occasions (each interview lasting for 20-25 minutes) provided sufficient data for analysis.

Informal Interviews

Informal interviews with the instructor took place at the end of each class session during the previously specified weeks and focused on the upcoming day's events (e.g., plans for future class sessions). Informal interviews with students were conducted as often as possible and helped develop rapport and clarify my observations. These informal interviews took place before and after class sessions.

Student journal responses

Initially students were asked to keep a reflective journal throughout the eight-week class, often responding to specific questions. Their responses were submitted electronically via Black Board ™, a web-based learning environment designed to enable educational innovations and to engage students in their own learning. I developed the journal questions and they were based on observations and daily class events. The first journal question centered on students' understanding of CBC as it was presented to them by the instructor. However, so that they did not simply reiterate what they heard, the question was worded in a way that omitted the terms CBC. The first journal question was: "In the first session, you received information about what it will take for students to learn and progress individually and as part of a larger group. Based on this information

and in your own words, how would you describe to a friend the information about students being able to make decisions about taking risks in this ropes class? I was interested in students' understanding of the concept CBC and I was looking for them to be able to describe the concept in their own words.

As a way to check for congruency, their responses were compared to the transcript from the instructor's presentation of CBC. Since that most of the journal responses were not fully developed by students, coupled with the idea that I was gathering more in-depth data through the increased number of interviews, I decided to ask fewer journal questions. Other journal questions would be based on concepts such as opportunity for involvement, design and presentation of activities, and engagement in activities. These questions were further developed and refined as the study progressed and were asked during the interviews. The only other time that journaling was used was to gather background information from the students. Each was asked three related questions: "Why are you taking this class? Have you had any other experiences with challenge courses? Have you heard of challenge-by-choice prior to this class?" Journal responses were used as an independent data source, and functioned as a basis for refining formal interview questions.

Descriptive field notes from observations

A detailed descriptive record of my observations and field notes was maintained throughout the study. According to Gold's (1958) typology of observation roles, I acted as an observer participant. That is, my primary role was that of an observer; but, I also participated in a couple of name game and warm-up activities to further develop rapport with the students. My field notes focused on observations of student interactions (with

individuals and the larger group), teacher interactions, individual behaviors, description of activities and how they were presented, and student-teacher interactions before and after class. Specific to observing activities, I looked at whether they were being presented in alignment with the recommendations outlined in the literature. All of my field notes were typed after each observation session and included my own personal reflections. The data from these field notes were used to develop follow up questions for formal interviews. In the following paragraphs details pertaining to the 12 observation periods are provided. Each class was observed four times; twice during the first week, once during the third week, and once during the last week (thus, three classes with four observations each, totaling twelve observation sessions). As mentioned previously, although three separate classes were observed over the eight week time period, all experienced the same activities in the same manner during their respective class periods. Therefore, I have provided details for four observation sessions rather than twelve.

During week one‘s first of two observation sessions, the instructor introduced me to each class and briefly explained my role as a researcher. The instructor also informed the students that their willingness to participate in the research process would not impact their grade in any way. After explaining why and when I would be present, the instructor explained the course in greater detail and reviewed the syllabus (Appendix G). The syllabus detailed students’ expectations and the overall goal of the course. The students also received a release of liability and medical information form. The instructor explained these forms to the students and allowed them ample time to read and sign them. At this point the instructor re-introduced me and informed the students that I now would be sharing with them more information about my research project. I explained my research

project and reviewed with them the letter of informed consent, then asking their willingness to participate. The instructor interjected at this point, reiterating that their participation or non-participation had no bearing on their grade in the class. All students agreed to participate in the observation and informal interview aspects of the study, with 18 out of 33 agreeing to the two formal interviews. All students signed a letter of informed consent and none had any follow up questions. After thanking the students for their time and willingness to participate in this study, I handed the class back over to the instructor.

During the next 15 minutes of class the instructor explained the challenge-by-choice (CBC) philosophy and the atmosphere necessary to promote it. By way of explanation, the instructor stressed that, in order to meet individual and group goals at the ropes course, it would be important to establish an agreed upon way of interacting with one another. This concept was referred to as a full-value contract and could be easily remembered by assigning parts of the contract to each of the five fingers on one hand. To summarize the contract, the thumb represented having a good time/fun; the index finger was to help students remember to take care of "number one" (self); the middle finger, shown in a downward fashion, signified that there would be no "put-downs" or trash talking; the ring finger represented a commitment to emotional and physical safety and learning; lastly the pinkie finger represented the "little guy" and reminded students that after taking care of themselves they needed to be aware of and assist any other group members that might be experiencing a particular difficulty at any point during the course.

All five parts of the "five-finger" contract were explained thoroughly and required no follow up explanation. The instructor then gave the class a few moments to think

about whether or not they were willing to abide by CBC and the “five-finger” contract. All students agreed and showed this by a way of “thumbs up”. The instructor then explained to the students that they were expected to keep this contract with one another and part of the responsibility of the agreement was to be willing to call someone out, including the instructor, if they saw an agreement being broken. Up until this point of the observation everything was taking place sitting in a stadium style bleacher. With moving and physical activity as a primary emphasis for these classes, it was time to get up and move.

The next set of activities I observed as a participant observer, which helped me to further develop rapport with the participants. Moving from the bleachers in the far corner of the ropes course, the instructor invited the students to an open grassy area for the following name game and ice-breaker activities. Before the name game activity, the instructor led the group in the ice-breaker activity, “finger count-off”. The group was asked to separate into pairs and listen for the instructions. The instructor was very upbeat and playful in his introduction of the activity. With a few tentative onlookers, the instructor then gave the “official” rules. Each person held their dominant hand behind his or her back and, at the count of three, he or she were to hold out a number of fingers (zero to five) to their partner. The partner that could sum both the numbers of fingers on his/her hand and the fingers on the partner’s hand needed to shout that sum. The first student to shout the correct number won that round. This was continued with laughs and a bit of competition.

The next level of challenge offered to students was to have them use the same rules as before, but this time they needed to use their non-dominant hand. This continued

with laughs, groans and a bit more competition. At this point the instructor stopped the group and asked if anyone was willing to share any strategies that they might have used. The next increase in challenge was the introduction of “third grade” rules, multiplication with both hands. After a few rounds of this increased challenge level the instructor brought the group back to a circle and asked about strategies again. Most of the students caught on quickly and noted that showing zero fingers was the best strategy. During this brief discussion about strategies, at least one student from each class referred to a partner as “him or her” because they did not yet learn names. The instructor used this as a transition into the next activity, “flip the bird.”

“Flip the bird” is a brief name game activity that is used to assist members of a small group in remembering other group members’ names. The instructor pointed out that we could all identify one another by the color someone was wearing, but it would be more personal to use names rather than relying on a the color of a clothing item. Once more the instructor introduced this activity with increasingly difficult levels of challenge. For instance, still standing in a circle, the instructor challenged each student in the class to know the names of at least three people in the class. He also went on to help the students by jokingly saying that almost everybody in the class already knew one name, their own.

The students were then given a few moments to get to know the names of the person to their left and to their right. After getting to know the name of the person to the left and to the right the instructor had each student say their own name loudly and proudly to the rest of the group. The instructor thanked the students for doing this so well and then offered the challenge to any person to go around the circle and name everyone

else without making one mistake. This was attempted by many students in each class with at least one student from each class getting it correct. Since not all of the students were able to do this correctly (and admitting he could not do this as well) the instructor introduced a stuffed bird to the class and suggested that this would help them remember names.

The instructor then introduced the activity “flip the bird” and immediately most students started to giggle at the name. In fact, some had a hard time controlling their laughter when the instructor informed them that they were going to flip him the bird. Allowing a few moments of laughter, the instructor let the group know that they were going to physically flip the stuffed bird to another person in the group in a particular fashion. The person starting with the bird was instructed to flip it to someone else in the circle but had to let the person know that he/she was about to be flipped the bird. For example, if the first student flipped the bird to the instructor, he would have to say, “Jeff (pseudonym), I’m flipping you the bird.” Jeff would catch the bird and then have to say, “Thank you (name of the person flipping the bird to him) for flipping me the bird.” Before the students started “flipping the bird” to one another, a number of restrictions were added. The bird could not be flipped to the person standing to the immediate left or right. The instructor asked if anyone had questions and when no questions were asked he reminded them that this was not an activity about how far you could flip the bird but an activity to remember names.

After many rounds (five or six) the instructor offered the challenge to any student to try and name everyone in the class. Each person had an attempt and each person was successful. The instructor then had the students sit in the circle and recapped with them

the day's events and what they could expect during the next class session. It is important to note that during this recap the instructor helped the class remember CBC and pointed out some of the different challenges that the students had just faced (i.e. speaking in front of others, acting silly, and trying new things). A few students remained after class to discuss matters such as schedule conflicts and personal medical information. Once the instructor was finished speaking with these few students, I met with him briefly to discuss the events for the next observation period. I was told that it would be a reminder of CBC and the five finger contract and then more ice-breaker activities.

The second observation period occurred during the second class sessions of week one. These rounds of observations began as students started to congregate around the bleachers. Both the instructor and I welcomed the students to class and then the instructor started the class with a joke that received mostly patronizing laughs. Moving quickly from the joke, the instructor then shifted his focus on recapping the last class session by asking if anyone could tell him what CBC or the five-finger contract consisted of. After this recap everyone in the class was asked to meet in the middle of the grassy area and wait for further instructions.

The instructor let the classes know that each time they met they would begin with a similar recap of the previous class period events and then jump right into an activity to get them moving and warming up. Today's activity for warming up was partner tag. The rules of partner tag were explained to the students and were quite simple. The first thing each student had to do was to find themselves a partner and then decide which one would be chasing the other one first. Once the game began, students would chase only their partner trying to tag them. If they did tag them, the roles reversed and now they would be

chased. To give the person that got tagged an opportunity to run off before getting tagged too quickly, the instructor added the rule that once you were tagged you had to plant one foot one the ground and shuffle around in a circle three times before you were allowed to begin your chase. The game of partner tag lasted about five minutes with almost everyone panting. The instructor did stop the game after the first minute to implement a safety rule; chasers were only allowed to tag their partner "appropriately" that is in the middle of the upper back.

Allowing students to get a quick breath, the instructor transitioned right into the next activity, "back-to-back and change three things". Staying with the same partner from tag or changing to a new partner, the object of this game was to try and find what three things your partner changed when you were not looking. The game began with each partner facing one another. One partner was the guessing partner and the other was the changing partner. After spending about one or two minutes checking over their partners, the guessing partner turned around to allow the other partner to change three things about his/her appearance. Once all of the changing partners had finished making their changes the other partner turned around and attempted to figure out what changes were made. A few rounds of this activity were concluded with a short review. During this review the instructor asked the group how they thought they were doing regarding the five finger agreements.

The next activity, "commonalities" also required a partner and again students were given the choice to keep their current partner or choose a different one. Actually, the instructor encouraged the students to switch partners each time just to get to know everyone a bit better. With their partner each pair had to come up with three things they

both had in common with one another. Students were encouraged to challenge themselves by coming up with things that were not so obvious. For example, they were encouraged to think beyond commonalities such as, we are both guys, we are both in school, and we each have arms. After the pairs shared their commonalities with the group, they were then instructed to join another pair and find three things the four of them had in common without using any of the previous answers. This continued until the entire class was together trying to find three things they all had in common. After a short review of the activity and a water break, the instructor had the class meet arranged in the form of a circle in the middle of the grassy area to await their next challenge, "speed rabbit".

The activity "speed rabbit" was prefaced by letting students know that they would have an opportunity to act or appear inept in front of the class with the help of two other students. The class was arranged in a circle and with the instructor standing in the middle. While in the middle the instructor gave the students the instructions. He let the classes know that three students would have to model one of three characters; John Travolta, a screaming Viking, or Elvis Pressley. After showing the students how to create the three characters and telling them that they only had until the count of ten to complete this, the entire class practiced each part of creating the characters.

The instructor informed the students that the game would begin as soon as he pointed at someone in the circle while saying the name of one of the three characters. The student pointed at and the students to his or her left would then have to create the character named before the instructor counted to ten. If any of the three students failed to create their part of the character before the count of ten then the instructor would switch

places in the circle and the new person in the middle would continue the game in the same fashion. Many rounds of the game were played with the addition of more characters to increase the challenge. After a short review and time for a few students to compose themselves, the last activity, “circle in a circle” was introduced.

The activity “circle in a circle” was another ice-breaker activity used to allow students to continue to get to know one another a bit more. Each person in the class found a partner and decided who would be “A” and who would be “B”. All of the “A’s” made a circle facing in. Their partners assembled a circle inside this circle and arranged themselves so that they were facing directly across from their partners. The next instruction was to have the partners discuss specific questions asked by the instructor. After discussing a topic for two to three minutes the circles would rotate so that everyone ended up with a new partner. Sample topics included discussing favorite foods, what each student considered to be their dream vacation and why, favorite movies, and favorite scars and the story behind them to name a few. This activity continued until each student had an opportunity to discuss at least one topic with each person from the other circle.

The class periods were wrapped up when the instructor described to the students how cool it was to observe everyone “getting into” their scar stories – lifting up clothing, hopping on one foot, etc. The instructor also asked if there were any questions about anything up until this point and then thanked the class for being willing to try new things and stretch themselves. After asking the students to keep this in mind as they progressed through subsequent classes, I was allowed time to schedule interviews.

The third observation took place during the first class sessions of week three. Similar to the previous observation periods, this set of observations began as students

milled around the stadium bleachers. The instructor started the classes off with an introduction to the day's events, followed with a "corvette-speeding" joke that was received with a few laughs. The instructor also reminded the students that their next class period would be the transition to the high elements. He also used this time to remind any students that were apprehensive or nervous about the idea of climbing that they did not have to leave the ground to be successful in the class. With many students excited about the thought of climbing the next week and a few set at ease knowing that they were not required to climb, the game "Alaskan baseball" was introduced as a way to get the students moving for the day.

The game "Alaskan baseball" was similar to traditional baseball in the sense that there were two teams competing to earn "runs" against one another, but differed in many other ways. For instance, after choosing two teams the following instructions were given. The team that was batting first needed to have one person toss a soft ball into the air and hit it with their hand into the field of play. The field of play consisted of the entire grassy area. After hitting the ball into the field of play, the batter could score one run for each time he/she ran around the rest of his/her huddled team. Of course the defensive team could call a stop to the number of earned runs by fielding the ball and completing the following sequence: after the entire team lined up behind the person that fielded the ball, the fielder would then hand the ball backwards over his/her head to the next player in line. This player receiving the ball from the fielder would then pass the ball backwards between his/her legs to the next person in line and this sequence would be continued until the last team member had the ball. As soon as the last team member received the ball, he/she would yell stop and the offensive runner would be "out" and could not earn

anymore runs. This game did not have an out limit; rather each person on the team had an opportunity to “bat” before sides were switched. The team with the most runs after everyone had a chance to bat “won”. This game ended with a review which focused on strategies, competition, and the idea of cheating.

Asking the students to remember the focus of their review, the instructor introduced the group initiative, “overhand knot”. The instructor separated the large group into smaller groups of four and continued by modeling how to tie a simple overhand knot in the middle of a three foot piece of rope. Each group member demonstrated that they knew how to tie the knot and then listened intently for the next set of directions. The small groups of four were instructed to have two members hold each end of the short rope in their left hands. With their right hands empty, the two people holding the rope then reached their hand out to another group member and held their hand. This created a link of four people with a short piece of rope between the middle two members. Once the group of four was linked, and without letting go of the rope, the next task was to tie the overhand knot. The instructor also let the groups know that if they finished before another group their next task was to offer suggestions and assistance to other groups, but only if the other groups wanted it. This group initiative ended with a review of the activity and focused on things such as; what worked, what did not work/held you back, etc. The instructor then asked the students to bring any successes from this activity to the next group initiative, “traffic jam”.

After taking a short water break, the activity “traffic jam” was introduced to the entire group. This activity required an even number of players and as luck had it, each class had an even number of students in attendance. Working as one group the students

needed to navigate a series of steps (poly spots placed on the ground) in a particular order to complete the activity. The instructor had placed poly spots on the ground about 18 inches apart in a v-shape. Students were then asked to stand on a spot of their choice. Once the students found a spot, the instructor added another spot that divided the group into two equal halves and then told the group that they had to be facing the direction of the vacant spot. This was the only vacant spot available at the start.

The instructor next informed the group that they did a great job finding a spot to stand on, but unfortunately they were on the wrong sides, in reverse order and to complete the activity they would have to switch. Immediately students simply walked off of their spots to the other side and the instructor let them know that he had not finished giving all of the rules. The additional rules were as follows: a person could move to a vacant spot if it was right in front of them; a person was allowed to step around someone facing them only if the next spot was vacant; the person behind you could step around you if there was a vacant space in front of you; no player was allowed to step back; players could only move one spot at a time or move past one person at a time; the group was given as much time as they needed to figure this out; and anytime they could not make a move they had to reassemble to their original formation and begin again.

After many attempts and a few looks of frustration, the instructor reviewed this activity by letting the group know that they had every right to feel successful because of their persistence and level of engagement. He then followed that up with the question, “what things worked or allowed the group to be successful?” Finally the instructor transitioned to the next activity by asking the group to bring “things” that worked in “traffic jam” to the next activity. He also informed them know that upon hearing the

instructions for the next group initiative, the group must have a plan in place and communicated to him prior to making any attempts.

The next and final group initiative for the day, “nuclear fence,” was more physical than the previous activity. The “nuclear fence” consisted of a cord, four feet from the ground stretched between two poles 10 feet apart. Two classes had the cord parallel to the ground; the other class had the cord placed on an angle going from four feet on one pole to five feet on the other pole. This variation was set up intentionally to see if students recognized the different choices being offered. The next set of instructions was straightforward; each group had to get over the cord. However, the following restrictions were in effect: group members were not allowed to use the poles; the group must remain connected with one another throughout the activity (connection could be anything from holding hands, clothes tied together, feet touching, etc.); the group could not go under the cord nor have any body part under the cord; and the group could not go around the outside of the poles. The final restriction was presented to the groups as an option that must be agreed upon by all members before beginning the activity. The options were: if any person touched the cord at any time, the entire group must start again; if any person touched the cord, only that person had to start again; or, if any person touched the cord, either that person or any other person already over the cord could start again. All three groups decided on the final option, if a person touched the cord, that person or any other person that was already over could start again.

Prior to their first start the group was reminded that the instructor had to hear their decision on the option they chose and their plan for attempting this activity. Then the instructor discussed specific safety issues related to lifting a student from the ground and

linked this to the five-finger contract. After completion of the activity, the instructor led a brief review of this activity and centered it on defining success, cheating, support, etc. The review was concluded with the question, what did you learn from this activity that might help your group or hold it back in the future?

The final observation occurred during week seven and by this time the students had been climbing on the high elements for three weeks. On this day the following high ropes course activities were available for the students to challenge themselves: Catwalk; Zip Line; Pamper Pole; Sylv's Swings; Giant's Ladder; and Climbing Tower. During each of these high ropes course activities the climber(s) wore harnesses and were attached to a belay rope for safety. When used correctly, the belay rope keeps the climbers from falling to the ground. The following is a brief description of each activity and the variations offered at each.

The Catwalk is a horizontally positioned pole suspended approximately forty feet in the air between two vertical utility poles. Participants typically access the Catwalk via small pegs on either of the two vertical poles. To increase the physical challenge the Catwalk could also be accessed by climbing a rope ladder hanging from the bottom of the Catwalk. This variation was more challenging because the ladder required increased strength to climb. Further, making the transition from the ladder to the top of the Catwalk was more difficult than transferring from one of the vertical poles. This activity could be done alone or with a partner. If done alone, after accessing the Catwalk, the climber then attempted to walk across. If done with a partner, each climber accessed the Catwalk from opposite sides and then had to negotiate past one another at some point in their crossing.

The Zipline consists of an aircraft cable suspended horizontally between two poles. One end of the cable is attached to a utility pole approximately forty five feet in the air and is connected to another utility pole 200 feet away at approximately the same height. The climbers accessed a small 18" x 30" platform near the top of one of the poles via small pegs. The facilitator stood on top of this platform and attached the climber to the Zipline. The climber then walked, jumped, or scooted off the platform and rode down the Zipline. There was a braking system on the other end of the cable which prevented the participant from crashing into the other utility pole. Slack in the cable allowed the participants to be helped off the Zipline via a step ladder. Variations for this activity included clipping in from either the front or the back of the harness. Clipping into the front of the harness was the typical/traditional method and provided the climber with a short rope to hold onto on the ride down. When clipped in from behind, the short rope was behind the participant giving him/her the feeling that they were attached to nothing (not able to hold on).

The Pamper Pole is simply a vertical utility pole that the participants climb via small pegs attached to the sides. Standing approximately forty feet high, the top of the utility pole provided climbers a small surface (12" diameter) to climb and stand atop. Once a climber stood on top of the pole, he/she leapt for a small 2.5" round pipe hanging vertically six feet away from them. The round pipe was positioned six feet away and slightly higher than the climber to coax them to jump/leap off the pole. An increased challenge was to grab the round pipe and hang on. Some climbers sat atop the pole and scooted off while others climbed back down.

The Dangle-Duo is a vertically oriented log ladder suspended from an overhead cable between two vertical poles. The log steps on the ladder are unevenly spaced apart from approximately five feet to seven feet. This element was designed to be completed in pairs. Once each climber was on the first step of the ladder (approximately four feet off the ground) they assisted one another in climbing to the top. While the design of this activity is physically challenging, participants could increase their challenge by not using the side cables of the ladder. To make this activity a bit easier, the climbers could use a short piece of cord to wrap around the ladder steps above them to pull themselves up.

Sylv's swings are a series of four – six foot, four inch by four inch beams suspended 35 to 40 feet in the air (like swings) by ropes attached to an overhead cable stretched between two utility poles. Participants accessed the first beam by climbing pegs on a utility pole and then had to lean out three feet to step onto the beam. Once a climber reached the first beam and walked the four feet to the other end, he/she had to swing the beam back and forth to reach the next beam that was anywhere from five to seven feet away. To increase the challenge for this element, climbers could choose to access the first swing by climbing a knotted rope.

The Climbing tower is a large wooden wall (12' wide x 45' high) that has a number of climbing holds attached to it. The climbing holds differed in shape, size, texture, and placement to provide a number of different challenges. The wall starts ten feet from the ground; therefore, the climbers accessed the wall by climbing up an aluminum ladder. To increase the challenge, instead of climbing the aluminum ladder, climbers could also access the wall by way of a knotted rope or a rope ladder. Other

variations for the climbing tower included using a limited number of holds, climbing for speed and/or gracefulness.

For this particular observation, the instructor was standing on top of the platform for the Pamper Pole. The classes had already been divided into small climbing groups (three to four students per group) and had the option to try any activity as many times possible for the class duration. Before allowing the small groups to begin climbing, the instructor began the class period by reminding students about CBC and the ways in which an individual could stretch into their growth zone. He reminded the class of the aforementioned variations but also let them know that they could attempt any of the activities blindfolded. He also encouraged each student to set individual goals for the day and try to push further than the last class period. The instructor allowed approximately ten minutes at the end of the class periods for me to set up any last interviews. There was no review period at the end of these observations.

It is important to note that my role as an observer may have had an effect on the group being studied (Merriam, 1998; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Throughout the research process I reflected on how my presence could have impacted the study, and I documented my reflections in a researcher log. Maintaining an observation log also helped create an audit trail.

Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba, the question addressed by trustworthiness is straightforward: "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (1985, p. 290). Trustworthiness refers to the way qualitative research can be judged. In order to provide verification of

trustworthiness, Creswell (1998) details eight procedures available to qualitative researchers and recommends that at least two of the procedures be included in any qualitative study. I used three of the recommended procedures: (1) triangulation, (2) member checks, and (3) external audits (audit trail including a researcher journal). Moreover, any findings also were validated by means of further observations or interviews. As an important step in the process of establishing trustworthiness and detailing my readiness and ability to undertake a qualitative study, I begin the following section with a description of my research perspective.

At the outset it is important to note my involvement with the ropes course site chosen for this study. I have been employed as a lead facilitator at this particular course for the past five years and have also taught two sections of the type of academic class being studied. Furthermore, I have worked closely with the instructor who is a participant in this study. Specifically, I have assisted in teaching classes, developed and facilitated ropes course programs, facilitated climbing camps, and co-authored a book with this instructor. Although bias is a concern in all studies, readers may interpret my prior involvement with this instructor as bringing too much bias to this investigation. However, my stance is that bias in this study should not be viewed negatively; rather it should be seen as a contributing factor strengthening my research.

Having had experience with this type of university course and with the instructor allowed me to build rapport much more quickly. Further, this instructor has been applying CBC in his teaching for the past 20 years and I was confident that my presence would not impact his teaching. Had I chosen another instructor with whom I had minimal experience, I might have had to deal with the possibility of observer impact. Also, having

taught this class, I was able to concentrate on factors related to CBC that others may overlook. For instance, I am sensitive to and have developed a heightened awareness to the subtle ways in which students use body language to express their feelings. Although I have worked closely with this instructor and was challenged at times not to debrief the day's events (as we normally would do as co-workers on the course), we maintained a professional researcher-participant relationship throughout this study. The conversations we had at the end of each class session centered on the next days' events. The instructor's first exposure to any of the research findings was weeks after the study was complete.

To further support researcher credibility, I will describe my qualifications as a qualitative researcher. During the past four years I have completed a doctoral minor in applied statistics and research methods and have been involved in two qualitative studies. In regard to the first study, I was a co-investigator and involved in all phases of the research project which investigated students' perceptions of active homework. I assisted in data collection and analysis and disseminated the findings at a national conference. At that same time I also was involved in an ethnography examining the culture of a local club sport hockey team. This research was extensive, involving more than 50 hours of observation and in-depth formal interviews with players, coaches, and support staff. The study required approximately 20 informal interviews with parents and fans. Findings from the study were disseminated at a national conference in April, 2008. Additional support for research credibility is now presented under the following headings: triangulation, member checks, and external auditor.

Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the practice of collecting data from a diverse range of participants and using multiple data sources to provide corroborating evidence to help shed light on a theme (Creswell, 1998). In other words, the attempt is to identify convergence of data gathered by different methods. Interviewing and observing both male and female students from three different classes allowed me to look for similarities or differences among individuals. It also had the potential of producing different reports about the same event. Utilizing a number of data collection techniques (e.g., interviews, observations, journal responses, and field notes) helped provide a more complete representation. Further, to add to the credibility of the study, each data source was used to cross check individual accounts. Investigating how CBC was presented and understood by multiple participants and drawing from a number of data sources was one of three strategies lending credibility to this study.

Member Checks

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe member checking as evaluating consistency, and involves the process of sharing the researcher's interpretations of findings with participants. Considered as the most critical technique in establishing credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and as an important method for ruling out any misinterpretation of participants' meanings, member checks were used as a systematic process of soliciting feedback from interviewees. I provided participants access to my interview transcripts, initial findings, and results of the study. Participants were then requested to indicate whether they perceived any discrepancies between their interpretations and mine.

External Audit

To further establish credibility I invited a faculty member to serve as an external auditor. The faculty member was not involved in this study in any other way and is highly qualified to serve as the auditor. For instance, his dissertation used qualitative methodology, he has conducted several studies that employ qualitative methodology, and he teaches qualitative research classes at the graduate level. The auditor's sole involvement with this study was to review objectively the process and product of the research and to evaluate its accuracy (Creswell, 1998). In that role the auditor assisted in determining whether the findings, interpretations, and conclusions of the study were supported by the available data. As a final method of addressing trustworthiness and as an aid to the auditor, I maintained an audit trail detailing the processes used to collect and analyze data throughout the study. The audit trail included written documents such as: raw data from transcripts; research memos; field notes and reflections; journal responses; and, intermediate data analysis.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis were performed in tandem, whereby data analysis informed data collection (Patton, 2000). Data were collected from three sources (interviews, observations, and journal entries) and were analyzed using what Dey (1993) has referred to as the general inductive analysis approach. This approach helped to obtain answers to the following research questions: how was the concept CBC presented to and understood by college students in an elective eight-week challenge course class?; were challenge course activities presented in congruence with the recommendations outlined in the literature?; what was the instructor's view (comprehension and opinion) of CBC, and in what manner was that viewpoint shared with participants both verbally and through

activities?; how did participants' understanding (comprehension, approval, and degree of importance) of CBC relate to their involvement?; did the design and presentation of selected activities align with CBC, as well as did the activities relate to participants' involvement?; and, did non-CBC factors (e.g., classmates, weather, and personal events/issues external to the course) have a bearing on participants' involvement? The following section provides detailed description of the data analysis process used in this study.

Although qualitative data analysis has been referred to as a mysterious process in which the findings emerge from the data (Mertens, 1998), following a set of specific procedures I was able to remove some of the ambiguity. The subsequent paragraphs outline the procedures that I used to condense the volumes of raw data by assigning codes and categories, to establish links between my research objectives and findings by indicating commonalities between levels of categories, and to develop and identify the main themes that appeared consistently across all data sources.

An important preliminary step in the general inductive data analysis phase was to prepare the extensive and diverse raw text data into a single, common, manageable format. As a way to help manage the volumes of data and to assist in the coding phase of analysis I first transferred all of my interview transcripts, field notes, and journal entries to a common format (e.g., font size, margins). Once all of my data were transferred to this common format I began the initial coding process. Coding in qualitative studies refers to the process of how researchers begin to define what their data means and how they sort out, apply names to, and summarize segments of data (Charmaz, 2006).

A number of approaches to this initial coding process include word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident to incident coding (Charmaz, 2006). Word-by-word coding was not practical for this study because it is usually reserved for working with historical documents or internet data; therefore, I began data analysis with line-by-line coding. All interview transcripts and journal responses were read line-by-line and codes (written in the margins) were affixed to each line. These early codes were the first step in separating the data into text segments that held a particular meaning and that could be used to compare against later data and to help refocus interviews. The initial step of separating data also helped to create manageable units of data for further analysis. Also in this step of the process, themes that began to emerge from the data were identified and placed into logical, meaningful categories. The intent was to help communicate this interpretation to readers (Patton, 1990). The observational field notes were already in my own words; therefore, I coded these files incident-to-incident. That is, I reviewed observational notes and compared similar incidents which allowed me to combine, compare, and affix codes to observational notes from each of the three ropes course classes. All of the handwritten codes were transferred to a format that matched the other raw data. This was done for ease of reference in subsequent steps of the analysis process.

The next step in the coding process placed the initial coded text segments into interconnected categories. That is, I reviewed all of the coded data and began to create and label categories from multiple codes that held similar meaning. After developing categories from the initial codes and after identifying central phenomena (categories holding the most conceptual interest), I revisited the data on a number of occasions to reduce overlap and redundancy among categories. For this part of the process I created a

matrix which allowed me to cut and paste evidence from the raw data documents into a common form (Appendix H). By using this form I was able to fill in categories that needed further refinement or development (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As I continued to collapse categories I discerned what caused the phenomena, what context influenced it, how it was responded to, and what resulted from these responses. The purpose was to relate categories to central phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The final product of the analysis process is a written account of how the condensed categories are interrelated and connected with the main themes and how these themes help explain students' involvement in an eight-week challenge course class.

To summarize, using qualitative methods and a constructionism framework, this study was designed to answer the following questions: how was the concept CBC presented to and understood by college students in an elective eight-week challenge course class?; were challenge course activities presented in congruence with the recommendations outlined in the literature review?; what was the instructor's view (comprehension and opinion) of CBC, and in what manner was that viewpoint shared with participants both verbally and through activities?; how did participants' understanding (comprehension, approval, and degree of importance) of CBC relate to their involvement?; did the design and presentation of selected activities align with CBC, as well as did the activities relate to participants' involvement?; and, did non-CBC factors (e.g., classmates, weather, and personal events/issues external to the course) have a bearing on participants' involvement.

The answers to these questions were explored using a number of data collection methods including; observations, instructor and student interviews, and student journal

responses. Data were collected from three separate ropes course classes and since there were no apparent differences between the three classes, I grouped all three together. Each class was observed four times; twice the first week, once the third week, and once the eighth and final week. Further, an interview with the instructor took place one week prior to the start of the classes and again at the end of the eight weeks. Two interviews were conducted with 18 of 33 students. The first of these interviews was conducted during the fourth week, and the second interview was conducted during the eighth and final week of the classes. The data from these sources was analyzed using general inductive methods, resulting in a narrative description of the instructor's and students' understanding of the concept CBC related to students' involvement.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of challenge by choice (CBC) in an adventure setting. Specifically, how was CBC understood and enacted, and did it appear to play a role in participants' involvement? Furthermore, four specific sub-problems guided the study. The first sub-problem investigated the instructor's view (comprehension and opinion) of CBC, and the manner in which that viewpoint was shared with participants verbally and through activities. The second sub-problem investigated participants' understanding (comprehension, approval, and degree of importance) of CBC, and whether that understanding was related to their involvement. The third sub-problem investigated whether the design and presentation of selected activities aligned with CBC, as well as whether the activities related to participants' involvement. The fourth sub-problem investigated whether non-CBC factors (e.g., classmates, weather, and personal events/issues external to the course) had a bearing on participants' involvement.

The intent of this chapter is to present a narrative description of the instructor's and students' understanding of the concept CBC related to students' involvement. While it was found that CBC might be a necessary component in the three classes, it was not sufficient in explaining students' involvement. As a result of the data analysis, there were three major themes common among challenge course students: "instruction"; "atmosphere"; and "challenge". Each of these themes was generated from and supported by condensed categories (sub-themes) and initial codes. The main theme "instruction" was generated from the following sub-themes: facilitator; subject matter; and

instructional method. The main theme “atmosphere” included the sub-themes: interest; risk; and support. Finally, the main theme “challenge” included the sub-themes: acceptance and avoidance. The following sections elaborate on the finding that CBC might be necessary but not sufficient in explaining students’ involvement. I have provided a thorough description, including evidence from observations, interviews, and journal responses, and a discussion of the dimensions of each theme as they related to the four specific sub-problems. Prior to fully explaining the three main themes I have included a brief summary of what constituted student involvement in this study followed by a detailed description of the instructor’s understanding of CBC.

Student Involvement

This study focused on students’ involvement in an eight-week challenge course class. One might surmise that by simply observing someone, it would be easy to discern whether or not that person is involved in an activity. However, it becomes more difficult when CBC is the guiding principle. Based on CBC and described as a goal of the course, students were encouraged to choose the level of challenge that was appropriate for each of them. Appropriate challenges were referred to challenges that would help individuals stretch beyond their comfort zone and move into their growth zone. It would be difficult for anyone to know what level of challenge is appropriate for each student, because choice of challenges is a personal decision that often is not readily apparent to others. I offer an example for clarification.

During one of my observation periods it appeared to me as if one young man was not involved with the group or activity. After recording in my field notes that he appeared disengaged from the activity, I had an opportunity to interact with him during the

transition to the next activity. During this interaction he detailed his perceived level of involvement during the last activity. Rather than corroborating my observation the student explained to me that he was highly involved in the activity because he was intentionally standing back from the group to get a better view and to quietly think of ways to help solve the group problem. The difference between my observation and the student's response were our differing perceptions of involvement. For the remainder of this paper, and throughout the findings section, I will refer to students' level of involvement based on their perceptions, unless otherwise noted.

Instructor's Understanding of CBC

An important aspect of this research (first sub-problem) was to investigate the instructor's view (perspective and comprehension) of CBC and how he shared that with his students. Understanding the instructor's view of CBC and then how he shared that view with students was vital in setting the stage for this research. First, I was examining if the instructor's view of CBC was aligned with the literature. Next, I was investigating if the instructor was congruent in the way that he shared his view of CBC with the students. Having worked extensively with this instructor in the past and having a preliminary understanding of his belief with regard to CBC plus having seen him apply the concept during other challenge course programs was a major reason for choosing to research his classes. Rather than being viewed as a possible conflict of interest (addressed in an earlier section), the background information afforded to me through our professional relationship can be viewed as beneficial to this research. Having a "hunch" that this instructor would consistently apply the philosophy of CBC in accord with the literature helped remove a shortcoming often associated with challenge course research.

That is, I was confident that the previously noted shortcomings of misapplying or misusing CBC in challenge course programs would not be present in this study. The following paragraphs provide support for my "hunch."

Based on an initial interview with the instructor it was clear that he understood and viewed CBC in the same manner as Karl Rohnke (1989) had intended it. When I compared the interview transcript with Rohnke's description of CBC they were almost identical. Rohnke (1989) had described CBC as a way to invite participant involvement and stated that CBC offers participants:

- "The chance to try a potentially difficult and/or frightening challenge in an atmosphere of support and caring.
- The opportunity to "back off" when performance pressures or self-doubt become too strong, knowing that an opportunity for a future attempt will always be available.
- The chance to try difficult tasks, recognizing that the attempt is more significant than performance results.
- Respect for individual ideas and choices" (p. 14).

When compared to the following excerpt from the instructor's description of CBC, it was clear that he understood the philosophy in accordance with the literature.

> So when I share challenge by choice with them (students), I let them know that you're going to have an opportunity to take risks but in a safe setting. So you're going to be confronted with things that may seem even scary at times, however, the choices that you make relative to those scary things are going to depend on you not so much me. It's up to you to choose the level of challenge that you want to take on at any particular time. But you are going to have an opportunity to take risks and we need to create a safe setting for you to do that. I also let them know that when they're out at the ropes course it's more about giving it your best try as opposed to you just gotta do it. So the attempt at something and giving it a try is more important than their performance. If you're on top of an element and you're

> going to jump out and try to grab onto something, the attempt to do that giving it the world's best try is much more important than actually doing it. So I try to let them know that. I also let them know that whatever choices they make all of us have to respect one another's choices. …but also realize that if you do make a choice and some times it may be a little bit too frightening to you and you need to back off of that, we all accept that and we all respect that, and you'll have opportunities to try things again. It's not like you back off once, you're out of the picture, like in some other activities. So I would say that's pretty much the essence of what I try to share with them when I'm sharing challenge by choice. I also let them know one other thing. The one choice that I would request that they not make is that they don't just check out. So be engaged at a level that's appropriate for you and if you're not engaged in a task or a challenge that I've given to the group in a way that was presented to the group, find an alternative.

It could be argued that perhaps the instructor simply memorized the components of CBC and can recite them on cue. So I probed more deeply and asked questions about how long he had been familiar with and applying CBC. He noted that he had been involved with this particular challenge course for the past seventeen years and had been applying CBC during that entire time. He also advised me that, despite hearing about CBC in 1989, he had been applying similar thinking since his undergraduate studies, as evidenced from the following quote.

> It was actually even before I'd ever heard of challenge by choice. I was an undergraduate and I worked with a guy named Muska Mosston who had a spectrum of teaching styles. He called it a teaching spectrum and the intention was to shift decisions from the teacher to the students and so they can become more autonomous. Then I came across Don Hellinson and his work with responsibility and I noticed, or I became even more aware, that not only shifting decisions but accepting the consequences of those decisions. Hellinson talks about it in terms of responsibility. So I was already familiar with challenges and choice. I had never really put them all together though in a way that I got passionate about it until I got involved in the ropes course and realized that's pretty much an underlying principle.

This initial interview made me comfortable knowing that the instructor understood CBC and the next step was to witness how he shared this view with the three classes.

First, I attended and audio-taped each of his CBC presentations to the three classes. After listening to the audio-tapes and re-reading my transcripts, it almost appeared as if the presentations were scripted. All of the points that he had communicated to me in the initial interview were shared with each class in a more or less verbatim fashion. He mentioned all of Rohnke's points and emphasized that students would have the opportunity to take risks in a safe environment. This emphasis was explained as being the groups' responsibility to develop a full-value contract that could support this philosophy. As a colleague, I have a bias toward the instructor in that I credit him with being able to share this philosophy with just about anyone and because of his long history of believing in and applying it in varied teaching situations. As a researcher, however, it was critical for me to look beyond this bias and to further investigate if his understanding was communicated through subsequent actions (i.e., designing and presenting activities) as well as for the duration of the course. I referred to this as congruency earlier and based on observations and interviews the instructor did in fact follow the points noted in CBC in his programming. In other words, he "walked his talk" minimizing confusion by saying and presenting the same things. This point of congruency will be elaborated on in the section of themes.

My initial interview with the instructor showed that his view of CBC aligned with the literature. This view was shared with the students in an unchanged manner. The following excerpt typifies the explanation of CBC with all three classes.

> The focus or the philosophy that underlies this course and this program is called Challenge by Choice. You'll be given challenges in a safe atmosphere and it's your choice to choose the level at which you're going to participate in a challenge. I would ask you not to make the choice of checking out. You can't just say, "I don't want to do that one," and then come over here and have a drink of water. If you could I ask that you choose the level of participation that's

> appropriate for you… So you get to choose the level of participation; just not "no participation." Come up with a different role for yourself. Talk with the group and say, "I hurt my back, I can't lift. But I'd be willing to try something else" okay. Another part of challenge by choice is that the performance out here is not as important as the attempt. I'll give an example. You climb the telephone pole over there, climb up that pole and try to go out and grab that yellow pole and miss. Who cares? You gave it a try. If somebody else does it and you don't do it. Who cares? Because it's not about doing things, accomplishing things, it's about trying stuff…. another thing is, if something out here becomes maybe a little bit too uncomfortable or even frightening for you, you're always welcome to back off, because you'll have another opportunity to try things down the road. Finally, we will be developing an agreed upon way to interact with one another out here so that we respect the ideas and choices others make…

Not only did the instructor share his view of CBC with the students in alignment with the literature, but he also followed the recommendations of the literature by including the four fundamental components of adventure education (CBC, FVC, sequencing, and activity review). CBC was introduced; a full-value contract was developed as way to build an appropriate atmosphere; activities were sequenced with increased challenge; and activities were reviewed. Observations and student comments revealed that he also adhered to CBC concepts throughout the eight week course and he remained consistent with providing student-centered learning. Further, he did not use language that forced or coerced student involvement.

Exploring whether students understood CBC (sub-question #2) as it was presented to them I relied on observations, journal responses, and interviews. Immediately after the instructor presented CBC, the students agreed that they understood this and were willing to follow CBC by giving a thumbs-up. The instructor reviewed this "yes" with the students by letting them know that what he heard by the thumbs-up was that everyone understood CBC and the full-value contract, and they were willing to stick to these agreements. He even asked if that was true and they all said yes. The journal responses

showed that students had a basic understanding of CBC, with most simply reiterating what was said during the first class (if they remembered that class). Lacking a detailed description of CBC and only communicating that they got the gist of it with a thumbs-up, I sought more detailed explanations from the students in interviews. The following excerpts from interviews are examples of how students understood CBC. For instance this student noted that CBC involved making choices, knowing personal limits, and realizing that backing off was a viable option.

> CBC is basically you challenge yourself but it's I mean it's your choice. You can decide how much to challenge yourself, how little to challenge yourself, how like you nobody knows your comfort zone except for yourself obviously so it's all your choice of how much you want to challenge yourself (student #11, 1st interview).

Another student remarked that CBC included individual choices, staying involved, backing off when necessary, stretching, and not just checking out.

> CBC it was basically it was kind of it goes along with the stretching. You know you don't have to be off the ground unless you want to. And yeah pretty much. It was also going along with the stretching like if you don't feel comfortable, if you're afraid of heights or whatever, just make sure that you challenge yourself in other ways other than just not going up and being lazy. You know sort of thing (student #16, 1st interview).

Confident that the instructor understood and presented CBC in a manner that students understood it in the way it was intended, the next step was to determine what their involvement was related to. The following section describes factors related to student involvement.

Themes

Focused on answering the four research sub-problems, the data analysis revealed three main themes. These themes emerged throughout the data analysis process and each main theme included sub-themes and initial codes. The three main themes; "instruction",

"atmosphere," and "challenge" will be explained by discussing the sub-themes and their connection to the four research sub-problems. All three themes were interrelated and contributed to explaining students' involvement, but not in any hierarchical fashion. Therefore, no inferences should be made about the order in which the themes are presented.

Instruction

The main theme "instruction" contributed to students' involvement during the eight week challenge course class. The theme "instruction" consisted of three sub-themes: instructor/facilitator; subject matter; and, instructional method.

Instructor/Facilitator

Student involvement was greatly impacted by the instructor of the class. While many students commented on the instructor as being a caring and supportive person, others also noted his personality, knowledge of adventure education and approachability as assets. Comments about the instructor's caring and support for the class will also be included under the theme "atmosphere." The following excerpts highlight the instructor's likeability. For instance, this excerpt shows how one student felt about the instructor.

> I think he's been a great instructor so far. I think he does a good job. He doesn't give a whole lot of input. Because he tells us the rules and then he steps back and let's us work it out and do what we want to do (student #5, 1st interview).

Not only did he note that the instructor did well, this can be connected with the instructor's ability to allow the group to work matters out for themselves. Allowing students to work as a group with minimal instructor input aligns with the experiential approach.

On a more personal level, this next student shared his appreciation for the instructor. Although not all of the students were as forthcoming as this one, many commented informally that they too really enjoyed the instructor because they felt as if he knew what he was doing out at the course and he really cared about the students.

> I like the instructor. I think he's a great asset for the recreation program and outdoor education. I think we need a lot more people like him. I think it's great for this university and I think it's going to help the recreation and outdoor education program hugely. I like him as a person; he makes you feel comfortable while you do the activities. He asks if there's anything that you're not comfortable with and he generally cares about what you're doing. He wants you to stretch. I can't say that about many of the other instructors I've had in the outdoor program (student #6, 1st interview).

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This student commented on the instructor's approach to motivating students, encouraging them to be involved for the sake of personal growth and learning. Although many students did not remark on this in their interviews, the following excerpt from this student summarizes his perception on the impact the instructor had on him being more involved and willing to grow.

> I think if it wasn't for the instructor and telling us this is what we're here for, this is why we're doing this, there really wouldn't have been any motivation for anybody to push themselves, I don't think. Like if you go out there and you freak out, you would have freaked out and just kind of found something a lot easier to do, or not do anything at all. But I think his you know really subtle way of you know just kind of a giving us a kick in the pants to get you going type of thing was actually a lot more effective than people may have given him credit for. And I think that once you put that kind of perspective on things, you're not up there to climb and show off, you're you there to conquer your own insecurities and you're up there to you know kind of take care of yourself (student #2, 2nd interview).

Another student commented on the trust and atmosphere that was fostered by the instructor over the course of the eight weeks. Although she did not directly say that the reason for this was due to the sequence and progression of the activities, credit was given

to the instructor for allowing her to feel comfortable speaking out in a group and feeling more relaxed.

> I think the way he instructs the class is great. I honestly since I've never done this before I don't know how any other the ropes course would be or anything like that, but he definitely he makes it fun. And for me because I'm not very outspoken allowing me to speak and have an opinion and having everybody else actually involved is a lot more relaxing and I don't know any way it would be better honestly (student #12, 1st interview).

The following quote notes that the presentation of activities factored into his involvement.

> I would say the way activities were presented factors into involvement, because he knows that these are like kind of cheesy activities or silly but he's enthusiastic about it so…you're sitting there rolling your eyes during his talking or are like oh what the hell! But then I'm like alright yeah let's just do it, let's have fun with it. And by the time you're done doing it, you don't feel stupid like you were thinking you would at the beginning of the demonstration. So, I think his demonstration and his presentation of the games or whatever is very effective (student #14, 1st interview).

Although this quote suggested the instructor's enthusiasm was a factor in his involvement, it failed to elaborate on more specifics. However, as you can tell from the next quote, for this particular student, the instructor's presentation did not factor into influencing his involvement.

> I kind of always went into this class planning to be involved in everything. So it doesn't really matter how the activity is presented, I'm not going to go to class and then not choose to be involved in any of the activities. Because I've taken class, I want to get all that I can out of it.

The next sub-theme under "instruction" was subject matter. As a sub-theme it was referred to by students as academic or non-academic subjects. Further, subject matter was found to influence students' involvement in the course.

Subject Matter

The following excerpt not only highlights the difference this student sees between these classes versus other "academic" classes. He also notes becoming more acquainted with all students in this class in a short period of time versus not knowing the majority of students from other academic classes.

> In other classes I can name the three people who sit around me. And this class by the second or third day I could name every single person in the class. Even though I don't remember their names now, I still recognize them when I walk around and I think, oh I know that person from ropes course class…I think it's definitely a better dynamic within this class versus other academic classes like economics or math (student #8, 2nd interview).

Although the next student does not identify academic versus non-academic subject matter, the following quote illustrates the idea that this student identifies the content or activities in this class to be quite different from other classes.

> Sometimes the way he says stuff seems a little cheesy but I think that's okay because it does enhance the idea of everything being our choice…It's just weird because we're not use to that kind of class. But that's probably because we are doing activities that seem really silly and fun. I know we would never do any thing like that in my other classes (student #9, 1st interview).

The next two quotes show that students identified a sense of responsibility and value was present during this class and not necessarily present in other classes.

> It was a lot of fun you know just actually to work with other people and kind of take on a responsibility, you don't really get that in other classes (student #2, 2nd interview).

> Everyone's happy to be here. It's kind of a break from regular classes. They can just you give their input and feel that it's valued from the group. And a lot of other classes nobody really cares about that (student #6, 1st interview).

The final sub-theme for "instruction" was instructional method which was found to have a positive influence on students' involvement.

Instructional Method

The majority of students reported that the instructor's experiential method of teaching was a positive influence on their involvement. Although some students noted that this approach was much different than their other classes, they did not report any negative outcomes associated with it. An example of the method seen as a positive influence is illustrated in the next excerpt, this student specifically found the experiential approach to be fun.

> I think that it's all part of the game, it's all part of the fun, and he gives us what we need to know to complete it. Sometimes we think we need more but it's fun to do some team building and working around it to try and figure out how to do it with just what we're given (student #1, 1st interview).

Students realized that the instructor was allowing them to make choices for themselves by providing a number of options and encouraging them to move outside their comfort zones. It is evident from the next excerpt that students appreciated the experiential approach.

> He lets us make our own decisions as a group. He doesn't give a whole lot of input because he tells us the rules and then he steps back and let's us work it out and do what we want to do (student 5, 1st interview).

The next student commented on the idea that it was alright for the instructor to give hints, but also realized the importance of an aspect of the experiential approach, allowing the group to explore, discover, and resolve things on their own.

> You know hints are okay I think. I think the other point of revelation when he's just like okay he said this but he didn't say this and that was kind of what we were uncertain unsure about. So let's try and see if it works and at the end of it if he says no, we did wrong, we'll go back and try something else. You know kind of similar to what I said before. Its okay to chime in, but you know, don't become the father figure. I mean if we're up to bat; don't hold the bat for us you know (student #7, 1st interview).

The next excerpt corroborates the sentiment of the last student's quote that it is important to allow students to work things out on their own.

> He's (instructor) kind of good at figuring out like when we need help…he's real good at just knowing when to step in and not step in. So he keeps it so that we are stretching ourselves (student #16, 1st interview).

As part of the experiential method and in accordance with the adventure education literature, students remarked on the importance of the sequence and progression of activities. The class progressed from ice-breakers, name-games, initiatives, low elements, and finally high elements. Students revealed that the order in which they were presented activities was important to their involvement. Take for instance the following excerpt.

> Doing the highs before the lows would be a total let down. It would be like blowing your load too early. I think the whole intrigue of the class is to get up on the high elements and once you get up on the high elements, people aren't going to show up for Alaskan baseball and dance like Elvis. I think it's much better served to do it the way he did (student #14, 2nd interview).

Another student shared this attitude regarding the sequence of activities in the following quote.

> If you started with the highs first that would be foolish. There's no working together. That's what it's all about, trusting each other and working on activities. I think if you started with the highs and then went to the lows, there's no way I'd go up in the air (student #6, 2nd interview).

This excerpt not only shows that the student recognized the importance of the progression of the activities and explicitly said he would not have been involved if the presentation of the low elements and high element were reversed, it also suggests that the reason for this would be based on the lack of development of trust. The method, experiential approach, was identified as a satisfactory approach by most students, as evidenced by previous excerpts.

Atmosphere

Students identified atmosphere as a factor impacting their involvement. The theme "atmosphere" included three sub-themes: interest/novelty; risk; and support.

Interest/Novelty

Student involvement in the challenge course was impacted by the concept of interest/novelty. Novelty has long been used by adventure educators as a way to increase involvement. Priest and Gass (1997) have commented that novelty is a hallmark of good adventure education and further contend that as participants' level of involvement increases, their ability to learn also increases. Although this research did not focus specifically on student learning, many students remarked that they were involved based on the novel/interesting atmosphere. The next two quotes depict the amusement and fun students reported during the high elements.

> I'd say I get a kick out of being up high and swinging on stuff and it's just enjoyable for me. It's also kind of amusing to watch different people try different things. It's not like this is something you see everyday (student #8, 2nd interview).

> The higher ones are more fun of course. The more adrenalin you get from trying something that looks so wild just made me want to at least try all of them (student #4, 2nd interview).

The next quote shows how this student shared a similar attitude regarding being involved because of the newness of activities.

> …it's new; I've never done this before. So just eating it all up, you know taking it all in and just trying to do things that I haven't done before (student #6, 2nd interview).

The following student commented that interest and novelty were embraced, not only because it was available at the ropes course but because it offered an escape from other areas of life.

> You know we recognize that it's not just a class. I think we are out there to have fun. We do a good job of that. That's kind of frowned upon now. So I think this class you know offers us a little bit of an escape to where we can kind of not necessarily you know go back to tribal roots but you know kind of poke fun at each other, kind of poke fun at ourselves and at the end of the day you know we'll

> leave better friends than when we came and be refreshed a little more (student #7, 1st interview).

While the previous students' quotes were only a sample of many, it was evident that most students were involved because of the fun, adrenaline rush, and chance to try new and exciting activities.

The next sub-theme under "atmosphere" was risk/fear. This sub-theme revealed that risk and fear factored into students' involvement in two different ways. More specifically, students reported either increased or decreased involvement associated with the sub-theme risk.

Risk/Fear

The following excerpts illustrate how risk and fear factored into these students' involvement during the high elements. Both recognized that the activities were designed with limited real risk and higher perceived risk, yet despite knowing this and thinking that there was really no way to actually get hurt, fear still factored into their degree of involvement.

> Yeah I guess you could say that I was kind of motivated by the fear of it. I mean like it says in the syllabus I mean you're actually facing like zero actual fear I mean it's all perceived. I mean there is a small element of real fear but for the most part it's just fear. So it's just kind of pushing yourself beyond your comfort zone and which I guess was the whole point of this exercise (student #14, 2nd interview).

> I don't panic unless there's actually a legitimate need to panic. I don't psych myself out. There are definitely a couple of times where I'd give myself the three count and end up going to a 9 count or something but I understand that the challenges are controlled risks (student #2, 2nd interview).

This next student had commented to me informally that he understood that the actual physical risk from participating in this class was low. He even said that he knew it was all

perception of risk and there was no way the instructor would let anyone get hurt. However, his involvement increased due to heightened awareness of real risk.

> I think you're a lot more aware of what's going on and a lot more involved because it's a little bit more serious cause there's that element of the "what if " factor (student #6, 2nd interview).

Increased involvement by most students was motivated by risk and fear that is, students viewed fear as something they wanted to manage. Still others, however, were at times less involved due to fear. Both of the following excerpts describe intimidation, rejection, and appearing inept or wrong in front of their peers as reasons why fear might have decreased their involvement.

> I was kind of intimidated during the lows by like having the people watch you or listen to an idea and then say nah let's try this, even though this never happened, I was still afraid that my idea would be rejected and I didn't want that to happen so I just didn't say anything (student #5, 2nd interview).

> I like the group size for the high elements; you know there are just 3 or 4 people. And so you switch off and then if you do something stupid or that you think make you look stupid, it's okay, because only those few people saw it. And that was cool. And then you can laugh about it when you're back on the ground and then tell other people. But if on the low elements we had a huge group and everybody's there and you do something that you're kind of embarrassed about, there would be 3 or 4 times as many interpretations of it and you can't retell the story and look as cool (student #3, 2nd interview).

Considering the last two quotes both indicated that group size also factored into their fears. Both commented that if the groups were smaller, their fear of embarrassment or being rejected by the group might possibly have been more manageable. Two other students informed me of their fear of heights and commented that there was no way they were even going to try to get off the ground. I could almost see the fear in their eyes and hear it in their voices when they thought about climbing. Despite making these claims, both of the students did in fact try climbing part way up a pole at a later point in the

semester. I spoke with both of them briefly about their experience of trying to climb and they both confirmed that there was no way they were doing that ever again and said, "it's just not for me."

Closely linked with risk/fear was the sub-theme "support." Described as an important factor of CBC, support was a necessary condition to help students attempt potentially frightening challenges. Support has already been described in relation to the instructor and how students believed he was caring and supportive. This section details support in terms of how students understood it as a factor of their involvement.

Support

The excerpt from this female student not only shows how she was looking out for a group member's welfare by not wanting to hurt him, she also indicates how she was comfortable with the group knowing that they were there to catch her if needed.

> During the nuclear fence I didn't want to hurt the guy I was stepping on so when one of them moved I think and that's what caused me to fall but I just didn't want to hurt them. But otherwise I felt safe and like when they caught me and I was falling it wasn't like, oh no I'm going to fall and hurt myself. It's, oh I'm falling. It's not a big deal (student #13, 1st interview).

The next excerpt shows a solid link between risk and support. This student identified that he was comfortable being involved with this group because he trusted them with his safety. Trust is something that is developed over time at the ropes course and as the instructor let them know throughout the eight weeks, trust is something we are building, not testing.

> So this class helps me in a way to know that risks that can be taken under certain circumstances, you're not going to get hurt, and you can do it. And then in a group, just being able to trust other people in a group is big for me cause a lot of people nowadays aren't ah like ethically thinking about others, they're just think about themselves. So it helps put that idea back into my head (student #4, 2nd interview).

This next quote illustrates the understanding that trust is being developed over time. It also shows that this student realized the need for the group to get better at supporting one another and how far they have come thus far.

> I think we're getting better about support and caring. I really do think we are better about being more supportive of each other and congratulating each other when we're successful or something. I definitely think we have more room to grow but I think we've gotten better (student #11, 1st interview).

This next excerpt was from a young lady that told me informally that she took the class with her fiancé in order to be with him during his last class and he was there to "protect" her. As illustrated in her statement, the group certainly helped her in trusting and supporting others.

> I think we did really well (caring for others and trusting) because for me like our first day I was telling Butch (pseudonym), like you're the only one who can belay me. I don't want anyone else to put me up there and after like the first day of the high elements, I didn't really care who was down there belaying me (student #5, 2nd interview).

Challenge

The final aspect that contributed to students' involvement during the eight week challenge course class was how students' responded to challenge. The main theme challenge included the two sub-themes, avoidance and acceptance. The sub-theme avoidance will be explained in two parts, intentional avoidance and unintentional avoidance.

Avoidance

Confirming my observations that some students were not involved but merely appeared to be "going through the motions" as evidenced in the next excerpt, this student

admitted it. She continued by letting me know what she thought of the activities and how that impacted her involvement.

> I'm involved without really being involved because, well some of the activities that he has us do are just retarded and so I got over on that, participated in them, but I really don't want to participate in them so I do the minimum of it (student #18, 1st interview).

Similar to the last excerpt, the quote from the next female student does not go so far as to say the activities are "retarded", but she does explain how she zones out because she does not want to take on a particular role in the class and she does not really enjoy the low element activities. At a later time in the semester during an informal interview this female student let me know that she would probably panic if she had to be in charge of something during a low element activity. This informal interview links her lack of involvement with both challenge avoidance and fear.

> I've included myself to a certain degree for certain ones, but I've also zoned out. I tend to do that. So you know I think I don't want to be team leader just yet. And personally low elements and team building activities aren't my favorite thing. I'm more like get me up in the air; I want to do high stuff (student #17, 1st interview).

The next two excerpts confirm my perception that some students were avoiding challenge by describing how some students perceived others' lack of involvement. They believed that some students were not involved or challenging themselves because they did not care about this class, they just go along with the class, or they were looking for the easy way out.

> I definitely know other people who can just go along with an idea because they don't care about this class (student #5, 2nd interview).

> I don't know if it's like me judging people but I think some people sometimes don't challenge themselves. Like they just go with whatever is happening. But they don't really want to. We haven't, I don't think we've had a situation where

> someone just sits out. But you can tell that some people want to sit out because it's not an exciting kind of activity for them (student #13, 1st interview).

> I can kind of see students just choosing the easy way out and whether that's for the benefit of the class so you don't have to start over or maybe it was for the benefit of yourself so you don't have to look like an idiot in front of others (student #8, 2nd interview).

Similar to students appearing to avoid challenge because they were only going along with the rest of the class or looking for the easy way out, other students were avoiding challenge because they were only going to be involved or appear to be involved enough to earn a specific grade or pass the class. The quote from this particular student made it very clear during her interview why she was involved. Not surprisingly, this was the same student that noted the activities as being "retarded."

> I only took this class for the "A" and I'm only concerned with trying to look like I'm involved and interested so that I don't fail the class. I really need the "A" to boost my GPA (student #18, 1st interview).

Another example of a student avoiding challenge was a more personal reason, which went against the purpose of CBC. CBC was designed to encourage involvement from students by stressing that the attempt is more important than completing an activity. The following student had a clear understanding of CBC, but as seen in her comment below, she was only willing to take on a challenge she knew she could complete.

> For me, in all honestly, a lot of it is me knowing whether or not I think I can or cannot do it. If I am absolutely pretty sure that I cannot do it, I'm not going to do it. I like to at least have a thought that it's possible. If I'm quite certain that I will fail, I won't try it. This is lame but true (student #1, 2nd interview).

The other type of challenge avoidance I referred to was unintentional avoidance. Unintentional avoidance refers to a situation in which a spectrum of challenges was offered to the group, yet for some reason students were not recognizing the challenges and therefore they unintentionally avoided them. This unintentional avoidance was noted

during both the low and high elements. The next excerpts are quite interesting with two conflicting opinions about the challenges afforded during the high and low elements. The first student recognized more challenge available during the low elements in comparison to the lack of challenge in the high elements. This student described the high elements in a very literal sense and noted that climbers could only ascend and traverse an element in one particular fashion, despite many options being offered at the start.

> I think there's more action and challenge in the lower elements because the higher elements there are just a couple of ways you can go up and go across or whatever. That was about it. But the low elements you get a little more say about how you want to go ahead and do something (student #5, 2nd interview).

Conversely, this next student recognized more challenge during the high elements compared to the lows and credited it with the fact that the group was stuck with one low element until completion. Perhaps the focus on completion interfered with seeing the number of challenges offered throughout the process of each low element.

> I think maybe there wasn't as much challenge in the lows just cause there was really no area for change. It was really like we were stuck with the activity until we got it done and we pretty much took as much time as we needed until it got done (student #11, 2nd interview).

The following student described involvement in high elements in a very concrete, physical manner. Unlike the next student, this student did not look past the different roles of climber and belayer to find new challenges.

> In the high elements it was either like you're doing it or you're belaying or you're back up belay. You weren't like coming up with ideas they're really kind of stringent rules about who's doing what as opposed to the low elements where people could do whatever (student #9, 2nd interview).

Acceptance

The next sub-theme under "challenge" is acceptance. This sub-theme revealed that students' acceptance of challenge impacted their involvement. Closely linked with CBC, many students recognized the different challenges and were eager to be involved.

Contrary to the previous quote about avoidance, and in response to an interview question about lack of challenges in the high elements, this student recognized that it was his responsibility to increase the challenge when appropriate and included ways in which he did that.

> Yeah, like I did it once with my eyes closed and cause I was just cause we didn't have anybody else to do it at the time so I'd just go up there and then I did it once with someone else and we were up there, we did the chicken dance. I was just trying like to make it more interesting and stretch ourselves a little bit more (student #9, 2nd interview).

The next excerpt links this student's involvement with his decision to take the class. Enrolling in the class required a commitment from this student and he was willing to face the challenge.

> I think my level of involvement has been guided more by my decision to be involved in everything, I kind of viewed it as it's my choice to take the class, and I knew there were going to be some scary climbing things, but if I take the class, I need to be involved in it completely and try as hard as I can (student #9, 1st interview).

The following quote describes that CBC was something this student uses as a personal philosophy to live by, despite ever hearing CBC before this class. Intrigued by this comment, I followed up with this student informally and she told me that she is always looking for a challenge in life, be it meeting new friends, trying a new sport, or taking this class.

> I try to push myself as much as I think I can. So that's a good factor for me to try and be involved. I always want to do everything I can. I think I usually try to live by the challenge by choice philosophy and that's why I try to be involved in

> everything, not just this class. I try to live by that, always pushing myself and not just sitting back… (student #13, 1st interview).

This final excerpt exemplifies a student being involved for the sake of personal growth. As mentioned in the syllabus and during the discussion of CBC, students were going to have the opportunity to step outside their comfort zones during this class in a safe environment. This particular student embraced that opportunity and was involved and accepted challenge due to his willingness to grow.

> It's not necessarily I don't want to lose I don't want to quit. But I have to try everything and I think that mentality can be attributed to I guess just a willingness to get outside of my comfort zone. I think that's what got me involved in the class in the first place. It was to try something new and challenging (student #7, 2nd interview).

Based on the reported findings it is clear that CBC was presented to and comprehended by students in the manner the instructor had intended; that is, in alignment with challenge course literature. Findings revealed that CBC might be necessary but not sufficient in explaining students' involvement in an eight week challenge course class. Additional factors that relate to student involvement were described in the three major themes: "instruction"; "atmosphere"; and "challenge". Each of these themes was generated from and supported by condensed categories (sub-themes) and initial codes. The main theme "instruction" was generated from the following sub-themes: instructor/facilitator; subject matter; and instructional method. The main theme "atmosphere" included the sub-themes: interest; risk; and support. Finally, the main theme "challenge" included the sub-themes: acceptance and avoidance.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter of this dissertation begins by restating the research problem and the four specific sub-problems guiding this study. Second, a review of the research methodology used in the study is presented. Third, a discussion links the research problem and four specific sub-problems to the three main themes noted in the findings in chapter IV. Four, the chapter concludes with a section that offers a summary of the research findings, including a discussion of findings and finally recommendations for future research are offered.

Research Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine the assumption that challenge by choice (CBC) was presented to and understood by college students in an elective eight-week challenge course class in ways that influenced participant involvement. Four specific sub-problems guided the study. The first sub-problem investigated the instructor's view (comprehension and opinion) of CBC, and the manner in which that viewpoint was shared with participants verbally and through activities. The second sub-problem investigated participants' understanding (comprehension, approval, and degree of importance) of CBC, and whether that understanding was related to their involvement. The third sub-problem investigated whether the design and presentation of selected activities aligned with CBC, as well as whether the activities related to participants' involvement. The fourth sub-problem investigated whether non-CBC factors (e.g., classmates, weather, and personal events/issues external to the course) had a bearing on participants' involvement.

Review of Methodology

As explained in chapter III, the study reported here was a field study of 33 students enrolled in one of three; eight-week challenge ropes course classes taught by the same instructor. Using qualitative methods to investigate students' involvement during these classes, data were collected during the first, fourth, and final weeks of the scheduled classes. The field study relied chiefly on observations, audio-taped presentations of the instructor, two formal interviews with the instructor and two other formal interviews with 18 out of 33 students, informal interviews, student journal response questions, and descriptive field notes. I observed each of the three classes on four separate occasions: twice the first week, once the fourth week, and once during the eighth and final week.

The instructor's presentation of CBC to each class during the first week was audio-taped and transcribed. Two formal interviews, approximately 40 minutes each, were conducted with the instructor. The first interview was conducted one week prior to the start of classes while the second was conducted one week after the conclusion of the course. Eighteen out of the 33 students were interviewed on two occasions; once during the fourth week and then again during the final week. Both of these interviews lasted approximately 25 minutes. Students also responded to journal questions on two occasions, one set of questions during the first week and a second set of questions during the fourth week. Detailed field notes were kept throughout the four observation periods.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of challenge by choice (CBC) in an adventure setting. Specifically, how was CBC understood and enacted, and did it

appear to play a role in participants' involvement? Findings from this research revealed that CBC might be necessary but not sufficient in explaining participant involvement. The three main themes from this research are linked with, or can be viewed as components of the CBC philosophy. A detailed explanation of these links will show how CBC might be a necessary condition in influencing participant involvement. A further explanation of the three main themes will reveal how CBC was not sufficient in explaining participant involvement. A closer examination of the four sub-problems will explain how the three main themes are connected with CBC and reveal other factors which had an impact on student involvement.

The first sub-problem examined the instructor's view of CBC and the manner in which he shared that view with students, first verbally and then through activities. Findings from the initial interview with the instructor revealed that his view of CBC was aligned closely with the challenge course literature. During the initial session with each class it was determined that the instructor's view of CBC was shared with the students in the same manner he had shared it with me. This helped to set the stage for the remainder of the research. More specifically, I was confident that the instructor verbally shared with students his view of CBC in a manner that they comprehended it. I then could proceed to determine whether his subsequent actions would be compatible with his words.

This was a critical juncture in this research. Rohnke and Grout (1998) noted a number of ways in which CBC has been misused, misapplied and misunderstood, often leading to confusion surrounding CBC. Recognizing that CBC was not misunderstood by the instructor nor the students helped eliminate an area of possible confusion. Findings also revealed that CBC was neither misused nor misapplied by the instructor. In fact

congruency existed between the instructor's verbal explanation of CBC and his design and presentation of activities throughout the duration of the course. This was an important finding because prior literature (Itin, 1992) had noted that congruency was often lacking in challenge course program design, resulting in reduced participant involvement.

The instructor's view and then his verbal presentation of CBC were clearly articulated, as noted in the transcripts from his initial interview and audio-taped presentations of CBC to the three classes. Students' understanding of CBC was not articulated as clearly to the instructor. Students showed their initial understanding of CBC with a "thumbs up" and then communicated a more detailed account of their understanding in their journal responses. However, the three main themes and sub-themes generated from this research indicated that students had a deeper understanding of CBC than first indicated. All three main themes; "instruction," "atmosphere," and "challenge" are components of CBC. The link between these three themes and CBC are explained in the following paragraphs.

Rohnke (1989) developed CBC as a way to promote participant involvement and the key components of CBC offered participants:

- "The chance to try a potentially difficult and/or frightening challenge in an atmosphere of support and caring.
- The opportunity to "back off" when performance pressures or self-doubt become too strong, knowing that an opportunity for a future attempt will always be available.

- The chance to try difficult tasks, recognizing that the attempt is more significant than performance results.
- Respect for individual ideas and choices" (p. 14).

Examining the above components of CBC and comparing them to the research findings, it is evident that the three main themes generated from this study are linked with CBC. For instance, the theme "instruction" is linked simply because it was the instructor who designed and presented adventure activities in a manner that provided students chances to try potentially frightening or difficult challenges in a safe atmosphere. Students commented that the instructor was caring, fun, supportive, and well suited to instruct this class. Although the findings could be interpreted as an evaluation of the instructor, it is more important to note that the instructor was following "best practices" as outlined in the literature. The instructor was congruent with what he said and did; he used CBC throughout the program design and he incorporated the four fundamental components of adventure education; CBC, Full-Value Contract (FVC), sequencing, and activity review, throughout the entire course.

As mentioned previously the instructor was credited with being supportive and caring of his students. This indication of caring and support not only created a link between the instructor and CBC, but the support and caring that he provided was also part of the theme, "atmosphere," which is clearly linked with CBC. As noted in Rohnke's description of CBC, participants are offered the chance to try potentially difficult or frightening challenges in a safe environment where there is respect for individual ideas and choices. The students and the instructor were cognizant of providing this atmosphere of support and respect, as evidenced in the theme and supporting sub-themes of

"atmosphere." Linked with atmosphere, support, and respect; students embraced the idea of CBC in the sense that it was acceptable to back off when performance pressures or self-doubt became too strong. There was never a report from a student that he or she felt pressured into completing an activity. Conversely, peer pressure, an initial code for "atmosphere", was described as positive and not particularly a "pressure" to do something. More specifically, students indicated that they viewed peer pressure as a type of encouragement, yet never getting to the point of forcing others to continue if they felt uncomfortable. This encouragement is one example of the supportive atmosphere developed and fostered by the students and instructor.

The final theme of "challenge' is inextricably linked with CBC. Not only is challenge the first word in the CBC philosophy, it is thought that providing appropriate levels of challenge in a supportive atmosphere invites participant involvement. Although "challenge" was a major theme generated from this research, the two sub-themes, acceptance and avoidance were linked with CBC in different ways. A closer examination of challenge acceptance and challenge avoidance provides a platform for addressing the second sub-problem.

The second sub-problem investigated participants' understanding of CBC and whether that understanding influenced their involvement. As already noted, students did in fact understand CBC as it was intended. Determining whether this understanding influenced their involvement warranted closer examination of the theme "challenge" and the supporting sub-themes, acceptance and avoidance.

Rohnke (1989) argued that by offering choices among different levels of challenge, participants would be inclined to join in various activities voluntarily, if not

eagerly. Most students reported that they were involved and that they accepted challenges for the sake of involvement; yet still others avoided challenge either intentionally or unintentionally and, by their report, were less involved.

Findings revealed that many students accepted challenges for personal growth. These students exemplified understanding of CBC and their willingness to try something potentially frightening. Many students remarked that risk motivated them to push beyond their comfort zones. For some, this risk was associated with being on top of a high element thinking, “this is a bit higher and scarier than I thought, but I trust others to catch me.” For others it may have involved standing in a circle acting silly or funny in front of the class. The students that embraced challenge for the sake of growth also remarked that it was their responsibility to find the appropriate level of challenge when it was not detailed by the instructor. This is an important finding. Some students noted having a personal responsibility in identifying their level of challenge while other students struggled with discerning or creating challenge for themselves in the absence of detail in the instruction. I referred to these times when students struggled with detecting available challenges as unintentional challenge avoidance.

Unintentional challenge avoidance was quite prevalent throughout this research. Although the instructor offered a continuum of challenges for each activity, many students were unable to recognize the available challenges. This was true during both the high and low element activities. Activities often appeared to be seen as black and white in the sense that some students only recognized the challenge of “what they needed to do to get to the next activity.” Many saw challenge as the completion of an activity versus the process of working with others during the attempt. Moreover, some students were

comfortable with simply going along with others for the sake of finishing the activity. The occasions in which students went along with others was referred to as intentional avoidance.

Many students reported an awareness that some classmates were involved just enough to appear active. The classmates were identified as taking the easy way out because they just did not care about this class. One of those classmates admitted that she was only concerned with appearing to be involved enough for the sake of a course grade. Still others remarked that the activities were not to their liking and they would rather be doing something else. Lastly, fear also factored into students avoiding challenges. A couple of students noted that they were deathly afraid of heights and there was no way they would be leaving the ground. After a few weeks in the class the students did leave the ground, confirmed their fear of heights, and commented that they would never do that again.

Fear was not only associated with heights, social fears were also revealed. A few students reported that they feared being wrong, looking silly/inept, or "un-cool" in front of their peers. While only a few students admitted this fear as a reason to avoid participation, observations led me to believe this fear was felt by many others. Interestingly, the students that I suspected of having this fear were those that were unwilling to be interviewed. In my final interview with the instructor, he too remarked that he thought many were not involved because of the same social fears.

The third sub-problem investigated whether the design or presentation of activities aligned with CBC, as well as whether the activities related to participants' involvement. It was clear from the description of activities in the observation section that

the design did in fact align with CBC. Many choices and levels of challenge were offered for each activity. An interesting finding concerned students' involvement relative to activity design and presentation. Although different challenges were available in activities, they did not always seem to be readily apparent and, therefore, not viewed as a choice or option. Student quotes from the theme "instruction" suggested that they were involved as a result of the manner in which the instructor presented the activities (his fun, silly demeanor and his supportiveness). However, they were less aware of any choices within activities, which also might have influenced their participation.

To illustrate the idea that students were not completely aware of possible choices in an activity, I asked the instructor to present the same activity using two distinct variations. The variation for one of the three classes presented a different challenge than what was available for the other two classes. The activity that was slightly modified for the one class, nuclear fence, requires the entire group to get over a rope without anyone touching it. The rope is suspended horizontally approximately four feet in the air. A detailed description of how this activity was presented is included in the observation section.

For the slight modification the rope was suspended on an angle with one end slightly less than three feet above the ground, and the other about four feet from the ground. This modification was made to offer more choices to the one class by allowing them to choose different heights to go over. The activity was presented to all three classes in a similar manner, and all were clear about what constituted success (i.e., everyone over the rope without touching it). The class that was offered choices of rope height never

commented on those choices. While CBC stresses the attempt being more important than the completion of an activity, many students focused heavily on completing activities.

The final sub-problem investigated whether non-CBC factors (e.g., weather, and personal issues external to the course) had a bearing on participants' involvement. The answer to this question was not as straightforward as I had anticipated. I may not have explored this question in enough detail, or it may not have been a factor impacting involvement. During student interviews I asked questions in a general and informal fashion, only alluding to factors such as the weather or personal issues. Of 18 interviewees all remarked that weather was not a factor because it had been rather pleasant up until that point. They further commented that they were familiar with the weather changes common to this geographical area and that they would be prepared for adverse conditions. Only one student noted that her lessened involvement during an activity review session was because the topic under discussion was a bit too personal for her.

This study focused primarily on CBC; an untested assumption that guides challenge ropes course programs. Although this assumption has been widely accepted in the adventure education field, it has received little scrutiny up until this point. The current study was the first to examine the assumption that CBC influences participant involvement. The findings also give cause for challenge course instructors to continue using the CBC philosophy in order to guide their ropes course programs. However, findings also revealed that CBC should be implemented using best practices. Simply talking about CBC at the start of a program without compatible actions on the part of the facilitator can lead to participant confusion. Fortunately, the instructor involved in this

research heeded Lisson's (2000) suggestion and included CBC as a part of the entire program design and presentation.

In addition to examining the tacit CBC-involvement relationship, this study filled another void in most challenge course research by detailing the actual events and interactions that occurred during challenge course activities. These details are important for helping readers to interpret my findings. Further, while not an intention of this study, the findings also revealed information regarding the untested assumption that risk (real or perceived) leads to positive outcomes (Wolfe & Somdahl 2005). Despite considerable focus on benefits-based research, there have been no studies investigating potential negative outcomes of challenge ropes course programs.

Findings from this study suggest that risk can also lead to negative outcomes. For example, when two participants confronted their fear of heights, the result was increased fear and decreased level of involvement. Still others in the class were less involved due to the fear of appearing "un-cool" in front of others. These findings suggest that fear and risk can lead to negative outcomes. This is an important discussion point, not only because prior research has assumed that risk (real or perceived) leads to positive outcomes, but despite following best practices, the instructor was faced with some students decreasing their involvement due to this risk.

The instructor in this study followed best practices outlined in the literature. Despite following these best practices and adhering to suggestions in challenge course literature, CBC was not sufficient in explaining student involvement. Students' focus on completing a task or problem, coupled with not recognizing challenges prevented many from moving out of their comfort zone and into their growth zone. Since challenge course

involvement and growth focus on self-discovery, facilitators are faced with the challenge of presenting activities in a way in which all students are able to recognize available choices while still allowing for self-discovery.

To summarize, the purpose of this study was to explore the explicit assumption that CBC positively influences student involvement. This assumption involves three components which seemingly contributed to a climate of involvement: instructor, participants, and activities. A closer examination of these three components reveals the intricacies which contributed to the climate of involvement. For instance, the combination of the instructor's view and understanding of CBC and how he expressed that to participants, both verbally and through actions, were key ingredients in developing a climate of involvement. Findings from this study revealed that the instructor viewed, understood and consistently expressed CBC to the participants, both verbally and through actions, as outlined in the challenge course literature.

These findings alone lend support for the assumption that CBC positively influences student involvement; however, these findings must be examined in connection with how participants understood and viewed CBC. The findings from this study suggest that most students understood CBC, but not all students fully embraced the philosophy. This was evidenced by the students who were capable of explaining CBC, yet motivated to be involved merely for a course grade. The third component, activities, must be examined in connection with the components, instructor and participants.

As noted, the instructor expressed CBC to the students both verbally and through actions, this included the ways in which he designed and presented activities. Findings revealed that the instructor designed and presented activities as outlined by best practices.

That is, all of the activities, both high and low, offered a variety of challenges and variations. While the presentation and design was an important component contributing to the climate of involvement, students' response to the design and presentation was equally important. The findings revealed that some students struggled with being able to recognize the different levels of challenges being offered, occasionally resulting in decreased involvement.

In light of the closer examination of the three components, I did not find complete support for the assumption that CBC positively influences student involvement. Rather, the findings from this study suggest that CBC might be necessary, but not sufficient in explaining student involvement. This key finding opens up an entire line of research. The following section offers suggestions for future inquiries.

The three classes in this study (class #1, class #2, and class #3) derived from Dewey's (1938) experiential learning theory. As part of the progressive education movement of the 20th century, John Dewey was one of the first to stress experience as a form of meaningful learning. A key component of Dewey's educational theory and thoughts about experiential education is the idea of reflection. Thinking, acting, and reflecting are linked to produce further learning, resulting in future action (Dewey, 1938). Experiential education is an educational approach to learning and emphasizes learning by engaging students in meaningful hands-on experiences.

Inspired by Dewey's work, David Kolb (1984) developed an experiential learning model, which provides an effective way to understand the experiential learning process. This model includes four elements: concrete experiences; reflective observation; abstract conceptualization; and active experimentation. Kolb's model also has been explained in a

more straightforward manner via its aspects of “what?”, “so what?”, and “now what?” (Panicucci, 2007; Rohnke, Tait, & Wall, 1997). These aspects were explained to students in the present study at the beginning of the course with intent to help them embrace the experiential process as part of the elements or activities themselves. Therefore, it is helpful to view the findings from the perspective of Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning model.

An important finding revealed that students described the learning atmosphere at the ropes course as quite different from other traditional classes (i.e., math, history). Not only were differences noted, but students remarked that the experiential approach (hands-on, student directed) impacted their involvement. In fact, many students expressed a desire for instructors of more traditional courses to adopt teaching methods similar to those used at the ropes course. This finding underscores the impact that an experiential education approach can have on student involvement.

Future Research

Spawned from the ongoing data collection and analysis, many questions arose throughout the research process. Many of these questions should guide future inquiries. Findings from this study indicated a number of factors that influenced student involvement: notion of fun; novelty and presentation of activities; risk (social, physical, and emotional); and CBC principles. While notions of fun were unrelated to this study per se, student comments and observations revealed that many students focused overwhelmingly on having fun during the eight-week challenge course class. Questions that arose from this focus include: “What is the role of “fun” in a ropes course setting?

How is it viewed (defined) by participants and instructors? Does it influence (enhance, detract) participant learning, and under what circumstances?"

The findings from this study also confirmed Priest and Baillie"s (1989) explanation that the novelty of challenge course activities leads to increased engagement. Future research should examine the following questions regarding novelty: "What degree of importance do students ascribe to novelty? Does it influence (enhance, detract) participant learning, and under what circumstances? How is novelty viewed by participants in a shorter ropes course program (one day) compared to a longer ropes course program (multi-day)?"

Since findings from this study confirmed that CBC was important to share with students both verbally and through actions; would expected outcomes be similar in challenge course settings in which CBC principles are never mentioned? Would expected outcomes differ if CBC was only shared through actions? What are the most salient components of CBC that positively influence student involvement?"

Finally, research should further investigate the finding that negative outcomes can be associated with challenge course participation. Particular questions that could be explored include: "What factors influence negative challenge course experiences? What role do negative experiences have on participants' willingness to engage in other adventure education or recreation programs?"

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APPENDIX A

Students' Reasons for Enrolling in Class

Students' Reasons for Enrolling in the Class: (27 of 33 responding)

1. For minor
2. It's required
3. Easy credit
4. I took this class because it sounded like a blast!
5. Get exercise and have fun
6. Fill grad requirements/have fun
7. Easy A
8. Needed a fun class
9. To have fun
10. I'm taking this class for 2 reasons. I need classes to help boost my GPA for law school and I enjoy doing "different" things even though it has no bearing on my major or minor.
11. Required and looked fun.
12. I took this course so I could take one last class with Brandon (my fiancé) before he graduates.
13. It is a requirement to graduate, but also to have fun.
14. Sounds fun
15. I've done ropes courses before and I liked them
16. I am taking this class because I need the credit & I really thought it would be really fun
17. Have fun…exercise and get in shape
18. Needed 1 credit to be full-time student
19. Had fun last time
20. To get climbing experience
21. This class sounded fun and I like physical activity
22. Outdoor class – break from reality/math. Enjoy ropes course/ppl interaction
23. I took this class to be a better challenge course leader and familiarize myself w/high ropes courses
24. Easy A and GPA upper
25. Easy A
26. Took the class for SES credit and easy A
27. Because I needed more credit

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

Informed Consent for Participation in Research

Project Title: Exploring Challenge-by-Choice in an Adventure Setting

Researcher: Daniel Chase, Department of Sport and Exercise Science

Phone Numbers: (xxx) xxx-xxxx
Email: dlyonschase@hotmail.com

I am researching challenge course experiences and I am interested in this in terms of the atmosphere that is created over the 8 week course.

Participants will be asked questions about their involvement in, and understanding of the challenge course atmosphere. Interviews will be audio-taped to record the conversations and notes will be taken during the interviews. Please be assured that I will keep the contents of these interviews private and confidential. All interview tapes, hand-written notes and interview transcripts will be locked in a filing cabinet, and then deleted when the study is complete. The names of participants will not appear in any professional report of this research but will be substituted with pseudonyms for the purpose of my research.

Please feel free to phone or email me if you have any questions or concerns about this research and please retain one copy of this letter for your records.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide withdraw from this study at any time, and to answer only those questions you feel are appropriate. Your decision will be respected. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Sponsored Programs and Academic Research Center.

Thank you for assisting me with my research.

Sincerely,

Dan Chase

_____ _____

Full Name (please print) Signature and date

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

APPENDIX C

Initial Instructor Interview Guide

Initial Instructor Interview Guide

1. So this interview I just want to get your impressions or interpretation or whatever you want to call it about challenge by choice. But before that could you describe or just talk a little it about your experience working in the challenge course industry? Possibly start with the number of years you've been involved.

2. Based on all of your experiences, you're familiar with challenge by choice, I know that. When did you start adhering to that philosophy? Was it at the start in 1989 when you first built the ropes course?

3. Can you describe your thoughts pertaining to the concept challenge by choice in your work with ropes course programs?

4. You've talked about challenge by choice being something that's not just mouthed but believed in. What types of things can you do to share that belief after it's talked about?

5. From past experiences with challenge course classes, or more specifically past experiences with this type of class, the 8 week class; how has the challenge by choice philosophy been received or understood by the students?

6. Do you get a clear sense that they're hearing it the way you intended them to hear it?

7. If so how would you know that or is there a way that you think that they're not getting it?

8. Have any students ever refused to hear the philosophy?

9. What's ACCT'S viewpoint on challenge by choice? Do they have one? Is it written in the standards anywhere?

10. In your words, could you summarize Karl Rohnke's intent behind challenge by choice?

11. Do you view challenge by choice as more than a philosophy that guides the course out here? For instance, is it related to each step in the design of your class?

12. Do you think that challenge by choice comes into the picture (participants') prior to the class coming out here? That is, do you think students have heard of this before in other areas of their lives?

APPENDIX D

Instructor Follow-Up Interview Guide

Instructor Follow-Up Interview Guide

1. Can you offer information on the different types of roles you've seen students take on during the first 4 low element activities?

2. Other than stepping back because they've previously done the element, did you see anyone take a different role than they normally did for a different reason? For instance, maybe one person doesn't like talking in front of others and was going to go out on a limb and took that role. Did you see anything like that?

3. You mentioned to the students on many occasions that success was not determined by completing an activity, rather it was related to taking on different roles, stretching, and setting forth effort. How do you think the student received that? Do you think they based success on your definition?

4. You talked with the students about the five finger contract and challenge by choice the first day. You'd mentioned to them that this is what the class is about. It's about stretching, growing, moving from your comfort zone, and those kinds of things. If students do not perceive success in the same manner you had intended, how do you think that affects their involvement throughout future sessions? Do you think that they are taking their view with them or is it changing over a period of time?

5. How about the way that you've designed and presented the activities to the students, do you think that's been a factor in their level of involvement? Do you think they'd comment on, gee you know he really set that up so I could be more involved?

6. How would you respond to me saying that about one third of the students would say that all this low element stuff is a bunch of crap and I haven't been challenged yet, and I probably won't be challenged in this class?

7. Do you think students don't recognize that challenges were available to them and you're taking that for granted based your programming experience sitting up activities?

8. Can you think of anyone in the class or anyone in each of the classes that has not moved from their comfort zone?

9. For those that you think didn't stretch or move from their comfort zones in the low elements, what is it that you observed or heard that would make you believe that?

10. During the low activities that you facilitated, it seemed to me I observed decisions were being made for group members without that group member or members being involved in the decision. Does that make sense? Did you see that as well?

11. You discussed challenge by choice to each class the first session and they all understood it based on their head nodding, their agreement to stick by it. It also appears to me based on my observations that you stayed true to that in the way you designed and presented things. If you were to ask them again, how do you think the students in your class understand the concept of challenge by choice? For instance, if you were to pick a student at random today and ask them if they could describe challenge by choice and what it meant to them based on how you explained it to them, how do you think they'd answer that question?

12. How do you think peer pressure affected the group?

APPENDIX E

Student Interview Guide #1

Student Interview Guide #1

1. To begin, perhaps you can tell me a little bit about your experiences with ropes courses prior to taking this class?

2. Next I would like to discuss your involvement in the class so far. It appears to me that everyone in the class has been involved in the activities to their own certain degree. Would you agree to that?

    a. How would you describe your own involvement?

        i. How about compared to others in your class?

    b. What types of roles have you taken on in activities in this class? Do you always take on the same role or do they change.

        i. If they change, what influences your decision to take on that particular role versus another?

    c. Next, can you describe to me briefly what goes into your decision to be involved in a particular activity? (you can chose whichever activity you would like, or you can talk about a couple of activities as well)

    d. I have noticed that many options have been offered to you and your classmates throughout the classes; do you think that these options have been suitable (or maybe realistic for your ability and interests)?

        i. If so, can you describe?

        ii. If not, can you describe what you would think suitable means?

3. Have there been any instances when you thought that you did not have suitable options during the class? Or thought you were not offered options?

    a. If yes, can you describe that situation in more detail?

4. Was there any point in time when you were inundated with too many options?

    a. If yes, can you describe that situation in more detail?

5. How do you personally know when you have been successful in this class?

    a. For instance, do you think success is completing the activity or putting forth effort?

6. Do you remember back to the first class when the instructor talked about the five-finger contract?

    a. Has this been revisited by him or anyone else in the class?

7. Can you think of any factors that might have influenced your decision to be more or less involved (this could be anything, weather, fights, etc.)?
    a. Has the activity design or presentation been a factor in your decision to be involved?
8. Generally speaking, do you think that everyone in your class has respected the decisions you have made in regards to being involved in an activity?
9. Up until this point in class, can you think of a time when you moved from your comfort zone to the stretch/growth zone (the place that feels a bit uncomfortable, yet not in the panic zone)?
10. How has peer pressure affected anybody's involvement in this class?
11. Have you felt panicked during any of the activities?
    a. What kind of support have you received from classmates during this time, or did nobody notice?
12. Let's shift gears and talk about the activity Nuclear Fence more specifically.
13. What do you remember about the presentation of this activity (what was the goal)?
14. What kind of ideas did the group come up with for solving this problem?
15. Based on those ideas, how did the group make the decision to try one over the other?
16. I observed a couple of instances when it appeared as if someone may have made a decision about trying one option or idea over another, perhaps not considering how everyone in the group felt – did you experience this at all.
17. Do you remember back to the discussion about CBC?
    a. Do you think that your involvement has been guided by your understanding of CBC?
    b. How about others in your class?
18. Much has been discussed in regards to support and caring, what comes to mind about this as your class has progressed, anything?
    a. Maybe describe a situation in which you did or did not see this?
19. Last question, can you offer any information about the class dynamics so far?

APPENDIX F

Student Interview Guide #2

Student Interview Guide #2

1. To start out can you discuss your involvement in high elements versus the low elements? Were you more involved, less involved, take on different roles?

2. So what motivates you to be involved in the high elements?

3. Looking back at the challenge by choice discussion, you'd be offered challenges and it's up to you to decide the level of challenge and then the only thing you couldn't do is just check out. Based on that do you think that there were appropriate levels of challenge in both the high and low elements for you personally?

4. What would you say if I told you most of the students commented that the low elements were not at all challenging?

5. Here's what I've seen over the years of working at ropes courses and teaching classes and things like that. That a lot of times students don't think that there's a challenge there because they're not willing to accept the challenge that's put forth and for a couple of particular reasons. One is that they're afraid of not looking cool or appearing foolish. Or two they're afraid of being wrong. Can you see that occurring with anybody in your group for them saying that there wasn't a challenge?

6. How do you define success in the high elements for yourself?

7. Was there a time out there you can describe for me that you stretched outside of your comfort zone?

8. When you started to move outside that comfort zone what kinds of things did you do to manage that?

9. So would you say you were successful on the high elements?

10. What do you contribute the success to?

11. It seems like from my observations that near the end of it, in the high elements students were kind of like bailing early, or not sticking around for the whole class period, or not taking full advantage of the amount of time that they could for climbing. Did you see that?

12. So back to the low elements real quickly, what do you think could have been done differently so more students would have felt that the activities were more challenging?

13. Do you think it would have been better off if the instructor had gone back and revisited that more often?

14. How did peer pressure affect students' involvement in the high elements?

15. Do you think setting up the small groups took away from the overall development that you had as a larger group?

16. Do you think that the small groups created an atmosphere of competition?

17. What do you think it is about this class in particular that allowed you to work as a group compared to other classes you've had?

18. To help you obtain your goal as an individual and as a group, the instructor talked about the five finger contract. And it was basically a way to establish support and caring for one another. How do you think your class did overall with that?

19. Did you see any instances of others putting people down or not like sticking to this contract?

20. How about this for an idea, some people in the field have advocated that you switch things up completely and start with the high elements and then you shift to the low elements.

21. If you had to identify the top three leaders in your class, who would they be? Do you think any of the leaders took away from others trying to be heard?

APPENDIX G

Syllabus

Challenge Ropes Course Syllabus

Instructor:
Office: **Phone:** **Email:**
Credit hours: 1 **Office Hours:** M 2-4pm, and TR 9:30-10am
Class meeting times: MW 11:15a-1p, or TR 11a-12:50p, or TR 2p-3:50p
Location: (Challenge Ropes Course)
Course Dates: Monday, March 10 (or Tuesday, March 11) – Weds Apr 30 (or Thursday, May 1)

Course Description: Students will participate in adventure activities using low and high challenge ropes course elements.

Course Objectives and Content:
This course is designed to enhance teamwork and self-confidence in each participant through adventure activities and experiences.

Adventure is a way of doing; it is not just an activity in and of itself. A class becomes an adventure for students if there is an element of surprise, if activities compel them into doing things they have never imagined possible, if it includes challenge, and if there are risks (not necessarily physical risks). There also needs to be an atmosphere of safety, a space where students can speak their minds and push themselves to limits -- all in an atmosphere of fun, real fun.

The goals for an adventure program are simple: to promote safe fun, to work as a team, to take care of others and ourselves, and to "stretch" personally beyond self-imposed limits. This will be undertaken through experiences that are planned around various challenges. Some of these challenges will occur on or near the ground, while others may be off the ground. The reward for you is an opportunity to increase your communication skills, while becoming an effective, contributing member of a team. Furthermore, attempting and succeeding in these activities often gives one a feeling of accomplishment, self-worth, elation, and a sense that the seemingly difficult is quite possible. Again, all of this will be conducted in a safe, playful, non-threatening manner.

Specifically, this course is designed to assist you in developing the following:

1. Deeper understanding of, and appreciation for, yourself, to include an increased sense of personal confidence ("stretch" personally beyond known limits).
2. Mutual support within a group (solving problems together in a cooperative, supportive atmosphere).
3. Increased joy in your physical self and in being with others (a playful sense of adventure in which anxieties and fears can be experienced alongside laughter and anticipation).
4. Greater familiarity and identification with the natural world (for example, experiencing and increasing your comfort with rolling in the dirt, with the smell of grass, with the feel of rain or snow or wind or cold or sunlight -- in all their various moods).
5. Competency in basic knot tying, spotting, belaying and other safety skills (thereby insuring low *actual* danger in the face of high *perceived* danger).

Minimally and specifically, students should expect to gain the following skills and knowledge by the end of the course:

1. Understand and demonstrate requisite challenge course safety procedures.
2. Understand and display a sincere attempt to work as a team.

3. Explain and make obvious a willingness to “stretch” personally beyond known limits
4. Demonstrate the ability to quickly and confidently tie all necessary knots
5. Demonstrate a working knowledge of selected equipment (e.g., ropes, harnesses, belay devices).
6. Know where to seek additional information regarding adventure programming.

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance: Because safety procedures will be discussed and taught at various times, attendance for all scheduled meetings is mandatory. Anyone missing more than two class sessions will be required to withdraw, or receive a failing grade.
   NO EXCEPTIONS!
2. Safety: Safe procedures must be practiced at all times. Any violation of procedures (observed by the instructor or class participants) may result in being immediately dropped from the course, and result in a failing grade.
3. Challenge: You will NOT be evaluated on the number of high elements successfully completed. The philosophy of the course is CHALLENGE BY CHOICE! You must, however, commit to stretch and develop in new ways. We will discuss principles of "Challenge By Choice" and "Full-Value Contract" during the first session. It is your responsibility to acquire and to adhere to these agreements, and to request clarification (from me) if you do not understand the agreements.
4. Skill Performance: You must demonstrate a working knowledge of selected equipment (e.g., care and storage of ropes), an ability to tie necessary knots, and an understanding (not necessarily demonstration) of setup and takedown procedures for high elements.

Method of Evaluation:

1. **ATTENDANCE and PARTICIPATION**: You must be here to be contributing, and learning.
2. **SAFETY**: This is ongoing, and is crucial whether on or off the ground.
3. **CHALLENGE**: A demonstrated willingness to stretch and develop in new ways -- to take risks.
4. **SKILL PERFORMANCE**: Although ongoing assessment of skills will occur, specific dates for demonstrating specific skills will be announced as the course proceeds.

Criteria	%’s	Grading Scale
Attendance and Participation	40	A = 100-90
Safety	20	B = 89-80
Challenge	20	C = 79-70
Skill	20	D = 69-60
	100	F = <60

Important Notes. -

- A student will automatically receive a course grade of "F" if one of the following occurs:
  1. Receive zero points in any of the above criteria.
  2. Failure to adhere to safety policies. This includes, but is not limited to: no use of tobacco, alcohol, or nonprescription drugs; must practice designated climbing, spotting, and belaying skills; must attend all sessions; must dress appropriately for weather conditions.

- Class may be cancelled in severe weather conditions (such as snow deeper than 1", rain with lightning, or excessive winds (e.g., over 30mph). Phone me or phone the main office (351-2535) if you are unsure; otherwise, assume that class will be held.

- **YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL TASKS AND FOR BEING PREPARED FOR CLASS ACTIVITIES; IN THE EVENT THAT YOU MISS ANYTHING PRESENTED IN CLASS, PLEASE CONSULT A CLASSMATE. Please do not ask the instructor, "Will I miss anything important?" or "What did I miss?"**

- All members of the University community are entrusted with the responsibility to uphold and promote five fundamental values: *Honesty, Trust, Respect, Fairness, and Responsibility*. These core elements foster an atmosphere, inside and outside of the classroom, which serves as a foundation and guides the University's community's academic, professional, and personal growth. Endorsement of these core elements by students, faculty, staff, administration, and trustees strengthens the integrity and value of our academic climate.
- The university's policies and recommendations for student **rights and responsibilities** and for **academic misconduct** will be followed.
- Please extend courtesy to your instructor and fellow students by turning off your **cell phones and pagers**. Thank you for your cooperation.
- Students who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact **Disability Support Services** (xxx/xxx-xxxx) as soon as possible to ensure that accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

Student Expectations:
Although I do my utmost to provide you with valuable knowledge and experiences, little can be gained unless you are making a concerted and noticeable effort to be a responsible, self-motivated, and active learner. In an effort to guide the goals of responsibility, motivation and participation, we will discuss the following expectations in an early class session:

1. Be here. This class is largely interactive and participatory. These types of experiences cannot be made up. You should plan to attend every class, to be on time, and to dress appropriately for participation in physical activity.

2. Participate with effort. This asks that you are prepared and that you put forth a solid and consistent effort in class. This includes giving input and feedback during discussions and group activities as well as producing college-level work. Do what you have to do to be ready.

3. Take initiative for yourself. Most of your learning will be the result of your own initiative, not my prodding nor the rewards (nor threats) of grades. You alone must be responsible for creating value for yourself in this course. How well you do will be, in a large part, the result of how well you are able to carry on without direct supervision. Taking initiative means asking questions when material, concepts, or expectations are not clear (it is OK not to know, but it is not OK to continue not knowing).

4. Help others. The ultimate success and reward for each of you depends on your ability to help and support your classmates in their learning and in their attempts to be responsible for their own learning. It is the only thing that really counts in the long run. It includes creating a safe learning environment; that is, one in which the confidentiality of one another's sharing is respected, where complaints are directed only to someone (and received only by someone) who can do something about the situation, and where healthy debate and differences of opinion are prized.

APPENDIX H

Data Analysis Matrix Form

Data Analysis Matrix Form

Interview **Coded by: Daniel Chase**
Number of interviews coded:

Theme: _____(condensed categories-) [initial codes-]	
Interview Info (e.g., #1; p1; line 1-5)	**Evidence (finding, quote, etc.)**