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STEPPING STONES:
ADVENTURE-BASED LEARNING AS TRANSFORMATIVE TEACHER
DEVELOPMENT

Dissertation

By

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Abstract

Through adventure-based learning (ABL), individuals analyze unique experiences in order to generalize and apply critical skills and dispositions to their homes, schools, workplaces, and communities (Dillon, Tannehill, & O’Sullivan, 2010). However, there is a lack of research documenting the transferability of ABL to other contexts (Kraft, 1999; Furman & Sibthorp, 2012). In educator preparation programs, coursework in ABL has been found inadequate for its incorporation into practice (Sutherland & Legge, 2016; Dillon, Tannehill, & O’Sullivan, 2010). Expanding this research base is critical in justifying “adventure programming [as] more than just fun and games, and to support it as the powerful form of change that practitioners tacitly know it to be” (Priest & Gass, 1999, p. 478), and understanding how that change can impact teachers.

This research is informed by the overall question: In what ways can experience as an adventure-based learning (ABL) leader impact the subsequent epistemologies and practices of professional educators? Utilizing qualitative, collective case study methodology (Yin, 2018; Hancock & Algozzine, 2017) and grounded in Mezirow’s (2000) transformative learning theory, this research studies ten professional educators who, as college students, had served as ABL facilitators.

Findings indicate that participants’ experience in facilitating ABL aligned with Mezirow’s criteria for transformative learning both personally and professionally. While participants rarely incorporated the physical challenges and fantastical premises typically associated with ABL, they reported their pre-professional experiences deeply influenced their pedagogical practice. This research posits a new framework for these connections, *adventure-informed pedagogy*, to explore how ABL *philosophies* and *processes*, but not *practices*, impacted former facilitators and their classrooms.

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I promise to never do this again.

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The CAAP family

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of David M. Small

Every silver lining's got a / Touch of grey.

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Chapter I: Introduction

A Day in the Life of CAAP

Washington Middle School is typical of public urban schools in Prudence, Rhode Island.¹ An imposing, brick-and-limestone edifice towers over the surrounding three-floor tenement apartments, up the street from the scrap yard and the local strip club. While the outside has maintained a degree of dignity, the inside of the school has not been substantially renovated since its construction in 1932. Wide, locker-lined hallways host occasional inspirational quotes in peeling paint and a few photocopied fliers for upcoming student events. High-ceilinged, hardwood-floored classrooms show the wear of the generations of students and teachers who have passed through. Watermarks dot the ceiling, and insulation peels off exposed pipes. All the windows are caged in black metal lattice.

On a crisp autumn Saturday, the Washington parking lot is nearly empty as the Crusade Academic Adventure Program (CAAP) staff filters in approaching 8:00 am. They exchange friendly greetings as they juggle program equipment and iced coffees. Settling at their respective sides of the school, the week's Staff Leader (a rotating position) opens with a 'sign in.' Whip-style, staff rate their current mood on a scale of 1-5 and share something 'good' or 'new' from their week. One shares her struggles with midterms, while another states she had trouble sleeping after hearing gunshots and police sirens outside her apartment the previous night. The team selects their other respective roles for the day --- Scribe, Timekeeper, Sargent, Goalie, and Rah-Rah --- and reviews the day's Essential Questions, journal topics, and curriculum.

This particular day's theme, "Choice and Consequence," challenges youth participants, known as 'Crusaders,' to explore their own agency and interdependence within their small group

¹ Note: Names of all participants, schools, and communities described herein are pseudonyms.

teams, and more broadly, in their lived experiences at their homes, schools, and communities. In this meeting, college student Mentors, the staff responsible for most of the program delivery, have several questions, and the team works frenetically to clarify the structures and outcomes of the day's learning opportunities, occasionally stepping out into the hallway for a quick demonstration.

With the day mapped out, the Goalie takes the lead in reviewing staff reflections from the previous week and facilitates setting a SMART goal for the day. The team has been discussing the pedagogical dictum 'ask don't tell' and decides that, when participating in activities with Crusaders, that staff will only ask questions—regardless of how obvious a solution or strategy may be to them—in the interest of facilitating more peer-to-peer talk. No suggestions, no hints, only questions.

After the Site Manager collects 'call logs' documenting Mentors' contact with Crusaders during the week, she begins to set up a breakfast of granola bars, fruit cups, and juice. The week's Leader confers with the Facilitator, who supervises the site, on final details of some large-group games. The remaining staff pairs disperse to their respective classrooms to decide the sequence of the day's activities, debriefing topics, and who will lead which experience for their 'team' of 10-12 youth.

Yellow buses filled with Crusaders from Prudence and surrounding urban communities arrive around 9:00. Participants check in, grab a quick bite, chat, or play informal ball games in the gym. CAAP begins at 9:15 sharp.

As other Mentors collect footballs and frisbees, the day's Leader welcomes Crusaders as the group circles up. She introduces the theme of the day, parses out rough definitions of 'choice' and 'consequence,' and introduces the first game of the day, Flag Tag. With a call and response,

she shouts “We play hard! We play fair! We play safe!” After three rounds, and a few variations, the group is wide awake and breathing hard, ready for Dragon’s Tails. In this challenge, teams line up single file, hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. The goal is for the ‘head’ of the dragon (the person at the front of the line) to catch the ‘tail’ by snatching the bandana from the pocket of the person at the end. Which end to assist is left to those in the middle.

After a few minutes, just before energy begins to lag, the Facilitator calls for the group’s attention. He prods participants to consider the game in the following light: it’s easy to know what to do when it’s ‘us versus them.’ What do we do when it’s ‘us versus us?’

With this in mind, Mentors gather their teams and break off into separate classrooms. As with the staff, Crusaders sign in, choose roles, and set a goal for their day, perhaps something like ‘we will hear from everyone at least once before we make a decision.’ Mentors review the Essential Question for the day; Crusaders respond in their journals, then share.

After these routines, Mentors introduce, supervise, and debrief activities, known as ‘challenges’ or ‘initiatives,’ which go by such whimsical titles as Toe Fencing, Cosmic Donut, and Ah So Yah. Each offers opportunities for both youth and adults alike to laugh, move, think, and interact. Mentors present each with energy and panache, then Crusaders strategize their plan of action. At the conclusion of each experience, the team sits in a circle and discusses their successes and difficulties. Mentors ask a graduated series of questions: What happened? Why was it important? How will we use this in the future? How does this relate to ‘real life’?

After a lunch of penne, meatballs, and bottled water from a local catering company (Water from Washington’s fountains is suspiciously brown.), the large group plays a few more games in the gym before Mentors lead their teams in the Focus Challenge of the day, Stepping

Stones. Melodramatically, they present a scenario wherein the group, traveling together through a mystical underground labyrinth, encounters a bubbling pit of poisonous peanut butter (or something equally noxious and absurd). The challenge is to move the group safely across this ‘pit’ (the space between orange cones) using only a limited set of ‘stepping stones’ (one-foot-square sections of foam flooring) to keep themselves safe. Should anyone touch the ‘pit,’ the group starts over; if a ‘stone’ loses contact with a person’s hand or foot, it is taken away (i.e., ‘sinks’), leaving the group with fewer resources with which to accomplish their goal.

While most groups lose a few ‘stepping stones’ along their journey, they eventually conquer this challenge. However, meeting the objective of crossing the ‘pit’ is of little consequence; as with all the day’s activities, Stepping Stones is merely a prelude to a critical conversation. Metaphorically, Crusaders are asked to consider the ‘stepping stones’ as the values and assets which inform and support their decision-making. Crusaders discuss, journal, draw, post and rearrange sticky notes, then discuss again. With the careful guidance of their Mentors, they consider their individual roles within the group, and how their decision-making impacted the process and outcome of the challenge. While a struggle for many, the group eventually relates the game to aspects of their lives beyond CAAP—decisions about friends, homework, family. Mentors praise and push, relate, elaborate, probe, praise, and listen. The discussion concludes with the challenge for Crusaders to put their newfound revelations into practice.

Before boarding their respective busses at the end of the day, Crusaders ‘sign out,’ assess their roles and goals, and meet for a closing circle with the full site before departing. Exhausted but still smiling, the CAAP staff gather once again for a familiar routine, themselves signing out, sharing ‘pluses’ and ‘deltas’ for the day, and reviewing the evidence of meeting their goal. They discuss the progress they’ve seen in their Crusaders, with what (or whom) they struggled, and

what they will cover with youth during their weekly phone calls. Mentors then decide on their leader for the following week, jokingly quibble over leftovers from lunch, carry equipment out to their cars, and go their separate ways.

The College Crusade of Rhode Island

The nonprofit College Crusade of RI ('the Crusade') was founded in 1989 as an experiment in early and sustained intervention leading to post-secondary success for traditionally excluded and marginalized youth. It has since become Rhode Island's foremost college access organization. Recognizing the challenges urban youth often face, the Crusade's mission is

to prepare and inspire young people in Rhode Island to become the first in their families to attend and complete college. Every year, we provide college readiness programs and personalized advisory services to over 4,000 middle school, high school and college students from Prudence, Talbot, Community Falls, Williamstown, Cray and Wanskuck. All of our students are low-income (based on free/reduced price lunch status at the time of enrollment), 95% identify as students of color, and approximately 93% are first-generation students. (E. W. McHugh, personal communication, February 2, 2020).

Each year, the Crusade enrolls a new cohort of sixth grade students and provides them with ongoing services through their first year of college. The organization offers personalized support through 29 Advisors at 37 middle and high schools, and at the state's three public colleges. Through "over 60 innovative programs to meet students' academic, social and emotional development, career education, and college readiness needs." Programs include a robotics team, STEM camps, an environmental education residency program on Block Island, as well as workshops "covering life skills, financial literacy, and study skills; literacy programs; career

exploration; college visits; SAT test preparation; and FAFSA and college application support“ (E. W. McHugh, personal communication, 2020).

To date, the Crusade has earned prestigious awards from The National College Access Network, the Rhode Island Foundation, and Excelencia in Education. Roughly one in fifty Rhode Islanders is, or has been, a Crusader.

A college education represents intellectual achievement, scholastic dedication, personal development, and expanded professional and social mobility. Given the demographics of participating youth, the Crusade must be understood in both moral and financial terms. Historically, people of color, in poverty, and of linguistic minority have been disproportionately under-represented in higher education (Contreras, 2011). They are less likely to be accepted to, enroll in, and graduate from two- or four-year degree programs. In addressing this disparity through providing meaningful opportunities to learn about and prepare for college, the Crusade represents an equity mindset in action, reflecting research-based methods of academic and personal growth. College graduates also earn more money, and thus contribute more to the local economy (Kyllonon, 2012). In this, the Crusade reflects a long-term investment not only in changing individuals' lives, but also in prolonging the prosperity of the state.

Crusader Academic Adventure Program

According to an internal document (2020) used in grant-writing, the Crusade describes CAAP as

one of the core programs we offer to middle school Crusaders each year as part of our efforts to meet students' academic, social, and emotional development, career exploration, and college preparation needs. While this program has evolved over the last 20 years, it remains a favorite among our students... CAAP is filled with activities

designed to build confidence and leadership in students by having them take part in a variety of problem-solving tasks, and group physical challenges and adventures. There is a key focus on decision making, leadership skills, team building, and conflict resolution... CAAP was designed for middle school students with an understanding that youth at this developmental stage are often faced with challenges and dilemmas for which they are not properly prepared. It is crucial for these learners to have opportunities to interact with peers and teachers in safe, constructive ways in order to develop good social skills, learn how to take healthy risks, process their successes and learn from their mistakes, and acquire skills to overcome the challenges that lie ahead. Throughout the program, the staff help participants reflect on what has been difficult and what they have learned. (E. W. McHugh, personal communication, February 2, 2020)

With the skills and dispositions they develop at CAAP Crusaders are better prepared to succeed in high school, college, and beyond (see Rios, Ling, Pugh, Becker, & Bacall [2020]; Kyllonon [2012]).

CAAP draws inspiration from traditional outdoor/wilderness adventure experiences, such as mountain-climbing or extended kayak trips, which are predominantly middle-class, white, and male (Roberts, 2008), and thus tend to exclude diverse populations (Russ & Krancy, 2017). CAAP seeks to make the benefits of such adventures accessible for urban youth. As a mandatory program for middle level Crusaders, it is the most expansive Adventure Based Learning (ABL) program in the state and often the only such opportunity in Rhode Island's economically disadvantaged communities.

Part of the appeal of CAAP is that it is explicitly unlike 'school' (Lindsay & Ewert, 1999). Over the course of ten Saturdays, middle level Crusaders engage in a dynamic sequence

of games and activities which promote collaboration, leadership, creative problem solving, and critical reflection. The cognitive, social, and affective skills necessary to participate in collaborative problem-solving initiatives, such as regulating emotions, critical reflection, and treating others with dignity, are essential to academic and career success (Hromek & Roffey, 2009), yet rarely explicitly taught in schools. Thus, CAAP directly addresses the “hidden curriculum” (Alsubaie, 2015) of behaviors and ideologies which often distinguish high-performing students from their less-proficient peers. As engaged as participants may be in the fantastical premises and inherent fun of the challenges, without purpose and structure these activities are pedagogically pointless (Chapman, McPhee, & Proudman, 2008). CAAP occurs under careful structure cognizant of outcomes. As with many ABL experiences, it “paradoxically requir[es] a level of pedagogical play that belies the serious intent” (Rohnke, 1989, p. vii).

Each of the two CAAP sites at Washington, A and B, serve 30-50 Crusaders per session. The staff is composed of a Facilitator, who creates and supervises the implementation of the curriculum; a Site Manager, who handles parent contact, paperwork, and meals; and six Mentors, local college students and recent graduates responsible for the bulk of program delivery.

Working in pairs, Mentors lead ‘teams’ of 8-15 Crusaders in a graduated series of events with whimsical premise and meaningful object; enact group protocols; and help youth set and evaluate goals. Most importantly, they facilitate critically reflective conversations, known as ‘processing,’ which challenge Crusaders to deconstruct their CAAP experiences and make meanings they can then apply in their homes, schools, and communities.

Mentors are purposefully hired to represent linguistic, racial, educational, and ethnic diversity, reflecting the identities of CAAP participants. Many have been Crusaders, and most are the first in their families to attend higher education. They come from the same communities

as Crusaders, speak like them, dress like them. They are relatable “near peer” (Murphey & Arao, 2001, p. 1) role models who help Crusaders see themselves as future college students and make the goal of post-secondary education more tangible (Contreras, 2011). They also provide a critical link between CAAP and Crusaders’ weekday experiences and facilitate understanding of the program for families (see Wilson, Hayashi, & Ewert, 2009). Their leadership depends on “parallel process... do unto others as you want them, in turn, to do unto others” (Mitten, 2009b, p. 290), embodying the values and behaviors the program seeks to promote among participants.

Mentors receive limited formal training, typically a day-long workshop preceding each ten-week session. Led by Facilitators and Site Managers, training typically balances community-building among the staff, modest adventure education theory, practice in delivery and processing, and program policies and procedures. Most Mentor development is embedded in practice through daily pre-program meetings, on-the-job collaboration and coaching, and end-of-day debriefs. Such work is individualized, contextualized, and responsive. Assessment of performance reflects a growth mindset (Dweck, 2015) involving supervisory staff and Mentors co-constructing ongoing plans for personal and professional development.

For Mentors who pursue careers in education, CAAP provides a unique and extended opportunity to explore adventure-based learning outside the confines of the traditional classroom, curriculum, or one-off ‘edutainment’ events (Roberts, 2008). Through this work, Mentors build skills in youth leadership, motivation, engagement, sequencing, differentiation and adaptation, and facilitating authentic conversations --- in addition to a wide variety of pedagogical structures and learning strategies. Most importantly, CAAP instills dispositions towards active learning and critical reflection as necessary aspects of learning.

Embedded in the structures and practices of CAAP are understandings not just about development for Crusaders, but staff as well. Such learning is tied to a model of vectors for personal development: developing competence, managing emotions, moving towards interdependence, developing mature relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). As such, CAAP is a unique environment in which to grow.

Researcher Positionality

My experience as an educator began in 1997, when I was a Mentor (later Facilitator) in CAAP's predecessor, the National Early Intervention Scholarship Program (NEISP). College students and AmeriCorps volunteers (like myself, at the time) served in nearly a dozen sites around Rhode Island. I quickly came to find Saturdays the highlight of my week. The program made sense to me with strong positive relationships, shared leadership, genuine inquiry, creativity, and novelty combined with insight, purpose, and intellectual rigor. Most importantly professionally, it proved to me that middle-level learners had cognitive capacities far beyond what is typically presumed in their schools.

I went on to become a CAAP Facilitator and teach English in Community Falls, Rhode Island's smallest, poorest, and most diverse city, for fifteen years. In 2006, I began mentoring preservice educators, and eventually taught in undergraduate and graduate education programs. Throughout, ABL remained central to my teaching practice. It had set the standard for engagement, provided innovative tools for learning, and inspired me to expect rich thinking from my students, regardless of age or grade.

The premise for this research comes directly from my own experience incorporating ABL ideas and practices into my classroom instruction. Through the years, I've worked with other

CAAP Mentors who have followed similar career trajectories. Over the last 20 years, several have gone so far as to tell me that their CAAP experience was more influential on their development as educators than their university preparation, leading me to wonder about the commonalities of our classrooms.

In my 20 years with CAAP (on and off), most study participants have, at one point or another, been my colleagues in the program; a few, I now consider family. Given this positive bias, it is therefore incumbent on me as a researcher, as much as possible, to be vigilant in representing their views and experiences impartially. This notion informs Chapter Four, which incorporates limited summary in order to privilege participants' direct quotations.

My employment at CAAP ended in July of 2021.

Background

In the literature, variations on the terms 'adventure-based learning,' 'experiential education,' 'outdoor education,' 'wilderness education' and 'adventure education' are often used interchangeably (Sutherland & Legge, 2016). For purposes here, while ABL is experiential, it is distinct in its pedagogical objectives, philosophies, processes, and practices.

Sutherland and Legge (2016) define adventure-based learning (ABL) as:

A student-centric approach, encompassing a form of adventure, where the educative purpose of the experience is emphasized, and students reflect on their personal and social development through a debrief process... ABL can be used with a variety of content, in different cultural contexts, and with different participants. (p. 308)

Adventure takes a myriad of forms, and research suggests the beneficial aspects can be met through a wide variety of experiences (McKenzie, 2000; Brown, 2006; Chapman, McPhee, & Proudman, 2008) which share a common set of values and practices. ABL capitalizes on

liminal experiences, bringing participants to the literal or metaphorical boundaries of their familiarity and confidence, encouraging and inspiring them to take the ‘next step’ in their personal journeys. Unusual, fantastical, or otherwise exotic premises and methodologies help create a sense of disequilibrium and productive anxiety (Horwood, 1999; McKenzie, 2000). Most activities involve a cyclical learning model (Dillon, Tannehill, & O’Sullivan, 2010; Kolb, 1984), wherein direct experience is followed by investigation and reflection, generalization, and application to future scenarios. Experiences are holistic (McKenzie, 2000), and “promote movement from a place of relative comfort and push [participants] to test new ideas and practice new skills” (Speelman & Wagstaff, 2015, p. 93) in cooperation and collaboration with others (Rappaport, 2009). Values, such as respect, safety, and mutual support, are made explicit and interwoven throughout. Multiple explicit avenues for participation allow individuals autonomy in deciding their own degree of risk at their own level of competence (Wallia, 2008). Challenges rarely rely on a single solution, and build in complexity over time, promoting change in knowledge, dispositions, and skills (Luckner & Nadler, 1997) through the development and use of analytical competencies. Experiences are student-centered (Speelman & Wagstaff, 2015), lasting (Stremba, 2009a), and involve kinesthetic, cognitive, and affective components (McKenzie, 2000). Risk and uncertainty challenge individuals to explore new learning (Bunyan, 2011). Transfer and relevance are key outcomes, with leaders facilitating reflection on and application of adventure experiences into daily life.

ABL experiences are typically distinguishable from traditional classroom norms. They are collaborative, democratic, and without coercion: expressly inclusive, adaptable, and provocative. ABL is not geared towards accomplishing a measurable goal through definitive structures but creating immersive and relevant experiences wherein participants construct their

own meaning. While given the independence to experiment and grow, learners are never far from the watchful and caring eye of a facilitator whose job is not to instruct, but to question and guide.

The Problem

Landay and Wooton (2012) challenge readers to put themselves in the shoes of a contemporary American high school student on the first day of eleventh grade:

You take a seat and look around. The teacher looks familiar. You've passed her in the hall, been in classes with a few of these kids before, but you don't really know any of them. Your thoughts wander. Time passes. You realize the teacher has been talking but you haven't really been listening. Now she's passing out heavy thick books. In your mind, the year stretches ahead endlessly. You feel you really don't belong here, in this room, with these people. You wish you were someplace—anyplace—else. Suddenly, you are very tired. You feel yourself slumping in your seat. You want to put your head down to go to sleep. (p. 1)

Horwood (1999) notes the “common experience and perception that schools are more often dull and tedious” (p. 11-12) than adventurous. According to Huston,

[t]raditional education is defined as teacher-centered delivery of instruction to classes of students who are the receivers of information. Traditional schools generally stress basic educational practices and expect mastery of academic learning in the core subjects of math, reading, writing, science and social studies. Public schools generally follow this educational model... Traditional schools are most common nationwide and can offer quality instruction along with the benefits of federal- and state-mandated regulations and laws. (<https://education.seattlepi.com/advantages-traditional-schools-2140.html>)

American students' foremost complaint about traditional school is that it is "so boring" (Mora, 2011). They are often "given material that is dead, wooden and far removed from their own experience" (Hunt, 1999, p. 122). Many contemporary American classrooms still follow a roughly behaviorist model of discrete subjects, defined schedules, rote learning, and right answers. The terminology shifts with the times; what used to be a quiz has been dubbed a 'do now' or 'exit ticket;' a lecture is now a 'mini-lesson;' and the five-paragraph essay and multiple-choice test, by whatever names, remain the standard assessments. Yet, the structure remains largely unchanged in decades, inherently tied to empirical and imperialist traditions which privilege rationality and linearity of fact-based thought above other ways of knowing (Rea & Waite, 2012). The verbal and auditory take precedence over the kinesthetic and affective. Conformity and obedience remain high priorities for teachers, who "employ top-down instruction... [thus] fail to engage their students" (Mora, 2011, p. 2). Many programs of study follow mandated curricula of 'standards-based' instruction and assessment; some, even a veritable script. Contemporary schools in the United States schools are

subject to increasing levels of audit, curricular control, pedagogic control through state-sponsored... initiatives and best practice orthodoxies, surveillance through testing, self-review and inspection, the production of comparison tables, and the publication of inspectorial reports. (Rea & Waite, 2012, p. 265)

Such factors lead to instruction that is dry, formalistic, and formulaic, offering little intrigue to explore or opportunity to do so. The inflexibility of such pedagogy "fails to recognize that meaning and therefore learning is filtered and constructed through multiple discourses to which children contribute as much as adults" (Rea & Waite, 2012, p. 268).

Current research in this area is abundant; numerous scholars have explored innovative techniques, programs, and interventions which break the traditional mold and result in higher academic achievement and student satisfaction (Stremba & Bisson, 2009). Collaboration, creative problem-solving, and personal reflection, often termed ‘21st century skills’ (<https://www.edglossary.org/21st-century-skills/>), are a promising route to relevance. The moniker posits the expectations and necessary dispositions of the next-generation workforce, and presumes these skills, embedded throughout instruction, are transferable across domains.

Twenty-first century skills stress process over product—and are thus not readily contiguous with an assessable curriculum, nor seen as efficacious allocations of time. Similarly, they are not necessarily understood or practiced by teachers, who often view them as another obligation in an already-bloated curriculum (www.edglossary.org/21st-century-skills/). Even the moniker itself is deceptive; such skills are not only necessary for surviving tomorrow’s world of work but today’s world of the classroom. Too often, they are simply presumed of students or considered byproducts of academic endeavors. For schools with “[l]ow achievement, disproportionate assignments to low academic tracks and special education classes, high dropout rates, and academic disengagement and alienation of students of color and lower SES” (Warren, 2002, p. 109), the need for them is acute. Twenty-first century skills serve as critical ‘entry points’ for students to engage with academics with awareness, enthusiasm, and purpose.

ABL philosophy and practices go far beyond simply generating interest; they fundamentally reconsider the nature of relationships in the classroom, the processes of learning, and foundational conceptions about education itself. ABL inspires intrinsic motivation by presenting developmentally appropriate tasks framed as puzzles to solve, rather than worksheets

to be completed. ABL works towards nothing less than the globalized skill-building touted in ‘21st century’ paradigms.

Traditional classrooms persist because formal teacher education is similarly conservative. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, preparatory programs regularly promote outdated and outmoded transmission models of inherited pedagogy (Darling-Hammond, 2006) directly at odds with the idealism of new professionals. Preservice educators rarely have opportunities for sustained work outside the university classroom, part of a “return to the factory model of the early 19th century, with the hiring of underprepared teachers linked to the use of scripted curriculum intended to compensate for their lack of skills” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 38). This is particularly evident in the time gap between novices’ assimilation of theory at the university and its application in the classroom (Wurdinger & Priest, 1999) in brief student teaching practica.

The ghastly turnover of new teachers, up to 30% in the first four years (Castro, Quinn, Fuller, & Barnes, 2018), indicates that many educators enter the workforce unprepared for the realities of classroom life, without the beliefs, processes, and practices to make their career sustainable. While teacher quality is responsible for nearly half of students’ academic achievement (Warren, 2002), teachers simply are not graduating preparatory programs adequately equipped to meet classroom needs. Student teaching is necessary but not sufficient; pre-service teachers need opportunities to build relationships, explore practice, and reflect on their work outside the traditional curricular boundaries and other formal structures of the school.

Professional preparation must include sustained, pragmatic opportunities for future educators to explore a variety of pedagogical approaches in search of the philosophies and strategies which will ultimately guide their own practice (Darling-Hammond, 2010). While such programs vary widely in their premise and practice, all involve some combination of theory and

pragmatics of pedagogy. What is missing is the ‘real-world’ connection between the two: a cogent philosophy *on* practice that is intimately intertwined *with* practice.

ABL entails both. Ideas about universal inclusion, active engagement, and problem-solving are just as relevant to the classroom as they are to the outdoors. Activities which entail physical movement, affective engagement, and higher-order thinking are similarly imperative. Diversity and differentiation allow all learners to achieve, with their unique contributions valued. Experiences are developmental and build in complexity. Learning is measured in terms of individual and collective growth, not pre-set criteria. From this milieu, ABL leadership experience prepares teachers with accessible means to engage in learning skills and dispositions to enact this philosophy.

Experience and training as an ABL facilitator, such as being a CAAP Mentor, provides a promising supplement to traditional student teaching. The role is complex, as adult leaders are “removed from their roles as interpreters of reality, purveyors of truth, mediators between students and the world” (Chapman, McPhee, & Proudman, 2008, p. 7). Instead, they “provide a spark to ignite a conversation, bring new knowledge to the students, and create an atmosphere conducive to open sharing” (Speelman & Wagstaff, 2015, p. 91). Mentors encourage engagement, model enthusiasm, and monitor safety while explicitly distinguishing themselves from a traditional didactic, authoritarian teacher stance (Forgan & Jones, 2002) on the premise that “people learn and change more from... finding solutions than from being given answers and solutions by a teacher/counselor/leader” (Stanchfield, 2007, p. 1).

Proficient ABL facilitators exhibit intentionality in their practice, and model the empathy, communication skills, and reflective capacities they expect from participants (Thomas, 2004). While the most accomplished bring a sense of joy and spontaneity to their craft, their work is no

less deliberate or objectives-driven than more formal teaching methodologies and requires similarly substantive preparation and experience to achieve (Schary, Jenny, Morrow, & Wozniak, 2018). Teachers with a background in ABL have an extended set of resources they bring to their classroom practice. Thus, programs like CAAP not only serve as powerful personal development for participating youth, but also a meaningful form of professional development for pre-service educators.

However, “[d]espite passionate advocates and strong beliefs, adventure programmers clearly do not possess a magic educational cure-all” (Brown, 2012, p. 12). The impact of ABL is notoriously challenging to measure (Bunyan, 2011), as outcomes are difficult to quantify and are necessarily entangled in a variety of personal, situational, and institutional, and circumstances. ABL practitioners themselves have been described as “[m]averick, informal, unconventional, transient, nonmainstream [*sic*], and anti-intellectual” (Warren, 2012, p. 123), reinforcing the idea that the field is not only outside the pedagogical norm, but deliberately positioned in opposition thereto.

Research in ABL to date has focused primarily on learners’ self-reported experiences and growth outcomes (Brown, 2006), rather than how these are achieved, with a distinct emphasis on theory over empirical data (McKenzie, 2000). Implementation of adventure education curriculum research has been confined primarily to physical education as it relates to national curricula in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand (Webber, 2019). Thus, research into adventure experiences “needs to move into the next stage, from describing the product to understanding the process” (Klint, 1999, p. 167).

ABL, as practices, processes, and philosophy, deserves fuller exploration than current research can provide, most critically in documenting the transferability of adventure learning to

other contexts (Kraft, 1999). Thus, expanding the research base is critical in justifying “adventure programming [as] more than just fun and games, and to support it as the powerful form of change that practitioners tacitly know it to be” (Priest & Gass, 1999, p. 478).

CAAP represents an authentic opportunity for pre-service teachers to develop competence beyond the traditional classroom, with tangible results in their epistemologies and professional practices. This dissertation is informed by the overall question: In what ways can experience as an Adventure Based Learning (ABL) leader impact the subsequent epistemologies and practices of professional educators?

Sub-questions include:

1. To what degree, if any, do participants attribute changes to their epistemological beliefs about teaching and learning through serving as an ABL facilitator?
2. What, if any, similarities and differences in philosophy and practices do participants identify between their educator preparation programs, their ABL experience, and current professional practices? How do participants make sense of and negotiate differences?
3. To what degree, if any, do participants’ ABL experiences align with criteria for transformative learning?

This qualitative study investigates how the ABL experiences of alumni CAAP Mentors have informed their subsequent practices as professional educators, and how ABL concepts and constructs serve as pre-service teacher preparation. Ten participants were recruited, representing a variety of professional perspectives, university preparation programs, and identity factors. This research is informed by transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2006), and was conducted during the 2019-2020 school year through a collective case study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017).

Furman and Sibthorp (2012) conclude that the transfer of ABL skills to other arenas lacks both research and researchability, and thus is an insufficient explanation for the relevance and utility of ABL experiences. Citing Mezirow, Dirkx, and Freire, they find “[o]utcomes from adventure programs, such as a change in life perspective... challenging assumptions of self and others, profound impacts on life... all seem to fit within the context of transformative learning and have been found across a variety of youth- and adult-age groups" (p. 42).

Transformative learning theory posits that adult learners, in this case preservice educators, are uniquely positioned to think critically and enact change by “questioning assumptions and expectations that shape and influence what [they] think and do” (Mezirow, 2006, p. 24). By critically analyzing interactions and activities, individuals use analogical strategies to come to a best judgement about the meaning of their experiences, and to utilize these meanings to inform future decisions. Transformative learning helps individuals refine their frames of reference (habits of mind and points of view) “to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow, 2006, p. 26) through critical reflection. Change is then evidenced in their subsequent ideologies, epistemologies, and practices. Through this lens, educators are seen as capable of evaluating a variety of perspectives on their craft and making informed decisions about improving their service to students. In building their practice, they are not simply transferring what they have learned, but transforming themselves as well.

The case study model (Yin, 2018) allows researchers to explore participants’ experiences from an emic perspective through description, narrative, observation, and documentation in ways that are not easily quantifiable (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Case study stresses depth over breadth, facilitates the effective triangulation of numerous data sources, and allows researchers

deep access into the insights and actions of participants. It is useful in developing theory, evaluating programming, and creating interventions (Baxter & Jack, 2008), as it is not limited to one lens or discrete data points for deconstructing and reconstructing meaning. Case study posits participants as experts on their own unique experiences within complex contexts (Mertens, 2010), endorsing a constructivist paradigm in which nuance, subtlety, and subjective perspectives are privileged (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Exploring multiple cases allows researchers to unearth patterns and dissonances across participants.

Data sources for this research include:

- Semi-structured interviews which allow for in-depth, individualized exploration of experience, context, and meaning. The first of two interviews focused on pedagogical philosophy, the second on pedagogical practices.
- Table completion exercise which asks participants to delineate how ABL practices and concepts connect or disconnect from their university preparation in education. Areas of inquiry include:
 - Building community and creating a positive classroom environment
 - Engineering learning for engagement and affect
 - Making curriculum meaningful --- relevance and ownership
 - Implementing creativity and reflection
 - Adapting adventure activities across classrooms and purposes
 - Differentiating learning
 - Motivating and empowering
 - Building teacher identity/philosophy

Data will be analyzed primarily through thematic and narrative analyses (see chart below).

Thematic analysis identifies categories in data useful to description and understanding and is thus well-suited to exploring meaning in interviews and anecdotes. Narrative analysis “uses the stories people tell, analyzing them in various ways, to understand the *[sic]* meaning of the experiences as revealed in the story” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). It gives attention not only to first-person accounts themselves, but the manner, structure, and language in which such stories are told.

Chapter Two provides an in-depth review of the existing literature, including the evolution of experiential and adventure-based learning in the context of teacher development. Chapter Three details the methodology employed. Chapter Four presents each case, and a summary of Table Completion exercise responses. Chapter Five discusses participants’ experiences in terms of Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, and Chapter Six introduces the concept of *adventure-informed pedagogy*. Chapter Seven addresses problematic aspects of ABL and its instantiation in educator preparation, as well as suggested areas of future research.

Chapter II: Background Knowledge and Review of Literature

Defining Adventure in Experiential Education

Centered on learners' growth, experiential practices explore choice, freedom, and consequence, leading to learning which is transferable to future scenarios (Breunig, 2009). According to the Association for Experiential Education website, the field is broadly defined as "a teaching philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, synthesize learning, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities" (Gass, Gillis, & Russell, 2012, cited on <https://www.aee.org/what-is-ee>). It requires participants' interest, initiative, and active engagement with both content and process. Relationships are valued, and outcomes uncertain, with activity embedded in critical reflection and conceptual synthesis (Stremba, 2009a). Concrete experiences generate abstractions, and learning is less dependent upon the navigations of the symbolic and propositional which privilege some learners over others (Kraft, 1999).

ABL experiences, as with most pedagogical practices, do not have inherent worth; their value exists entirely in personal growth and future utility (Knapp, 1999). Often presented as 'games,' their recreative role is purposely conflated with their educative function. Experiences are designed to be recognizably like real-life situations, especially regarding self-concept, skill building, and critical thinking. Metaphors and isomorphs make concepts more readily accessible for both participants and instructors. ABL activities could be understood as a type of role-play as a means to skill acquisition and consequential action --- a learning strategy which, in itself, is more effective than lecture (Stremba & Bisson, 2009).

The “essential element” (Stanchfield, 2007, p. 106) which delineates ABL is processing, a form of deliberate, collective reflection and debriefing throughout an experience which metacognitively unearths issues of group process, new learning, evaluation, and transfer (Bunyan, 2011). In its simplest form, processing is a democratic discussion of an experience and its significance—both in terms of what it means to the group, and to individuals in their homes, schools, workplaces, and communities. The group utilizes its experiences as the vehicle for knowledge and skill transfer through explicit analogy (Brown, 2010), a process disturbingly absent from much schooling (Kraft, 1999). Transferable learning must incorporate processes by which learners can recognize salient analogues between past and present circumstances, a process “complex and not clearly understood” (Warren, 2009c, p. 271). The more successful the experience and the more participants attribute their success to their own efforts and skills, the more transferable the learning (Bisson, 2009d). Such ““metaphor pedagogy”” (Bearnese, 2012) frames and enacts the adventure experience as an isomorph, requiring clear objectives, patience, affirmation, flexibility, and reciprocity from the instructor (Henton, 1996). Metaphor pedagogy makes sense of the novel and unique leading to tangible learning for participants (McKenzie, 2000; Rohnke, 1989), enabling the facilitator to help participants make ‘real life’ connections that lead to ‘real life’ change (Hromek & Roffey, 2009; Medina, 2009b).

In ABL, “perhaps no other concept is so often misunderstood” (Gass, 1999) as transfer, learning which does not apply only to the experience itself. It depends upon participants’ activation of prior knowledge (Mitten & Whittingham, 2009), critical examination, and generalization (Gass, 1999), and thus it is the role of the instructor to engineer the circumstances in which these occur. Before ABL experiences can become meaningful learning, they must be conceptualized as such; if participants are not prepared to make the metaphorical connections,

they miss the key step of generalization beyond the immediate context (Mitten & Whittingham, 2009). Effective transfer must account for “the relationship between what people know and the settings in which they know --- between the knower and the known” (2000, p. 12).

A subcategory of experiential education, adventure-based learning (ABL) is characterized as “the deliberate use of adventurous experiences to create learning in individuals or groups, that results in change for society and communities” (Priest, 1999a, p. xiii). While a “comprehensive and analytical history of adventure programming remains to be written” (Miles & Priest, 1999, p. 43), the field takes its pragmatic roots in outdoor programs designed to build character and prepare British soldiers in the late 1800’s (Webber, 2019), and organizations like the Boy Scouts which seek to “develop young individuals physically and mentally to be conscientious and responsible members of society... [and provide] the opportunity to learn about their personal abilities, gain self-confidence, and develop a sense of responsibility for others” (Speelman & Wagstaff, 2015, p. 90).

By the 1940’s, Kurt Hahn developed the philosophy behind Outward Bound, wherein leadership and outcome-based experiences encouraged personal growth, citizenship, and physical fitness (Sutherland & Legge, 2016). From the late 1940’s to mid-1950’s, the National Training Laboratory for Group Development’s Basic Skills Training programs, or ‘T Groups,’ focused on intensive, intimate personal development experiences which laid the foundations for Gestalt sessions and encounter groups of the 1960’s (Seaman, Brown, & Quay, 2017). As Seaman, Brown, and Clay (2017) note, the term ‘experiential education’ came into common usage in the 1960’s; by the end of the decade, Outward Bound was offering courses targeted towards teachers, leading to professional conferences and the eventual establishment of the Association for Experiential Education (AEE) (Garvey, 1999).

In the mid 1970's, adventure education was described as a mysterious 'black box' wherein personal growth occurred, but no one seemed to know why (Bunyan, 2011). The field was "experience rich but theory poor" (Warren, Mitten, & Loeffler, 2008, p. xi). In part to remedy this situation, the *Journal of Experiential Education (JEE)* was founded in 1978. Project Adventure (PA), the organization currently most associated with mainstream adventure learning, was established in 1971, part of a move to bring salient aspects of wilderness experiences into schools, question what constituted adventure education as a unique field, and signaling the field's expansion indoors. By 1980, over 400 schools adopted some aspects of PA's work into their curricula (Hirsch, 1999).

Adventure education grew in popularity and began to diversify through the 1980's (Russ & Krasny, 2017) as the field made strides in cementing its conceptual and pedagogical tenets, as well as adopting standardized safety measures and criteria for practitioners. In the 1980's and 1990's, personal and social development became more salient as the wilderness aspect of adventure education began to fade (Sutherland & Legge, 2016). The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) opened adventure education to new clientele, and ABL began infiltrating the corporate training landscape (Raiola & O'Keefe, 1999). To date, the field has begun to mature, and "a variety of curricular models, theories, and practices have emerged" (Roberts, 2008).

Raiola and O'Keefe (1999) describe the concept of adventure as a "human need... an atmosphere, an attitude, a climate of the mind... the curiosity of people to seek the other side of the mountain, the impulse in us that makes us break our bonds with the familiar and seek greater possibilities" (p. 46). While the adventure education community has yet to reach consensus on its own self-definition, several common threads undergird most programming in the field (Raiola & O'Keefe, 1999). ABL essentials include active learner engagement and initiative, risk and

uncertain outcomes, multi-sensory and multi-modal experiences, and both interpersonal and intrapersonal learning (Medina, 2009a). Horwood (1999) defines four essential characteristics of adventure: “risk, inescapable consequences, energetic action, and willing participation” (p. 9); Stremba (2009) cites “the support component of interpersonal relationships... [as] a distinguishing feature of adventure education” (p. 108). Key outcomes include “the confidence to embrace challenge or the ability to work more effectively in groups” (Stremba, 2009b), as well as gains in:

increasing the ability to use helpful self-talk; changing self-perceptions; modifying meaning attributions to create the possibility of hope and change; building skills in making good decisions; using skills to access risk...; understanding fear and how to manage it and keep thinking and acting; building skills in social support; learning more about understanding, empathizing with, and helping others as they succeed or struggle; and learning to balance needs of the self with needs of others. (Mitten & Whittingham, 2009, p. 255)

According to Stremba and Bisson (2009), four necessary (though not sufficient) criteria dictate that each adventure experience must “capture the attention of the learner... promote participation... promote cooperation, and... enhance learning” (p. 19). Hirsch (1999) added consistently high expectations, positivity, limited predictability, and a balance between activity and introspection.

Plato, Dewey, and Hahn

Experiential education claims deep roots in Western educational philosophy and epistemics and draws on an amalgam of social science traditions. Some authors trace its lineage as far back as Aristotle’s experience/reflection *phronesis* (Stonehouse, Allison, & Carr, 2011).

Rousseau's notions of intellectual freedom and hands-on learning in *Emile* endorse a developmental approach to education beyond the rote of the classroom (Smith, 2011). With the rise of Romanticism, experiential learning was seen as 'natural' learning—the most relevant, the most organic, the most meaningful, the most human[e].

Various researchers also trace elements of experiential education to Comenius' application of the sensory as foreground for the academic (Bisson, 2009[b]), the active and intersocial learning of L. S. Vygotsky (Hromek & Roffey, 2009), Piaget's development theory (Kraft, 1999), Hume's empiricism (tempered by Kant's intellectual categorization) (Bisson, 2009[b]), the 'problem-posing' and critical praxis of Paulo Freire (Breuning, 2011; Roberts, 2008), the pragmatism and questioning of Pestalozzi (Bisson, 2009[b]), Kurt Lewin's group development model (Smith & Leeming, 2011), Maxine Greene's ideas on freedom and imagination (Frank, 2011), the growth-oriented metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead (Hunt, 1999), and the self-directed learning of Maria Montessori (Swinderski, 2011). Bisson (2009[b]) concludes that the educational impact of the Western philosophical tradition rationalizes the necessity of reflection, the value of direct experience, and the relevance of pragmatic learning.

According to Hunt (1999), the "philosophical implications of adventure education reach into the very core of civilization and what direction the modern world will take" (p. 122). ABL theory draws from several sources in the social sciences, including social psychology, education, and philosophy (Stremba & Bisson, 2009), though the most oft-cited thinkers remain Plato, John Dewey, and Kurt Hahn.

For Plato (472 BCE - 347 BCE), 'human nature' determines that experience is necessary for understanding (Bisson, 2009b). He believes "to learn social virtues, children should experience these virtues themselves... to become courageous, wise, just, and temperate, one

must participate in experiences that require one to be courageous, wise, just, and temperate” (Bisson, 2009b, p. 111). As with Aristotle, Plato believed risk-taking to be necessary for learning, and that the *elenic* dialogic and reflective processes now known as the Socratic method were the route to truth (Bisson, 2009b).

John Dewey (1859-1952) published *Experience and Education* in 1938. Therein he presents physical activity as a means to an end, and highlights the efficacy of demonstration (overt action) over verbal instruction alone (Breunig, 2009). Dewey rejects the Manichean dichotomy of body and mind, believing

both reason and reflection were driven by the quest for the truth about reality, and that a better epistemology of education would focus on knowing values instead of theoretical abstractions... education should aim not at the teaching of mere dead fact; rather, the skills and knowledge that students learn should be integrated fully into their lives as persons, citizens, and human beings. (Bisson, 2009b, p. 114)

Numerous researchers (for example, Brown, 2006; Roberts, 2008; Stanchford, 2007; Sutherland & Legge, 2016; Wurdinger & Priest, 1999) cite *Education and Experience* as laying the groundwork for constructivism, learner-centrism, and personal relevance in American education. To Dewey, “the quest for knowledge is itself an adventure” (Hunt, 1999, p. 121), with the commensurate risks that entails. He stands against the deadening effects of external authority and rote learning in the development of the individual and of a democratic society (Kraft, 1999).

Central in the construction of ABL experiences is what Dewey describes as the distinction between ‘educative’ and ‘miseducative’ experiences (Breunig, 2009; Kraft, 1999). While uncertainty and risk are essential elements of adventure education (Bisson, 2009c), chaos and fear can inhibit learning, especially for participants who are habituated to such

circumstances. Thus, not all experiences are beneficial to all learners, and educators must plan accordingly. For example, “if the intention of an experience is to control the learner, or if the experience is above the maturity level of the learner, then the educative qualities of the experience are lost” (Rappaport, 2009, p. 129). The objective conditions of education “may inhibit learning because while they may to some extent enable the passive, quiet behavior so often valued in schools, they may also inhibit students’ freedom” (Breunig, 2009, p. 126). Learning experiences are situated in social conditions, with other people serving to help broaden an individual’s perspectives and growth (Rappaport, 2009). Education which allows students choice respects their autonomy, develops self-discipline, and acknowledges coercion as the antithesis of learning.

Dewey’s “pattern of inquiry” (POI) (Rappaport, 2009, p. 128) undergirds the processes of both academic and non-academic learning, prefiguring Kolb’s experiential learning cycle. The POI is “a cyclical process, detailing the journey of learning instead of the ultimate destination... [as] true learning comes from a passionate quest for knowledge that develops a thirst for lifelong learning (Rappaport, 2009, p. 129). A POI begins with some sort of ‘indeterminate’ situation “rooted in the actual world of a person” (Hunt, 1999, p. 121), through which learners test their existing knowledge in a stimulating and novel scenario designed to promote questioning and critical analysis. Through this experience, learners construct a “determinate [situation via the] formation of cognitive ideas, concepts, and potential resolutions” (Rappaport, 2009, p. 129). Such constructions are then tested in other scenarios, with reflection determining either the incorporation, or abandonment, of subsequent knowledge (Wurdinger & Priest, 1999).

According to Seaman & Rheingold (2012), Dewey “conceived of education as a social institution responsible for the expansion of democratic culture... [ABL] educators seem to

conceive of education as a democratic process of individual learning” (p. 259). Dewey’s democracy was more concerned with the collective than the individual, seeing learners as participants in their cultural, historic, and sociological contexts. Like Freire, his “insistence that social and economic changes are needed before the liberation of individual creative activity suggests that the cultural function of knowledge, not individual psychology, was primary in his education thinking” (Seaman & Rheingold, 2012, p. 260).

A “visionary” (Bisson, 2009a, p. 53), Kurt Hahn (1886 - 1974) based his pedagogical concerns in what he deemed the ‘declines in modern society:’

1. Decline of fitness due to modern methods of locomotion
 2. Decline of initiative and enterprise due to the widespread disease of spectatoritis [*sic*]
 3. Decline of memory and imagination due to the confused restlessness of modern life
 4. Decline of skill and care due to the weakened tradition of craftsmanship
 5. Decline of self-discipline due to the ever-present availability of stimulants and tranquilizers
 6. Decline of compassion due to the unseemly haste with which modern life is conducted
- (p. 58)

As a student at Oxford, Hahn explored the works of progressive thinkers and educators such as Sir Robert Baden-Powell, Cecil Reddie, and Thomas Arnold (Bisson, 2009), as well as Plato, Aristotle, Dewey, Thoreau, William James (notably “The Moral Equivalent of War”), and Alfred North Whitehead (Raiola & O’Keefe, 1999). In 1920, he became headmaster of the newly created Salem School in Germany, where he established seven ‘laws’ for teachers:

1. Give children opportunities for self-discovery.
2. Have children meet with triumph and defeat.

3. Give children the opportunity for self-effacement in the common cause.
 4. Provide periods of silence.
 5. Train the imagination.
 6. Make games important but not predominant.
 7. Free the sons of the wealthy and powerful from the enervating sense of privilege.
- (Bisson, 2009a, p. 54-5).

Thus, Salem was grounded in a student-centered tradition with a focus on self-discovery, character-building, engagement, reflection, and social action.

In 1933, Hahn proposed an ultimatum to the Salem community: side with the school, or Hitler (Bisson, 2019). He was arrested, effectively ending his career in Germany. Within months, British friends arranged his deportation to England, and in 1934 he founded the Gordonstoun School in Scotland based on the principles of Salem. Broadening the impact of his philosophy beyond Gordonstoun, Hahn established the Moray Badge scheme (later the County Badge scheme and eventually the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme), a self-directed program for youth to explore physical fitness, outdoor expeditions, and interest-driven skill development (Bisson, 2009a) similar to the burgeoning Boy Scouts.

Hahn is best known for founding the first Outward Bound (OB) program in England in 1941. The dominant narrative describes the purpose of Outward Bound (OB) was to prepare young sailors for the stresses of war; however, Bisson (2009) and Miner (1999) argue that, from its instantiation, the program included a broad range of participants from firefighters to students. Following the epic

metaphor of heading out to sea on an adventure that requires participants to leave the safety of home and daily routine to cope with the unfamiliar, the

uncomfortable, the difficult, and the adventurous, in search of an opportunity to understand, test, and demonstrate their own resources, participants are challenged to learn about themselves and the world and discover endless possibilities for personal growth... participants come to realize that the limits to their own potential... are mostly imagined and self-imposed. (Hirsch, 1999, p. 23)

Through OB experiences, youth develop compassion, resilience, and courage (Bisson, 2009b) to prepare for adult life.

While Hahn never held an official office with Outward Bound (Miner, 1999), he “gave us the foundation for adventure-based curriculum... challenge, learning, compassion, service, and self-growth (Bisson, 2009a, p. 54). A “trained propagandist” (Richards, 1999, p. 65), Hahn grounded his work in the motto ‘plus est en vous,’ (‘There is more in you [than you think.]’), with self-development at the heart of recognizing human potential (Bisson, 2009a) not simply of, but *through*, the body. Former Gordonstoun teacher Josh Miner, who founded the first American Outward Bound school in Colorado in 1962, cites several Hahn aphorisms, including “‘the magic of the puzzle’ [through which] ‘a young person ‘defeats his defeatism,’... [and] ‘[y]our disability is your opportunity’” (1999, p. 56).

Critical Concepts

Undergirding its lofty goals of personal growth, community development, and critical reflection, ABL practitioners rely on an ideology conscious of constructivist learning processes, motivation, and affect. Foundational beliefs are then instituted in practices such as the Full Value Contract, Challenge by Choice, and High-Performance Teams. While terminology may differ from program to program, these critical concepts delineate adventure practices as holistic, volitional, recursive, and developmental.

Cyclical Learning.

Kolb (1984) proposes the “experiential learning cycle” (Stremba & Bisson, 2009, p. 12) which defined direct experience, observation, critical reflection, and application as foundations of learning (Daniel, 2009). In this model, learners move from concrete experience to “abstract conceptualization” (Stremba, 2009a, p. 181) and theorizing (Wurdinger & Priest, 1999). They synthesize prior and new knowledge, which is then transferred to novel situations, where the process begins again. For Kolb, learning resides in pattern recognition, theory-building, and theory-testing. Risk operates on three coinciding levels: confronting the inadequacies of prior knowledge, the risk of failure, and the risk of conceptualization. Such pedagogy privileges learner discovery, multiple ways of knowing, and an ethic of care, with the instructor taking the role of designer and facilitator (Henton, 1996) rather than informer. Kolb’s model has become ubiquitous in ABL (see Folan, 2021), to the point it is often simply cited as ‘the adventure learning cycle.’

Risk.

In wilderness experiences, actions have natural consequences; for example, hikers who do not adequately prepare for the weather may spend a night wet and cold. Replication of natural consequences in the classroom is not as obvious (Gass, 1999), as traditional schooling relies on artificial and authority-dependent measures to modify student behaviors. Yet the classroom is a place filled with risks—social, emotional, psychological, and cognitive (Raiola & O’Keefe, 2009). By engaging in classroom activities, students can jeopardize their standing with peers, open the possibility of failure, and confront the need to re-envision their beliefs about the world. Dealing with successes and failures in this context builds feelings of competence and self-efficacy (Bisson, 2009d).

According to Hahn (1999), the “exercise of the human imagination is fundamentally an exercise of adventure when it reaches out to an uncertain future. If to think is to inquire, then to think is to risk being wrong” (p. 121). Risk “sharpens and enhances the learning experience. It stimulates and provides focus... it is a value in itself” (Smissen & Gregg, 1999, p. 285). Participants must have a personal stake in the experience—the fear of loss—for it to be meaningful enough to result in authentic and transferable learning. Risk is necessary to create productive disequilibrium (Stremba, 2009b) and open opportunities for growth (Quinn, 1999). As such, risk is a subjective experience (Davis-Berman & Berman, 2012), and “an adventure for one person, in a particular place, at a given time, may not be adventure for another, or for the same person in a different place or time” (Priest, 1999b, p. 160).

This is not to presume all risks are intrinsically positive, productive, or character-building as “[t]oo much safety results in killing students’ souls. Too little safety results in dead bodies” (Hunt, 1999, p. 119). As “perceived risk creates the same emotional and biophysical response as real risk --- it is, in fact, real (Wolfe & Samdah, 2012, p. 28), and must be treated as such by ABL instructors.

According to Blenkinsop and Beeman (2012), risk and reward are not diametrically opposed, but exist on a continuum wherein the benefits of adventure programming outweigh similar ends from safer means; in fact, “risk and benefit cannot be separated in an attempt at self-transformation” (p. 7). Thus, risk is conceptualized at the core of both self-knowledge and self-transformation, and can serve as partial inoculant against future struggles. It is integral to change, thus essential in education.

Authentic Community.

Terms such as ‘inclusion’ and ‘differentiation’ have, in contemporary pedagogical parlance, become an exercise in semantic satiation. Stemming from federal mandates such as 1992’s Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA] and 2004’s Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA]), schools are legally required to accommodate differences (as they are narrowly defined), resulting in substantively different school experiences for different learners. This is predicated on a change in hierarchies and views of competition regularly ingrained in traditional classrooms (Blenkinsop & Beeman, 2012). Valuing individuals for both their assets and challenges is essential to building an equitable society; mirroring this in the classroom space sends important messages to students about how they should treat others, and how they deserve to be treated --- what they can do, and what they should do. Philosophically, no responsible educator would choose to exclude participation on such variables as race, disability, or native language; the notion is morally repugnant.

Unfortunately, in practice, schools often do not live up to the promise of accessibility and reinforce a dialectic of difference as deficit.

Driven by Hahn’s humanistic dictum ‘your disability is your opportunity,’ ABL reflects a fundamental understanding of the role difference plays in thoughts and actions. Outdoor experiences which “emphasize physical risk and challenge may not seem welcoming to groups whose historical orientation to the outdoors had been tainted by racism and violence” (Warren, 2012, p. 123). Here, ABL classrooms have distinct advantages over traditional wilderness experiences. Accommodations for physical needs, such as the use of a hearing device or wheelchair, should already be established in schools. The emotional and cognitive needs of learners can be met more immediately and substantially by qualified professionals, such as social

workers and counselors, than on a week-long hike. Contact with difference (Coco-Ripp, 2012) is sustained over a semester, a year, or multiple years.

Full Value Contract and Challenge by Choice

“Play hard, play fair, nobody hurt” was the motto of the *New Games* initiative in the 1970’s; for Henton (1996), it manifests as “*play hard, play safe, play fair*” (p. 73, emphasis in original). It represents a mindset of collaborative effort, integrity, accountability, and safety that underlies quality ABL experiences (Dillon, Tannehill, & O’Sullivan, 2010; Phipps, 2009b). ‘Play hard’ means that anything worth doing is worth doing well, and that “the attempt is more significant than performance results” (Rohnke, 1989, p. 14). ‘Play fair’ means to respect the rules, limits, or structures which keep the activity enjoyable and equitable for all. Most importantly, ‘play safe’ necessitates active awareness of potential dangers (internal and external) and the mutual responsibility of all participants to protect themselves and others.

These values are reflected in the Full Value Contract (FVC), a good-faith agreement among participants and facilitators on norms for how they will act and interact (Hirsch, 1999). Henton (1996) notes five commitments for ABL participants, to “be here[,] be safe [,] set goals [,] be honest[,] let go and move on” (p. 68). It is critical to recognize that “students cannot be pulled against their will through a developmental sequence. Students are agents on their own behalf and cannot be forced to grow” (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quale, 2016, p. 332). While traditional classrooms maintain top-down ‘rules’ (Phipps, 2009[b]) which dictate what students *cannot* do a FVC reflects what all members of the classroom community agree they *will* do

While safety protocols are established by the instructor, ABL participants are responsible for determining their own boundaries. A corollary of the FVC is ‘challenge by choice’ (CXC) (Rohnke, 1989). Done right, ABL experiences respect the autonomy of individuals, regardless of

focus on the group. CXC empowers participants, at any point in their ABL experience, to decline, defer, or alter their participation to suit their particular needs, knowing their decision will be respected. Participants are encouraged, but never forced—impelled but not compelled (Horwood, 1999)—toward agentic growth.

In a positive light, CXC offers learners the opportunity to explore personal needs and interests in their own way, similar to the self-efficacious naturalistic discovery of young children (Henton, 1996). This mitigates risk by providing participants a clear understanding of potential outcomes, as well as a sense of stability and control (Davis-Berman & Berman, 2012). An individual uncomfortable with holding hands could use a bandana to connect with a partner, be a ‘referee’ or ‘timekeeper’ for an activity, or simply cheer on their team. Those uncomfortable with a processing discussion could write about their experience rather than discuss with the group.

However, Wolfe & Samdahl (2012) state “little research exists to support the legitimacy and effectiveness” of ‘challenge by choice,’ and conclude it “should not be promoted, because it conflicts with or ignores the central tenets and experiential realities of adventure programs” (p. 24). They question whether ABL participants can be truly apprised of all potential consequences of their participation, especially in social and affective domains, thus making full disclosure impossible. This is compounded by the pressures and responsibilities that group membership entails (Rohnke, 1989). Participants have reported “pressure to complete the activities as presented to them... partly from the facilitators but also from the design of the [activity], other members of the group, and even expectations participants placed on themselves” (p. 25). Thus, the freedom implied by CXC is, at least in part, illusory: “a veneer that makes facilitators feel better about what they do” (p. 25).

While the myriad factors at play in ABL make absolute prediction impossible, Wolfe and Samdahl's (2012) argument oversimplifies CXC as instrumental rather than aspirational. Furthermore, such surety of outcomes would undermine the purposes and processes of experiential learning writ large.

Group Development.

Developing a nurturing community of learners is essential to ABL (Henton, 1996), and numerous theories address the fact that groups and their participants change over time (Mitten, 2009b). Lack of conscious leadership in this process, which will occur regardless, can set maladaptive behavioral norms which can be difficult to change (see Phipps, 2009b). Tuckman's 1965 model of group process, drawn primarily from literature on psychotherapy and 'T-groups' (Cassidy, 2009b), underlies the curricular sequencing of most ABL experiences. Working together, participants form teams which become "living organisms with a cycle of group life that includes both task functions and social-emotional-integrative or maintenance functions" (Warren, 2009c, p. 269). To become highly successful, teams typically go through a predictable (though not necessarily linear) series of 'stages' based on the personalities involved, the expertise and effort required, and the purpose[s] of the group itself.

During the 'forming' stage, the group is hesitant and apprehensive, though most members try to 'put their best face forward' and build friendly, if somewhat inauthentic, relationships with teammates. Known as the 'honeymoon' period, individuals try to avoid conflict or controversy. As they grow more comfortable with each other and task challenges increase, people begin to show their 'true colors' as they jockey for position and power within the group, challenge others, and question the structures and processes of the group. Limits are set and tested (Warren, 2009).

Some groups never evolve beyond this ‘storming’ phase, depending on the frequency and severity of individual resistance or interpersonal conflicts. While this stage may not be comfortable, it is a necessary means of engaging all group members in the process, as it will guide and impact the group’s performance. Thoughtful facilitation can address these issues in ways that are democratic, fair, and accessible without allowing anyone’s standing in the group to calcify. Recognizing that conflicts can occur at any stage of a group’s evolution, Mitten (2009b) notes an alternative term for this stage, “sorting’... [wherein] instead of working out power issues, the group members... sort out operating procedures and responsibilities” (p. 290).

Norming occurs when participants “set... the structures of the group that maintain its integrity” (Warren, 2009c, p. 270). They clarify “issues such as roles, norms, leadership, and division of labor” (Cassidy, 2009b, p. 279). The conflicts and questions of the previous stage are primarily resolved, alliances are formed, and procedures established. Once the group has ‘normed,’ they begin to ‘perform’ autonomously. They recognize each other’s strengths, fluidly assume different roles as needed, and share leadership and decision-making. Individuals at this stage are mutually interdependent, recognizing that reaching collective goals depends on each participant reaching individual goals (Phipps, 2009b).

However, groups do not last forever. In later versions of the model, Tuckman (2010) added a final step, ‘adjourning’ (sometimes also referred to as ‘mourning’ or ‘transforming’ (Warren, 2009c). ‘Saying goodbye’ raises a number of emotions, often manifesting in unusual ways more typical of storming than performing.

From a curricular standpoint, this model gives a guiding structure to the sequencing of both ABL activities and subsequent discussions. Recognizing where a team resides along this spectrum helps instructors focus their current and future work.

High Performance Team Roles.

Successful task completion is dependent upon successful relationships (Phipps, 2009b). As such, many ABL programs posit that groups are mainly defined by their ‘roles and goals’ (Rohnke, 1989). Beyond the pat rhyme, this approach unpacks essential elements of working together not only in ABL scenarios, but in homes, schools, workplaces, and communities.

High performance teams (Schechtman, n.d.) are characterized by cooperation, consensus decision making, rituals, shared goals, and care and respect for all individual members. While developing ‘leadership’ is often a stated goal of ABL programs; not everyone can lead --- at least, not all at once or in the same way. Someone needs to keep the group focused and on-task, maintain records of decisions, and cheer the group on. Effective ABL programs make this explicit and allow participants to explore different roles as isomorphs for expanding personal capacities. Such rituals as having a different ‘leader of the day’ (see Phipps, 2009b, p. 308 for a summary of Warters’ positive group roles) and rotation of key positions is initially artificial; it is a form of role-play to redirect peers, develop safety protocols, and rehearse skills. The end goal is for everyone to be able to operate in a variety of roles and modalities as circumstances dictate.

Win Conditions Versus Outcomes.

Most adventure activities have specified ‘win conditions’ which define the end point of a task—moving the group from A to B, building a C that is D tall, manipulating X until it can Y—which initially seem either inexplicably impossible or absurdly simple. For participants, fulfilling such conditions usually equates to success; for the ABL instructor, these ‘win conditions’ of the activity are often not the objectives thereof (Knapp, 1999). Goals provide motivation and structure, and often mirror game paradigms with which participants are familiar: solve the puzzle, gain the most points, achieve the fastest time. Even when the competitive angle is

abjured, these dispositions remain and provide the energy and enthusiasm which impels participants to act. The objectives define the aims of the instructor, who engineers learning opportunities, as growth for the group, the person, and the process. For the ABL leader, the experience is prelude to a conversation in which said objectives are critically examined in terms of outcomes --- the quantifiable improvements in person and product, which, cyclically, are evidenced in subsequent experiences (Hunt, 1999).

Virtue and Bias.

As with Plato and Aristotle, Hunt (1999) posits that “learning virtue is foundational to any philosophy of adventure education” (p. 117), with “[c]hange for society and communities [as] the altruistic end point sought... the ultimate impact is to make the world a better place to live in some small way... to create change that is sentient, purposeful, and sustainable” (Priest, 1999a, p. xiii). Stemming from Dewey’s focus on democracy, Hahn’s redress of societal ills under fascism and mirrored in Project Adventure’s work with “special needs populations” (Prouty, 1999), social justice has a “long history” (Warren, 2009a, p. 221) in adventure education. From the beginning, ABL theory has maintained humanism and equity as prime virtues and sought to foster moral and character development in the service of societal good (Bisson, 2009b; Medina, 2009a). ABL educators stress an “appreciation for diversity... nurturing... consensus... [and] inclus[ion]” (Hirsch, 1999, p. 25), modeling the courage, compassion and justice mindset which grounds the field of ABL as legitimate pedagogy. The “moral virtues that are a part of the practice of adventure education are not an option to practitioners. To leave out the moral virtues and attempt to practice adventure education as a purely technical enterprise is impossible” (Hunt & Wurdinger, 1999, p. 126).

However, it is important to question the definitions and definers of such ‘virtue’ (Garvey, 1999b). ABL is a distinctively Western endeavor and faces significant difficulties in adapting to different cultural circumstances in its global development (Bailey, 1999; Coco-Ripp, 2012). The centrality of risk-taking, individualism, persistence through failure, and scarcity of resources may even make adventure experiences culturally inaccessible to some populations (Bailey, 1999; Mitten & Whittingham, 2009; Warren, 2012). Processing privileges the verbal, analytical, and conceptual. The field has been dominated by upper-class, white males from the East coast (Miles & Priest, 1999; Roberts, 2008) with the economic, geographic, and chronologic advantages to participate (Warren, 2012). ‘Distancing’ behaviors, especially for privileged leaders, continue to encumber the endeavor (see Warren, 2009a, p. 222-3). Limited research has begun to explore adventure experience for diverse populations (Warren, 2009a, Stremba & Bisson, 2009). Wilson, Hayashi, and Ewert (2009) note that ABL experiences, in challenging pre-existing beliefs, run the risk of reinforcing negative views on participants’ origins. As such, presumptions about accessibility and egalitarianism for women, for example, may be well-intentioned “myths” (Warren, 2009b, p. 232).

Instructor Competencies

Priest and Gass (2005), synthesizing earlier research, posit twelve core competencies for ABL leaders, including skills in organization, instruction, facilitation, flexible leadership, sound judgment, problem-solving, decision-making, communication, and ethics. These competencies “enhance... skills and perspectives in analysis, problem solving, communication, and making a positive contribution to the community” (Stremba & Bisson, 2009, p. 6). Mitten (2009a) describes three functions of leadership in ABL --- motivation, responsibility, and efficacy --- which can be distributed amongst participants through structures like “leader of the day (LOD)”

(p. 192). Phipps (2009a) notes that “[l]eadership style is the style that is perceived by the follower” (p. 195, emphasis in original). Adventure leaders typically aim for democratic or abdicatic (‘leading-by-refusing-to-assume-leadership’) methods of facilitation as participants progress (Stremba, 2009a), forgoing the traditional conception of pedagogue as knowledge-dispenser and ultimate decision-maker.

ABL instructors are expected to move well beyond the aphoristic ‘sage on the stage’ to create eustressful drama and intrigue, encourage growth, and demonstrate genuine care for students’ learning (Prouty, 1999). They encourage engagement, model enthusiasm, and monitor safety, explicitly distinguishing themselves from a traditional authoritarian stance (Forgan & Jones, 2002). As opposed to the didactic tradition, ABL instructors engineer opportunities for students to have direct experiences in which they generate meaning, relevant connections, and closure. This is based on the premise that “people learn and change more from the process of working through problems and finding solutions than from being given answers and solutions by a teacher/counselor/leader” (Stanchfield, 2007, p. 1).

According to Gass, Gillis, and Russell (2012), an adventure instructor’s role includes “setting suitable experiences, posing problems, setting boundaries, supporting learners, ensuring physical and emotional safety, and facilitating the learning process” (cited on <https://www.aee.org/what-is-ee>). Transfer of learning beyond the ABL experience is contingent upon instructors’ pedagogical practices (Stremba, 2009a).

Context of Educator Preparation

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), there are approximately 3.7 million practicing teachers in the United States today (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_208.20.asp). Roughly 1400 colleges and

universities offer programs in teacher preparation, producing nearly 250,000 yearly graduates (<https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=37>). In addition, one-third of new teachers earn licensure through non-degree programs, with most of these educators working in poor communities of color and exiting the profession after a few years (Zeichner, 2014). Fifteen percent of all college graduates go into teaching (Labaree, 2018). These novices “struggle for control, and experience feelings of frustration, anger, and bewilderment... often feel[ing] insufficiently prepared... view[ing] their experienced colleagues in the schools as more realistic sources of information on how to teach than their teacher educators” (Korthagen, 2016, p. 317). Such socialization of teachers can result in the perpetuation of entrenched, even ineffective, practices, as “[t]eachers teach as they are taught - not as they are taught to teach” (Blume, 1971, p. 412).

Educator preparation remains contested territory, and EPP’s negotiate issues of quantity (ensuring there are enough teachers), quality (ensuring there are good teachers), and efficiency (ensuring minimal cost at optimal speed) (Blackwell et al., 2003). Teaching is now “widely understood as interactional, improvisational work in which students’ ideas and beliefs are critical resources” (Forzani, 2014, p. 360). However, to reformers, university programs are often perceived as outmoded, overly theoretical, and/or lacking in rigor (Zeichner, 2014), with schools of education “speak[ing] the language of change while holding close to models of the past” (Blackwell et al., 2003, p. 359). Research affirms that preservice-teacher learning is often lost in the realities of teaching, encouraging novices to succumb to stagnant, outdated practices (Korthagen, 2001). The parochialism of, and limited research on, teacher preparatory programs has led some to question the enterprise as a whole (Korthagen, 2016).

Adventure in Schools

The incorporation of adventure into formal American schooling began in 1971 with the establishment of Project Adventure at Hamilton-Wenham Junior-Senior High School in Massachusetts. Utilizing federal funds, Dick Prouty and Karl Rohnke sought to adapt principles from Outward Bound to the physical education curriculum for secondary students via the use of artificial adventure experiences, such as ropes courses and climbing walls, which could be fit into the standard 50-minute instructional schedule. According to Prouty (1999), the “[t]wo basic goals were constantly sought and reinforced: that the students would learn how to solve problems in a group more creatively and efficiently; and that preconceived barriers to what was possible often held both the group and the individual from increasing achievement” (p. 94). The organization has since become “instrumental” (Medina, 2009a, p. 80) in the proliferation of ropes courses, professional training, and adventure education publications. In the Anglosphere (notably the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand), while other academic content areas have adapted curricula to address topics like creative problem solving and self-efficacy (Hirsch, 1999), adventure education remains primarily instituted in physical education curricula.

The consideration of adventure in the educational establishment is essentially reconstructive in nature. Hunt (1999) declares

[t]o equate learning with sitting passively in a lecture hall or classroom and regurgitating facts to a teacher who talks 95 percent of the time is the antithesis of adventure education. To measure scholastic aptitude by scores obtained from students [under duress] filling in the proper computer bubble responses to questions posed in a booklet is the antithesis of adventure education. In either case, what is rewarded is a students’ ability to make safe,

predictable answers. For a student to attempt any sort of creativity is to risk, not genuine adventure, but censorship and punishment. (p. 120-1).

Despite their potential, adventure practices are rare in contemporary classrooms, with sparse presence in teacher preparation, limited experiences for instructors, the inertia of entrenched practices, prejudicial perceptions of methodology, and limited public understanding (Sutherland & Legge (2016). In addition, Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the preponderance of prescriptive curricula, and a hyper-focus on quantifiable measures of learning limit teachers' autonomy in service of one-size-fits-all outcomes and expedited pacing which reinforce dominant conceptions of knowledge and knowledge acquisition.

In a Hahnian paradigm, academic content is secondary to *cura personalis*, care for the whole person (Henton, 1996; Prouty, 1999). Thus, part of the critique of utilizing adventure-based classroom practices is the time they take (Kraft, 1999) --- especially in trial-and-error pedagogy (Wurdinger & Priest, 1999) --- and their resistance to traditional curricular compartmentalization (Henton, 1996).

Extant Research

Research into ABL began in the 1950's, and for much of its history has been quantitative in nature, focusing on whether or not a given program 'works' for participants with little consideration of why (Allison & Pomeroy, 2000; Martin & Liberman, 2005; Nichols, 2000), thus perpetuating the 'black box' analogy (Baldwin, Persing, Magnuson, 2004). Classical experimental designs, with 'treatment' and 'control' groups, sought to establish the credibility of adventure work (Baldwin, Persing, Magnuson, 2004) through measurement and evaluation (Allison & Pomeroy, 2000). Contextually, this makes sense; in a positivist ontological framework, knowledge can be concretely discovered and succinctly expressed (Nichols, 2000).

As a burgeoning field often conflated with recreation, early ABL research had to make the case not only for the distinction, but also the field's legitimacy. As such, measuring outcomes became paramount.

By the 1970's, research had established common outcomes, though not common terminology, associated with ABL, often under blanket terms of 'personal development,' 'personal growth' or increase in 'self-concept,' measured primarily with participants' self-reporting on quantitative questionnaires (Davidson, 2001). During this time, researchers began to investigate social and academic benefits of ABL as well (Ewert, 1987).

While outcome measurements can serve to legitimate adventure programming, especially to external funders (Davidson, 2001; Martin & Leberman, 2005), they situate the research itself in questionable territory by attempting to transform subjective experiences into objective data. Quantitative research in ABL, unlike laboratory conditions, involves numerous uncontrolled-for variables, making it near impossible to isolate any one for investigation --- further complicated by issues of human agency in attributing direct causality to ABL programming (Nichols, 2000). This approach often neglects grounding research in theory (Nichols, 2000; Baldwin, Persing, Magnuson, 2004). The overemphasis on outcomes, problematic evaluations, and lack of theoretical basis further underscore the need for a new research paradigm in ABL which stresses both nuance of understanding and sophistication of analysis (Baldwin, Persing, Magnuson, 2004; Nichols, 2000). Furthermore, the ostensible generalizability of quantitative numerical evaluation, and meta-analyses predicated thereon, risk portraying ABL as a panacea for "a seemingly endless array of outcomes" (Baldwin, Persing, Magnuson, 2004, p.170). Thus, quantitative methods alone do not do full justice to the ABL experience and the processes of individual learning which result therefrom (Allison & Pomeroy, 2000).

Researchers have been calling for focus on process over product in investigating ABL experiences since the mid-1990's (Davidson, 2001; Martin & Leberman, 2005; Scrutton & Beames, 2015), qualitative studies which focus on individuals' constructions of their unique experiences, and the underlying mechanisms by which participants achieve outcomes (Baldwin, Persing, Magnuson, 2004). Qualitative research can

capture the personal nature and the phenomenological aspects of the adventure experience. They are particularly suited to analysis that focuses upon meanings rather than predetermined by the researcher. Participants can be encouraged to speak in their own voice, which is particularly important when the information gathered from each individual varies considerably and becomes a story in its own right. (Davidson, 2001, p. 12).

The use of qualitative research methods aligns with ABL in both pragmatic and philosophical terms (Nichols, 2000), and befits the intensely personal and unique adventures of participants empowered to make their own meaning through experience and reflection (Allison & Pomeroy, 2000). Qualitative research posits the power of expertise within the individual, and that each person's unique experiences and perspectives are valid. Through the research process, both the researcher and participant look to gain a greater insight into those experiences and make meaning, thus changing the dynamic between the two into more cooperation than evaluation.

Martin and Leberman (2005) highlight this in conducting a mixed methods study of an Outward Bound New Zealand adventure program, including both qualitative and quantitative measures of program effectiveness. In contrasting their findings from different metrics, they conclude that "the qualitative responses encapsulated the value and 'real' meaning of the personal experiences" (p. 44) because these "provided additional insight into individual

learning... which move[d] beyond numbers on a page, highlighting the value of adventure programs to individuals” (p. 57). This serves to “encapsulate the meaning of [ABL] experiences... by valuing the words [participants] attribute to their learning” (p. 57) and has important implications for examining the transfer of ABL ideas and practices to daily life.

The impact of adventure education is notoriously challenging to measure (Bunyan, 2011), as outcomes are difficult to quantify and necessarily entangled in a variety of situational, internal, and external circumstances. ABL activities and applications are often informally passed on from experienced facilitators and freely re-named, tweaked, and adapted. While this evolution maintains an oral tradition and allows for more precise, rather than dogmatic, applications, it makes etymology and citation challenging for scholars.

Research into ABL has been confined primarily to physical education as it relates to national curricula in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand (Webber, 2019). It focuses primarily on learners’ self-reported experiences and growth outcomes (Brown, 2006), rather than how these are achieved, with a distinct emphasis on theory over empirical data (McKenzie, 2000). Typical outcomes include an increased sense of confidence, self-efficacy, resilience, and leadership development.

Studies regarding adventure education *in* teacher preparation, but not *as* teacher preparation; as Sutherland & Legge (2016) note, while such experiences have been enjoyable for preservice teachers, they were not adequate for participants to enact adventure education within their own practice. Integration has been problematic, as “[n]o research was found on how [preservice teachers] implement and engage with adventure education as a curriculum model and in turn how [they] work with their understandings of the model in the school context” (Dillon, Tannehill, & O’Sullivan, 2010. p. 3).

While some theoretical research establishes that ABL can be integrated into existing curricula (Harper, 2017; Horwood, 1999; Schary, Jenny, Morrow, & Wozniak, 2018), little if any explores the challenges and advantages of ABL in content areas such as English or mathematics, nor how teachers incorporate adventure into their practice. Thus, it remains unclear to what degree, if any, experience in leading adventure experiences transfers into improved teaching practice.

Preservice Teacher Epistemology and Practicum Experiences

In critiquing ABL, Seaman and Rheingold (2012) declare “any socially altruistic reform that does not take knowledge seriously.... might appear liberating on its face but is unlikely to change the status quo” (p. 261). According to Bisson (2009b), ABL asks basic epistemological questions, including “can we rationalize the use of risk and adventure activities to promote learning? ... can we rationalize the use of direct experiences to promote learning?” (p. 110). Such questions highlight the role of judgment in ABL leadership and the unique positionality of preservice teachers. As conceived in an adventure paradigm, learning is fundamentally inductive, drawing from particular experiences to create broader interpretations and judgments about self, others, work, and world (Wurdinger & Priest, 1999). Similarly, it is subjective. These factors invert traditional, primarily deductive views on pedagogy wherein learners assimilate concepts in the symbolic and abstract before application to particulars (Kraft, 1999).

Termed ‘the apprenticeship of observation’ (Lortie, 1975), teachers’ own time on the receiving end of instruction in the K-12 world (and even in college) transmits powerful models of what education and schooling should (and should not) be. Having seen only the outcomes of teaching, not the intricacies of lesson planning, curricular design, or assessment (to name just a few), many preservice teachers have developed an oversimplified view of “becoming

enculturated into the teaching community --- learning to think, talk, and act as a teacher” (Putnam & Borko, 2000, 9-10). Especially in times of discomfort and stress, teachers regularly fall back on familiar, though ineffective, practices (Stremba & Bisson, 2009) in the ‘scholar-academic’ tradition of transmission pedagogy (Schiro, 2008).

Much preservice coursework, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1998) observe, is based on “what we refer to as ‘knowledge *for* practice’... [where] university-based researchers generate what is commonly referred to as formal knowledge and theory (including codifications of the so-called wisdom of practice) *for* teachers to use in order to improve practice” (p. 250, emphasis in original). Herein, knowledge is based largely on transmission, thereby positing the existence of a certain set of necessary pragmatic knowledge, practices, and skills new teachers need, and that such concepts have been appropriately vetted.

The institution of ‘student teaching’ aligns with Putnam and Borko’s (2004) “situative perspective... [in that] the physical and social contexts in which an activity takes place are an integral part of the activity, and the activity is an integral part of the learning that takes place within it” (p. 4). They posit learning as “coming to know how to participate in the discourse and practices of a particular community” (Putnam & Borsko, 2000, p. 5). Thus, each different learning experience will have a different knowledge outcome, based on the unique context in which it occurs (see Bisson, 1999).

Kapur and Bielaczyc (2011) see teacher development as “grounded in the belief that engaging novices to try, and even fail, at tasks that are beyond their skills and abilities can, under certain conditions, be productive for developing deeper understanding” (p. 6). Working through problems, even those immediately unsolvable, provokes one to be more creative and self-sufficient, generate more solutions, and capitalize on resources in such a way that their eventual

success will be more impactful and long-lasting. In short, they argue the long-term gains are worth the short-term failures (Kapur & Bielaczyc, 2011).

Through their practical experiences, beginning teachers are expected to move away from novice status and towards that of an expert. In Bransford's (2000) model, this includes not only the amount of content and pedagogical knowledge an exemplary teacher should have, but also specific structures of that knowledge, especially as it relates to problem-solving and practice. Central to this view is that experts know patterns within a discipline, an understanding which cannot be reduced to a simple set of discrete pieces of information and access this knowledge flexibly and effortlessly. Similarly, a novice teacher should be building not only a repertoire of classroom strategies, but also overarching patterns (or "chunks" [Bransford, 2000, p. 32) which govern their uses and outcomes. Unlike the expert teacher, novices compile their knowledge "... arranged on the basis of the problems' surface attributes" (p. 38). Thus, the apprenticeship model of teaching should eventually lead to automaticity and independence.

Adventure-Based Learning and Teacher Preparation

Teacher education tends to be conservative, and regularly perpetuates vestigial models of learning (Labaree, 2004, 2018). While university preparation and field experiences are essential to quality teacher development, preservice educator practicum experiences rarely afford candidates adequate opportunities for sustained work on skills that support classroom community, collaboration, affective learning, critical thinking, and creativity, despite these being essential for both teachers and students.

In educational settings, ABL provides "opportunities to develop intrinsic motivation, learn lessons about risk taking, responsibility, and commitment... add elements of excitement to the learning journey and provide lessons in collaboration, cooperation, and trust" (Raiola &

O’Keefe, 1999, p. 52). Henton (1996) outlines four criteria which exemplify the Adventure in the Classroom (AITC) model --- significance, support, stimulation, and satisfaction. Significance entails personal and professional commitment to worthwhile endeavors, beyond the compulsory nature of American schooling (Labaree, 2004). Support depends on mutual relationships, both between student and teacher and among learners. Stimulation involves excitement, uncertainty, discovery, and sustained engagement. Satisfaction ensures that experiences come to a reasonable and meaningful conclusion, a cognizance of what has been learned and why it is important. Similarly, Horwood (1999), who defines the conditions for adventure as “uncertain outcome, risk, inescapable consequences, energetic action, and willing participation” (p. 9), states that actualizing these in the classroom involves “the sequence of instruction, diversity in locale and method, the distribution of decision making between teacher and student, the degree of public exposure, and the modes of evaluation” (p. 10). As such, ABL and classroom practice are not mutually exclusive, instead offering novice teachers opportunities to synthesize their academic preparation with progressive practice.

Summary

Adventure-based learning is a set of practices, processes, and philosophies geared towards the holistic growth of the individual and the groups in which they live. ABL experiences are novel, engaging, risky, and rewarding. They offer opportunities to connect with others, deepen empathy and understanding, and solve real-world challenges in a microcosm of mutual support. Pursuing learning and change through this framework of pro-social, individualized, and creative experiences has the potential to profoundly influence the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of classroom practice. Preservice educators at the intersection of teacher training and ABL experiences are

uniquely positioned to learn from both in developing their personal and professional identities (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016).

Measuring ABL has been problematic. Despite over fifty years of the field's existence, limited research has documented the success of ABL programming but little unpacking of the processes by which such is achieved (Priest, 1999). The disconnect stems from the application of ill-suited quantitative measures, and a lack of sufficient learning theory undergirding academic studies. Thus, the field "sits on the fringe" (Priest, 1999) of educational research.

In the context of American teacher education, learning through experience is not a new concept, but has yet to reach its potential in preparing the educational workforce. In part, this is the inherited trajectory of the "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975) and the inertia of the public-school enterprise. It is also endemic to issues in conservative educator preparation programs.

To be ready to guide the learners of today and tomorrow, teachers must experience firsthand the value of learning outside the tradition. Through extended, non-traditional fieldwork opportunities within the framework of guided support and reflection, they can then successfully implement new strategies and practices in their own classrooms. In offering critical insights on the nature of compulsion, authority, engagement, agency, and success, ABL holds promise not just in what it offers to educators, but also in what it enables educators to do for their students --- provided a greater understanding of how such preparation works.

Chapter III: Methodology

This study investigated how the Adventure Based Learning (ABL) experiences of alumni Crusade Academic Adventure Program (CAAP) Mentors informed their subsequent work as professional educators, focusing on both the personal and professional changes for adults. Ten research participants met the selection criteria of at least one year (or equivalent) of experience as a CAAP Mentor, and a subsequent year of full-time employment in an educational position requiring direct interaction with youth outside a scripted curriculum. Participants represent a variety of perspectives (see Table 3.1). Each completed two semi-structured interviews and a Table Completion exercise. The research was informed by transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2006), and conducted during the 2019-2020 school year through a qualitative, holistic multiple-case study (Yin, 2018).

Table 3.1: Participant Demographics²

Research Participants Demographics Chart											
Name	Gender Identification	Race / Culture Identification	Professional Specialty	Age	Highest Degree Earned	Years in ABL	Years in Ed	Grade Levels Taught	Student Populations	School Contexts	Leadership
Carlos	Male	Latino	K-12 STEAM	45	BA	6	12	K - 12	MS, ELL, SN, FG, GH	R, U, S, PU, PR, C, U, G	Nonprofit Founder
Jonas	Male	Mixed	Secondary English	47	MAT	4	20	9 - 12, Undergraduate	MS, ELL, SN, GH	U, PS	Workshop Presenter, Writing Adjunct
Robin	Male	Black	Secondary Guidance	42	MEd	6	9	6 - 8	MS, ELL, SN, FG, GH	U, P, G	Dean of Students
Lynn	Female	White	Secondary Science	49	MAT	4	8	9 - 12, Undergraduate	MS, ELL, SN, FG	U, R, P, PS	Education Consultant
Aaron	Male	N/A	Post-Secondary	29	MEd	3	7	Undergraduate	MS, ELL, SN, FG	U, PU, PR, PS	Education Fellow, Resident Teacher
Chris	Male	White Italian Portuguese	Secondary Math	35	MA	12	6	9 - 12	MS, ELL, SN, FG, GH	U, P, C	Department Head
Sydney	Female	Biracial	Post-Secondary Career Development	31	MEd	7.5	10	Undergraduate	MS, FG, SOC	R, U, P, PS	Associate Director
Melissa	Female	Hispanic	Elementary	23	BA	5	1	1 - 3	MS, ELL	U, C	ABL Site Manager
Mamey	Female	Asian	Secondary Math	23	BA	4	5	8, 10, 11	MS, FG	U, S, P, C	
Emma	Female	White	Elementary	22	BA	2	1	1 - 8	MS, ELL, SN	R, U, C	Lead Teacher
Key											
Student Populations:				School Contexts:							
MS	Mainstream			R	Rural						
ELL	English Language Learners			U	Urban						
SN	Special Needs			S	Suburban						
FG	First Generation			P	Public						
GH	Gifted / Honors			PR	Private						
O	Other			C	Charter						
				PS	Post-secondary						

Research Questions

This dissertation is informed by the overall question: In what ways can experience as an Adventure Based Learning (ABL) leader impact the subsequent epistemologies and practices of professional educators?

Sub-questions include:

1. To what degree, if any, do participants attribute changes to their epistemological beliefs about teaching and learning through serving as an ABL facilitator?

² Note: Names of all participants, schools, and communities described herein are pseudonyms.

2. What, if any, similarities and differences in philosophy and practices do participants identify between their educator preparation programs, their ABL experience, and current professional practices? How do participants make sense of and negotiate differences?
3. To what degree, if any, do participants' ABL experiences align with criteria for transformative learning?

Research Methodology

In today's climate of accountability and explication in education, the search for 'best practices,' 'data-driven instruction,' and other forms of 'evidence-based' pedagogy associated with the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001 and 2009's Race to the Top initiative, researchers face a similar quandary in investigating teacher education as in ABL (see Ben-Peretz, 2011). In many instances, researchers have identified effective pedagogical practices without examining their internal logic, theory, or process. Analyzing ABL experiences in the classroom is challenging in that it does not necessarily transfer directly to the absorption of 'content' which preoccupies the test-driven standards movement. Ultimately, it is a process, not a product. It would be nearly impossible to assign viable statistics regarding the impact ABL teaching strategies and philosophies have on such measures as standardized tests, although learning experiences based in such concepts as constructivism, strategic and creative problem solving, and effective communication are intimately tied to success thereon.

Recent publications explore initial research into the role of experiential learning and ABL in teacher preparation. Girvan, Conneely, and Tagney (2016) approach curricular reform by placing teachers in the role of experiential learners. To challenge the traditional role of university teacher-educator, Glazier, Bolick, and Stutts (2017) undertake an extended adventure experience with their students, noting their own discomfort with the 'lip service' given experiential

education and a reimagining of the role of reflection. Harfit and Chow (2018) examine how constructivist adventure experiences can address social elements of pedagogy often ignored in teacher education, while Glazier and Bean (2019) explore ABL as a means to emancipate teachers from outmoded teaching methodologies, concluding participants showed significant epistemological changes.

However, while these studies are predominantly qualitative and examine participants' self-reported growth, especially in reflective domains, they do not explicitly explore how this growth is operationalized in the classroom. They focus on teacher learning, especially in pre-service training, but do not examine ways in which this translates into practice. Such research implies pedagogical ramifications without demonstration thereof. Thus, they can best be described as studies *of* ABL in teacher preparation, but not *as* teacher preparation.

Rationale for Case Study Methodology

The qualitative case study model (Yin, 2018) allows researchers to explore participants' experiences from an emic perspective through description, narrative, observation, and documentation *in situ*, in ways that are not easily quantifiable (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). The primary characteristic of case study resides in its limitations; a case must be carefully defined and delineated to enable substantive analysis (Brown, 2008). Case study stresses depth over breadth, facilitates the effective triangulation of numerous data sources, and allows researchers deep access into the insights, emotions, and actions of participants. It is holistic, considering both the individual and their context to "provide a humanistic... understanding of complex situations" (Brown, 2008, p. 10) with a wide variety of contextual and social factors (Kyburz-Graber, 2004).

The qualitative case study is useful in developing theory, evaluating programming, and developing interventions (Baxter & Jack, 2008), as it is not limited to one lens, or to discrete data points, for deconstructing and reconstructing meaning. Case study posits participants as experts on their own unique experiences within complex contexts (Mertens, 2010) and attempts to make the experiences of others available and relatable, thus validating the agency of participant, researcher, and reader (Thomas, 2010). It endorses a constructivist paradigm in which nuance, subtlety, and subjective perspectives are privileged (Allison & Pomeroy, 2000; Baxter & Jack, 2008). Case study focuses on how individuals make sense of their experiences: the “ontological vision that is claimed to be most prevalent in experiential education practice, if not in the research” (Allison & Pomeroy, 2000, p. 93).

Exploring multiple cases allows researchers to examine patterns and dissonances across and among participants. This research design is viewed as more reliable, rigorous, and powerful than examining a single case (Yin, 2018), as it provides not only more evidence, but also greater opportunities to develop theoretical analysis. Procedurally, this entails each case be explored and analyzed in and of itself, with its findings and conclusions then put in conversation with those of other cases. The correlation of conclusions from several individual cases, just as replicability from experimental design, highlights common themes and strengthens claims to their pervasiveness.

Case study, however, is not without its limitations, most significantly in generalizability (Brown, 2008; Cooley, Burns, & Cumming, 2015; Thomas, 2010; Yin, 2018), investigator bias (Unluer, 2012), and rigor (Kyburz-Graber, 2004; Yin, 2018). Thomas (2010) critiques the inductive (as opposed to abductive) nature of the case study tradition, and the invalidity of theory drawn therefrom. In the adventure field, Neil (2008), (as cited in Scrutton & Beams, 2015) notes

the following concerns in extant case studies: “the usage of inappropriate self-report questionnaires, low statistical power, over-reliance on inferential statistics, a lack of control and comparison groups, a lack of longitudinal data, and a lack of investigation of independent variables” (p.11-12)—in short, the strengths of quantitative research against which qualitative research contends for validity (Allison & Pomeroy, 2000).

Thus, “[t]he greatest challenge for the researcher is not the case study strategy itself, but in fact articulating the research paradigm and theoretical framework that is guiding every aspect of their work and ensuring the trustworthiness and credibility of the data and method of research” (Brown, 2008, p. 9). For validity, a qualitative case study must consider triangulation of several methods of investigation; explicitly ground itself in reliable theory and carefully designed metrics; and clear delineation of the boundaries, goals, and participants in question. While case study “has been regarded as a design, a methodology, a particular data collection procedure, and as a research strategy... [i]t is incumbent on the researcher to ensure... [it] is the right strategy based on the intention of the investigation” (Brown, 2008, p. 9).

In this dissertation, qualitative multiple case study was the primary analytical tool with which to investigate the philosophies, processes, and practices of teachers with preservice ABL leadership experience. As teaching is a multi-faceted endeavor, with practitioners drawing from a variety of source materials, practices, and ideologies, research procedures such as classroom observations or evaluation of student work would be suspect in their ability to draw direct attribution of classroom practices to the ABL experience. Therefore, it was imperative that it not be the outside observer who draws causal connections, but the practitioners themselves. Only they could authoritatively say how ABL has influenced their learning and teaching, which experiences and ideas inform their professional philosophy, and the utility of both in their

classroom. As such, this project relied on participants' self-reporting as the primary means to access data. This necessitated a nuanced understanding of each individual's situation, experiences, and epistemology, which made case study an appropriate methodology to align with the participant-focused, constructivist nature of the field (Fagerstam & Grotherus, 2018). Much like ABL itself, this was not simply a procedural or academic exercise; it was intellectual, affective, adaptable, and predictably unpredictable.

Such study fits with Yin's (2018) criteria for the selection of case study as method, in that it investigated a contemporary, concrete phenomena requiring substantive description. It featured well-defined and directive research questions, employed multiple means of information-gathering for triangulation, and compilation through iterative review. By focusing 'in depth,' this study allowed the researcher a "holistic and real-world perspective" (Yin, 2018, p. 5) suitable to the experiential nature of the investigation, and the pragmatics of classrooms influenced by ABL. This research sought to understand cases of teachers in relation to context and their subsequent school or university employment and aligned closely with relativist and constructivist philosophies (Yin, 2018). However, it did not require that the researcher have any control over events, but instead examined the beliefs and narratives of participants as they reported these evolved over time. Considering theory, these data were then used to create "*analytic generalization[s]*" (Yin, 2018, p. 37, italics in original), summative findings which go beyond the individual case.

According to Davidson (2001), the "essence of learning from adventure is the process of making meaning out of experience --- of action and reflection" (p. 11). While this certainly applies to program participants, it also describes the process of learning through which pre-service educators can build their repertoire of skills and dispositions through leadership positions

in adventure programs. Given the dearth of research on ABL leaders' learning, and the transfer thereof, this research takes the stance that many of the same processes through which ABL enables growth for participants apply equally well to leaders.

Transformative Learning Theory

Action and reflection form the core processes not only of ABL, but also of transformative learning theory (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011). Through their life experiences, individuals "build ways of seeing the world; settle on a way of interpreting what happens to them, and develop the accompanying values, beliefs, and assumptions that determine their behavior" (Cranton, 2016, p. 15), often without their conscious knowledge or intent. Formative experiences thus become a default "filter for understanding life" (Cranton, 2016), and provide justification for beliefs and actions in context (Mezirow, 2000). Transformative learning theory "is based on constructivist assumptions... [that] how we see the world is a result of our perceptions of our experiences" (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 3), which may include "distortions, stereotypes, and prejudices" (p. 6), and myriad other modes of inefficiency, inefficacy, and fallacy. When uncritically accepted, these views can circumscribe thinking and inhibit future growth. Transformative learning opportunities arise from cognitive dissonance, wherein a novel experience is incongruent with an individual's previous cognitive framework, entailing the individual must "negotiate contested meanings" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 3). Such an experience "is often an intensely threatening emotional experience in which we have to become aware of both the assumptions undergirding our ideas and those supporting our emotional responses to the need to change" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 6). It provokes a conscious reconsideration of existing beliefs, dispositions, forms of action, and personal identity.

Transformative learning occurs when one “becomes critically aware of one’s own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 4). The process is embedded in a context of personal relevance to the learner, their interactions with others, and their ability to think analogically (Mezirow, 2000). When an individual recognizes such disconnects, they then can revise their thinking, and act on said reconfiguration, developing new conceptual understandings which reconcile past and present in a way that is intelligible and sustainable. Ideally, this results in an expansion of beliefs, wherein the individual becomes more open and inclusive in their thinking, better equipped to understand and address multiple perspectives, and better able to justify their views and actions (Mezirow, 2000). Concurrently, they can build a more grounded sense of self, and greater confidence in the fidelity of their beliefs. It serves as a means toward “knowing what you know” (p. 7).

Transformative learning theory has been utilized to study instrumental, communicative, and reflective learning, centering around themes such as critical self-reflection, social interactions, and challenge mastery (D’Amato & Krasny, 2011).

Studies of ABL have historically ignored the role of theory in examining practice (Baldwin, Persing, & Magnuson, 2004). Transformative learning posits that adult learners, in this case preservice educators, are uniquely positioned to think critically and enact change by “questioning assumptions and expectations that shape and influence what [they] think and do” (Mezirow, 2006, p. 24). By analyzing various communications and scenarios, individuals use metaphors and analogical strategies to come to the most reasonable judgment about the meaning of their experiences, and to utilize these meanings to inform future decisions. In ABL, this translates to how a participant who is “outside their comfort zone forms new cognitions or

learning patterns as they cope with the experience” (Cooley, Burns, & Cumming, 2015, p. 569). Transformative learners seek to refine their frames of reference (habits of mind and points of view) “to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow, 2006, p. 26) through critical reflection, thus evidenced in their subsequent ideologies, epistemologies, and practices. Through this lens, educators are seen as capable of evaluating a variety of perspectives on their craft and making informed decisions about improving their service to students.

Transformative learning dovetails closely with the applications and practices of ABL, and how such experience can translate to the classroom. First, it is based on constructivist and experiential notions of the change that results from learning. Second, it posits that learners, particularly adults, are capable of (and thus responsible for) their own growth. Third, it focuses on analogy and metaphor as vehicles for understanding. Furthermore, transformative learning examines both the external and internal processes which result in change, with the emphasis on how learners make sense of changes in their world view, as the research above suggests should be the focus of study in ABL.

The Study

According to Cranton & Hoggan (2012), “in the literature we have paid virtually no explicit and direct attention to the process of evaluating transformative learning” (p. 531). As scant extant literature explores the relationship between ABL and educator preparation (Davie, 2016), and even less between ABL and transformative learning theory (Furman & Sibthorp, 2012), this is an exploratory study. This research will be considered successful when it accomplishes the following:

- Thorough explication of participants’ epistemologies on teaching and learning

- Tracing participants' philosophical and pedagogical development through their experience as Mentors and their professional preparation
- Juxtaposing thematic priorities in ABL with participants' teacher training
- Identifying the perceived influence of ABL on participants' epistemologies and pedagogical practices
- Identifying themes and trends across individuals' experiences
- Utilize data and analysis to construct an argument for positioning ABL in teacher training

Data Sources

The following data sources will be used in this research:

Semi-structured Interviews.

Participants in this study engaged in two semi-structured interviews which allowed for in-depth, individualized exploration of experience, context, and meaning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While both drew extensively from the research questions, the first of two interviews focused on pedagogical philosophy, and included the following questions:

- How familiar were you with adventure-based learning (ABL) before becoming a Mentor?
- How would you describe the role of a CAAP Mentor?
- What beliefs do successful CAAP Mentors hold?
- In what ways did your thinking change while you were a CAAP Mentor?
- In what ways is CAAP like / unlike traditional educational approaches (i.e., 'school')?
- What aspects of your work with CAAP have informed your current educational philosophy?

The second interview focused on pedagogical practices, and included the following questions:

- Which games/activities did you find most educationally effective for participants?

- Which games/activities were particularly enjoyable / educationally effective for you as a Mentor?
- How did your CAAP staff adapt or modify activities? Why?
- In what areas did you grow (skills, dispositions, knowledge) through CAAP?
- What ABL practices have you incorporated directly into your educational practice? What were your goals in doing so? Did you accomplish your goals?
- What ABL practices have you modified or adapted for use in your classroom / educational practice? What were your goals in doing so? Did you accomplish your goals?

Table Completion Exercise.

The Table Completion Exercise asks participants to delineate the degree of emphasis of 24 themes across their ABL practices and educator preparation programs. Areas of inquiry include:

- Building community and creating a positive classroom environment
- Engineering learning for engagement and affect
- Creating opportunities for authentic problem-solving
- Making curriculum meaningful --- relevance and ownership
- Role of cooperation and collaborative learning
- The importance of reflection
- Adapting adventure activities for the classroom for a variety of purposes
- Differentiated learning / learning styles / responsiveness
- Intuition, creativity, imagination
- Motivation and empowerment
- Teacher identity / philosophy

Data Analysis.

Data were analyzed primarily through thematic and narrative analyses (see chart below). Thematic analysis identifies categories in data useful to description and understanding, and is thus well-suited to exploring meaning in interviews, and narratives. By virtue of its “theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). It is an inductive, recursive process which requires careful pattern identification in data, and an emphasis on making connections between and among data sources, thus emphasizing the researchers’ active role in not just the analysis of data, but its construction as well.

Following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step model, data was first reviewed for topic and content, and initial codes generated based on the literature, participants’ responses, and researcher observations. From this, a basic structure emerged, focusing on participants’ personal development, professional development, professional practice, and educator preparation programs. Upon additional review, eight overarching themes emerged: communication and relationships, confidence and identity, “real world” transfer, critical and creative decision-making, roles and goals, risk and empowerment, parallel learning, and alternative pedagogies. There were given formal definitions and reviewed against the data. By the end of several reviews, two of these themes (‘roles and goals’ and ‘parallel learning’) were eliminated, as there was insufficient evidence to justify their inclusion as codes. Participants’ responses were then reviewed against Mezirow’s criteria for transformative learning: changes in participants’ frames of reference, discrimination, openness and inclusivity, learning from others, capacity for change, reflection, beliefs, and actions (see Table 3.2). For example, the theme of “real world” transfer aligned with participants’ increased capacities for change, reflection, and reconstituting beliefs;

‘critical and creative decision-making’ fit with participants’ greater discrimination, ability to learn from others, capacity for change, and reflection. Once categories and codes were finalized, the cases were built, then provided to participants for “member checks” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246). After review, the cases were reorganized to align with the criteria above and triangulated with data from the Table Completion exercise (see Table 4.1). This approach allowed participants’ reflections and conclusions to be organically categorized and meaningfully reconstituted to deepen understanding across and between participants.

Table 3.2: Alignment of Themes and Mezirow’s (2000) Criteria

Mezirow’s (2000) Criteria for Transformative Learning		Frames of Reference	Discrimination	Open and Inclusive	Learn from Others	Capacity for Change	Reflection	Change in Beliefs	Change in Actions
Themes	Communication and Relationships	X	X	X	X		X		X
	Confidence and Identity	X		X	X	X	X	X	
	"Real World" Transfer					X	X	X	X
	Critical and Creative Decision-Making		X		X	X	X		X
	Risk and Empowerment	X	X			X	X	X	X
	Alternative Pedagogies	X	X	X		X	X	X	X

Narrative analysis “uses the stories people tell, analyzing them in various ways, to understand the *[sic]* meaning of the experiences as revealed in the story *[sic]*” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). The goal is to construct life-like ‘vignettes’ or ‘creative nonfiction’ which encapsulate illustrative experiences to enable the reader to make meaning and see themselves in the situated stories of participants (Pepper & Wildy, 2009). In this case, it was used to frame the developmental trajectories participants relayed. Narrative analysis gives attention not only to first-person accounts themselves, but the manner, structure, and language in which they are told. Pepper & Wildy (2009) describe the process “similar to photography, where one image is presented but another quite different could be presented at another time, depending on the

context and the participants” (p. 21). Thus, narrative analysis focuses on capturing the subjective experience, rather than seeking generalizable patterns. By holding each story as distinct and intact, this approach honors the unique life histories and perspectives of research participants, thus lending itself towards explicating the growth described in participants’ interviews, as well as providing balance to the cross-case nature of the thematic analysis. Furthermore, this approach is particularly relevant to holistic case study, in that it allows for the consideration of multiple variables and the context[s] in which they occur.

Table 3.3: Research Alignment & Analysis

Research Question	Data Source	Data Analysis
1	Semi-structured Interview I	Thematic Analysis
2	Semi-structured Interview II Table Completion Exercise	Thematic Analysis Narrative Analysis
3	Semi-Structured Interview I Semi-structured Interview II	Thematic Analysis Narrative Analysis

Chapter IV: Case Studies

Each of the following case studies profiles a single research participant and is built from semi-structured interviews. These portrayals rely primarily on direct quotation to best represent and honor participants' unique voices, mitigate potential researcher bias, and foreground themes for analysis. All participants were provided the opportunity to review and approve their section to ensure accuracy. Summary demographic information for participants is in Table 3.1.

Since the outset of this research, CAAP has been conceptualized as an exemplary ABL program which can provide Mentors a unique introduction to the teaching profession. Examining how this opportunity influences the practices of Mentors who go on to professional roles in education, especially in juxtaposition to traditional university-based teacher development programs, was the initial and explicit goal. However, upon iterative review of the data, it became clear that excavating each participant's unique understanding of CAAP and the Mentor role was necessary to contextualize their responses. Many participants shared that CAAP had influenced their beliefs about teaching as much, if not more so, than their classroom practices. Several detailed ways in which, through the Mentor role, they learned many of the same skills as Crusaders.

Each case centers direct quotations from participants in order to honor their unique voices and mitigate researcher bias. They are arranged chronologically, based on the participants' start date with CAAP or its predecessor, NEISP. As applicable, each case study is generally organized into the following categories, none of which should be considered mutually exclusive:

Introduction: This section includes pertinent background and professional information about the participant. It explores their understanding of CAAP and the Mentor role, as well as individual successes and challenges in this role.

Personal Development: This section explores how CAAP impacted the participant outside their professional contexts, crossing over into other areas of identity, ideology, or action.

Professional Development: Particularly as these relate to ‘traditional’ public education, this section addresses how CAAP informed and influenced the participant’s beliefs and philosophy of education.

Professional Practice: This section details the ways in which the participant has adopted or adapted CAAP challenges, philosophy, or processes for use in their own classroom, and their perspectives on the efficacy thereof.

Teacher Preparation: For a participant with post-secondary training in education, this section compares their program of study with their initial and ongoing staff development experiences at CAAP.

Summary: This section briefly reviews the most salient themes the participant conveyed.

Case I: Carlos

Introduction.

Carlos began working with the Crusade in 1996, serving as a Mentor in the National Early Intervention Scholarship Partnership (NEISP) and the first few sessions of CAAP. He later went on to become a Facilitator and a full-time Middle School Advisor for the Crusade. While formally trained as a sound engineer, he has made his career in youth work, focusing on nontraditional learning. He is now the Founder and Executive Director of STEM Gen, a non-profit organization that provides youth-led science, technology, engineering, and math experiences in Rhode Island’s urban core. His students have built working rockets and a hovercraft, produced internationally renowned podcasts, and photographed Earth from a balloon

they sent into space. He described the STEM Gen endeavor as “birthed from the seeds of something like CAAP, and the experiences that I’ve had since then.”

Carlos joined NEISP “the way that everybody gets involved in whatever they're involved in here in Rhode Island: nepotism.” While he was in college, his uncle worked at the Crusade, and recruited his then-girlfriend for NEISP. For her, it was “a cool extra gig,” but for Carlos “it was like, ‘no, hold up, we can roll up our sleeves here.’” Despite his much more lucrative work in music production in Boston, he would return to Prudence each weekend for the program because “it felt like a calling, it felt like something I had to do so much.” Even after graduating, “everybody had to understand ‘you can't have me on Saturday. I'm going back to Prudence, take it or leave it,’ so I could work with these students.”

Carlos recalled his “first impression” of NEISP was ““hey, the students have leadership opportunities here. I see a value to what's going on...”” Empowering students as leaders has subsequently “become very important for me, because I saw the value in that, and I still see the value in that to this day. My whole career is based on that, I would say. So yeah, that was the first thing that struck me, that we were giving these students a lot of power.” As a Mentor,

I could feel it. I could feel it when I went in every time. It wasn't the smug sense of self-importance, and it wasn't the savior mentality of ‘I'm coming in and I'm changing students' lives.’ But you could feel how much they needed, some of them, the opportunity to shine, and others an opportunity to vent, and others an opportunity to learn how to fight, to learn how to have a dispute and start to fix it and manage it. These are all important things that adventure education offers to students... They're learning how to resolve conflicts together, and they're learning how to lead, and they're learning how to talk to each other, and they're learning

how to be civil with each other, and they're learning from their role model Mentors.

A strength of the CAAP staff structure was to “share the same sort of roles, structure for leadership that we ask our students to employ,” the successful implementation of which depended largely on the particular site’s Facilitator. In both NEISP and CAAP, Carlos said he had “mostly positive [experiences], but sometimes a mixed bag, depending on how amazing the facilitating was.” Not all Facilitators can “get past that hump, of every day they come in, it was *their* vision, *their* vision, *their* vision... You could bring an expert who is amazing at what they do, but not necessarily amazing at transferring that ownership of energy to the students,” a sentiment he echoes in hiring STEM Gen staff. He gave the example of one particular Facilitator who “would give the Mentors a great deal of leeway into how the days were going to go. We would all cook it and work it together.... [He would say] ‘show up an hour early. I wanna talk about this, I wanna see how you're gonna do it.’” Allowing Mentors “more design input into the day makes it easier to be able to translate that ownership, that input level on to the students.”

As a Mentor, Carlos worked with “many different Facilitators, many different people running the show over the course of several years, and everybody brought their own DNA to it.” Despite differences in style and emphasis, Carlos found “locus of control for the students” to be the “common denominator.”

I saw the difference immediately with a number of students, when they could say, ‘okay, if I'm in control, if I'm the leader today, this is the way that I wanna do things.’ So then we start to give them the tools and we start to give them the support so that they can actually lead the day... It was that secret DNA... When

I've gone and done programs with students elsewhere where they do not have control... the first thing I think is, 'well, how can we give it to them?'

For Mentors, Carlos recalled the basic expectations as "show up 10 days and be good. It was real simple, it wasn't, 'these students need to learn X, Y, and Z.' We didn't have that paradigm." As "education wasn't in quite that space at the time," CAAP operated outside standards of "what does success look like for this program? What are the students gonna leave here with," instead focusing on exploring organic experiences. The closest he found to a curriculum was a binder full of adventure "games... which was basically our playbook, to get from A to Z, so it was those little wins along the way."

CAAP was held in "the grossest schools... the schools where, if it rained, there was a flood in the basement, with rats just hanging on for dear life." While the "cosmetics" of a place like Washington Middle School represent what many Crusaders encounter during the week, the Mentors make an immediate impression that CAAP was "different" than what they might typically expect from a school-based program. While he acknowledged that "some of these [public school] teachers have a great level of experience, and have been there for 40 years, and it's an amazing thing what they can do with their experience," Mentors, "with far less experience, we're able to relate to the students right off the bat, immediately." Representation matters, as "we look like their big brothers, we look like their big sisters from home, or their cousin who takes them out for a milkshake and talks to them, saying, 'hey, you're doing alright in school?'" Just immediately off the bat, our educators look like people who our students will open up to."

Hispanic himself, Carlos appreciated "that we were hiring a lot of young people of color... who looked like our students, people who are in college. They started with people from the urban core, just like our students." This provided Crusaders "people they can relate to and

look up to, no matter what else is going on in their lives. At least right there, we've got a starting basis, where we were role models to some degree, and I thought that was the first and most important thing.” Carlos believes Mentors “right away, for adults, were as close as you can have for looking like our students.” As a Facilitator, this initial Crusader-staff connection gave him “something to work with” in growing a team who could eventually transfer “that locus of control over to the students.”

At CAAP, Carlos stated, there were no “never-fail” activities; instead, efficacy came from staff members’ delivery and priorities. His intent was often to “provoke” Crusaders into “real conflict, so that they can learn how to resolve those real conflicts together.” For example, he constructed a day-long ‘scavenger hunt’ at a local university, which was designed “to trigger the students. They’re supposed to get lost, if they’re smart and they’re working together.” The goals were challenging, but attainable, as “the intent is that they’re gonna struggle along the way, and how are they going to resolve it? Using the skills that they’ve learned in the previous weeks.” While he incorporated many games and “fun” experiences, “the real heart of that work for me was when we can have those learning moments, when we can challenge them and put them on trial to have those learning moments together.”

“Triggering conflict resolution opportunities,” as he did with CAAP, has become a hallmark of Carlos’s work with youth, despite the fact he “hate[s] every minute of it.” For this reason, he described working at CAAP to be “very uncomfortable. Even the work with the students, if you’re doing it well, at the end of the day is when you get your relief.” When he became a Facilitator, “it’s like Bill Belichick, man. You’re in your hoodie, it’s not a good time. You’re out there to work, and you’re out there to work hard... It was an undertaking that I’m very

proud to have taken. I love the fact that we did it, but no, I did not have a good time during the day.”

According to Carlos, CAAP has a long-lasting impact on participating Crusaders, “especially if they can trace it back, which many of them do. Many of them say, ‘I had this person to talk to when I was 13 years old, and they made an impact.’ I’ve heard that way too many times.” He saw success in changed behaviors, such as the student “who’s not gonna punch somebody as they regularly would.” He “felt like that was such an important part of what my students from the urban core really need, that we offer them consistently --- no matter who the Facilitator was, no matter what I thought of them --- consistently through our programming.”

Personal Development.

At CAAP, “a lot of the subtle nuances in the work that we were doing were about individual wellness, it was about taking care of yourself.” For staff, “it was about, ‘hey, I’m responsible for this group, but I’m also responsible for myself. It was a lot of those check-ins, and I definitely feel like I evolved a lot in that way.” He provided an example of how these factors intertwined, discussing the “toxic masculinity thing that I kinda grew up in,” an issue for “a lot of my students who come from similar backgrounds.” Working with diverse youth and staff “puts you through a trial, that you have to be comfortable with your own voice... That’s resonated with me.”

Carlos readily admits that, “because I love something, those are the things that I am most critical of, because I wanna see them grow. ‘Wouldn’t it be great if it was just a little bit tilted, more this way?’” He relished challenging his CAAP colleagues “to grow a little bit more, and to do more stuff with the students,” despite the fact that he “probably wasn’t well-equipped back then.” As a result, “sometimes I was a bit of an asshole, and other times I was probably being a

smarty. The truth was somewhere in between.” He admits he was “hard to work with,” but saw himself as challenging coworkers “because I saw the value in some of the parts of the program, and I wanted to fight for them.” This attitude has informed his views on interpersonal relationships, and his relationship with the Crusade:

I probably don't have a lot to say about somebody who I don't give a shit about.

But somebody who's my brother, somebody who's very close to me, I'm probably critical of. I really loved working in that program. I was obviously always very critical of it because I always saw that extra distance that we could go with youth... I would try to... push those boundaries, almost like with parents.

He admitted the limitations imposed on CAAP were a necessary evil, “because a lot of facilitators, myself included, probably wanted to go too hard.”

Professional Development.

From working with NEISP and CAAP, Carlos came to realize that many youth workers “feel like the end of their job is to have had children held in a bubble for a full day and then send them home.” He contrasted CAAP, where there was “adventure education every single day,” with a local Boys and Girls Club, which he described as “a holding cell. It's a daycare.”

At CAAP, Carlos developed and refined his interest in student-centered pedagogy, relinquishing control for learning into students' hands. As a result, “as I've gone forward and joined other adventures, if they don't have student-centered learning, that's what I usually find lacking because that's where we'll find less engagement almost uniformly.” His focus on engagement comes from his own experience, in that “if I'm not into it, then I'm not gonna give my all.” He gave an example where “if I'm playing a sport, and I'm there just hanging out with some friends, and I'm really just there to shoot the shit, then that's one thing.” However, “if I

believe in it, and if I believe in like, ‘hey, this team can be successful and we can win this game,’ and I feel like I can contribute, then I’m going to participate a little bit more. I’m gonna engage a little bit more.” He believes this “buy in” is necessary for not only the classroom but learning “across the board.”

Student ownership is Carlos’s highest priority in working with youth, a concept which was “straight out of” NEISP and CAAP, where “I’ve really seen the most ‘a-ha’ moments with students...when they can lead for a day.” When “the person who’s the biggest ass in the group... is now responsible for the rest of the group and can really understand it, I watched a lot of learning and growth happen in those moments.” Ownership became “the piece that I focused on, [that] my life is focused on since in youth work, ‘cause I honestly believe it.” When asked to explain the process, he said that “before I joined the College Crusade as a Mentor, I hadn’t thought about it. Kids were kids. I was leaving that period of my life where I was a kid, and now I was a young adult, and I hadn’t really thought about the perspective of an educator then.” As he grew into the role, moving from a “clock-in, clock out person” without a “deep philosophy on the work,” he “really started to find value” in being a Mentor:

There’s a Spider-Man bit, where ‘with great power comes great responsibility....’ I had to think about why students were evolving, and I honestly believed that it was that ownership. I honestly believe that it was because the day when the Mentors can pull back and let the students run the whole show, that’s when the students can grow... And it’s been my life since then. All of the jobs that I’ve done since then, I’ve said, ‘okay, if we as an organization are not offering the students a lot of ownership, why not? How can we do more? Will we be successful if we do more? And the answer has always been ‘yes.’

Professional Practice.

When asked in what ways NEISP and CAAP have influenced his current work with STEM Gen, Carlos responded “all of it. Definitely. I make no secret about that having a major influence.”

In staffing STEM Gen, Carlos returned to the distributed leadership he found with the better Facilitators at CAAP:

I don't have the capacity to raise a new staff, to bring up a new staff sometimes, so I'm finding people who I feel can give some of that leverage of control over to the students... I have been able to work with different people and bring different people in and whether or not it works is how quickly they can adapt to that philosophy... [of] ‘hey, here's this program that we've built. If you were gonna run it, what would it look like? What would be different? How can the students get involved, how can the students lead it?’ It's not easy to do, to bring in a professional, bring in somebody who's really great as an engineer, and then say, ‘okay, now let the students build something,’ 'cause the engineer comes in and the engineer oftentimes, once they know how to build it, they wanna build it, and they get frustrated watching these kids try to build it. But it doesn't matter at STEM Gen. It doesn't matter if the rocket ship works, it matters that the students built the rocket ship. If it fails, that's part of the process.

At STEM Gen, youth work collaboratively on projects. Carlos intentionally “put them together with a team. They're gonna lead a team where it's very CAAP-like.” This involves “meeting regularly, they're doing the check-ins, all of that stuff. But by the end... it's not ‘pass/

fail.’ I don't care if they ever have a board that hovers. I don't... because if they're shooting for the stars and they reach the moon, then I think that's pretty cool too.”

STEM Gen has been polarizing in many schools, garnering either “significant support or significant opposition.” When Carlos began delivering programming at Scotland High School, the principal “stayed in the room for the first couple of times, so he did have [his] ‘hands-on,’ but he was relatively quiet, and he watched the process. He asked a lot of questions, ‘how can I support blah blah blah?’” For administrators at other schools, “their mind is blown by the idea of letting students have some say, letting students have some challenge.”

Prudence Public Schools were reorganized after a scathing 2019 report from Johns Hopkins University. This involved the appointment of a new Commissioner of Education, who, less than a month after assuming the role, gave her first interview on the STEM Gen podcast. To Carlos, this “blows my mind, but it was dope to let students ask those questions, 'cause students have the same questions.” When the Commissioner in turn asked podcasters what needed to be improved, one replied “‘well, we'd like it if our teachers didn't call us the n-word.’”

The “leadership at that school was upset that the students had an opportunity to voice that opinion and to say that.” In Carlos’s experience, “not only does [such abuse] happen at that one school, but it happens pretty much everywhere... It's not the first time that I was seeing it. It's not the last time that I will see it.” Such schools “don't want student voice, are not ready for student voice, because it doesn't match their narrative.” However, “if you have good leadership, the good leadership is gonna respond to it and say, ‘how can we make this better,’ where other leadership is going to wanna sweep that under the rug.” Well-led schools “can react to the student’s voice and they can get ahead of it and make things better. And I feel like those are the places that might be more productive.”

Scotland's weekly STEM Gen podcast "is always in the top five in the world in education." Here Carlos sees himself "riding the coattails of the students, which is dope because I'm just doing whatever they wanna do." Since the program takes place during the school day, students need "special permission" to join; one student, however, regularly "snuck in." When his teachers discovered the ruse, they found him "working in the program, and working really hard. No student is more engaged." According to those same teachers, "this is a student who has trouble with behavior in most of their other classes and has trouble engaging." Carlos saw this student being successful in podcasting because "the program is based around what he wants to do. We're gonna do the podcast based around the guests, based around the topics that they are interested in, and apply it to their lives and their world." In such circumstances, Carlos finds "if we can address [students'] engagement, and if we can pull them in, if we can get some buy-in, it automatically modifies behavior." However, "there's some educators who resent that and say, 'well, if they're failing all their classes, they shouldn't have an opportunity to come to a program like this.'"

Summarizing CAAP's influence on STEM Gen, Carlos stated that "very specifically, I have absolutely made a career that has taken me to incredible places. I couldn't love what I do more, I wouldn't trade jobs with anyone" despite the low pay and long hours of his organization. Carlos noted CAPPs focus on youth ownership "was the piece that I ran with in our programs because that was the piece that I found the most valuable, along with conflict resolution." He has taken these concepts and built a program for youth, to the point where "they can sit on my board now and they can really own the projects."

Conclusion

Despite “some bitter times,” Carlos said NEISP and CAAP “really changed my life, and it's a big part of STEM Gen and the programs that I'm running today.” At CAAP, he found a “calling,” and his commitment to questioning the systems through which youth are expected to learn. At STEM Gen, Carlos maintains a facilitative role, to “go and find the resources to support the student vision,” maintaining that “ownership equals engagement.” He believes educators must contribute positivity, encouragement, resources, and, most importantly, a commitment “to respect [students] as we would respect our own people, to respect them as I respect my own children.”

Case II: Jonas

Introduction.

Jonas joined NEISP while pursuing a MAT in Secondary English in 1998. At the time, he “was aimed at” working with middle school students, whom he described as “high energy, and I'm high energy... the downside about that is they're high energy. So, it's a double-edged sword... they're enthusiastic, they're just not always enthusiastic about learning.” He took part-time work as a substitute middle school teacher and completed a middle-level endorsement which he has since let lapse for “political reasons.” He now works in an “urban ring” high school in Wanskuck Rhode Island and has twice earned National Board Certification.

Jonas identified his ethnicity as “mixed.” He grew up in a working-class community in Massachusetts, where “you get French Canadians living next to Puerto Ricans living next to Vietnamese [and] Laotians. So, it was a really weird mix. And I didn't know it was weird until after I left.” He found himself drawn to teach in “the working-class neighborhood, 'cause that... was a demographic I liked working with the best.” NEISP, however, exposed him to students with significantly different life circumstances, who “dealt with some stuff that we never had to

growing up. Their world was very different than the ones we were living.” For example, in feeding Crusaders, he recognized a “scarcity” mentality unlike his own upbringing, with students overeating or pocketing food to bring home for other family members. However, it was the gaps in Crusaders’ literacy that “shocked me the most... What kids could and couldn't do. All that we take for granted, or I took for granted, [at] our level of education.” When directing journaling, “sometimes you get a kid who, you ask them to write, and it's a bigger challenge. You can tell them ‘no matter what you write, it'll be okay,’ and stringing together an entire sentence is tricky.” As a result, “I guess I'm less surprised when that kind of thing happens” in Wanskuck.

Jonas pursued teaching after becoming disillusioned with his corporate position. He portrayed the business world as “all about shipping a bad product that they knew didn't work.” At the time, he “was young, I couldn't believe it. Now, I totally believe it.” These experiences framed his work with NEISP as a “customer service” model, where “the kids are your clients.” Ultimately, “you want them to be happy, you want them to come away with something valuable, you want them to have the skills that you're trying to inculcate... and you want them to come back.”

Becoming a Mentor was “the right fit.” Even before joining the Crusade staff, Jonas’s affinity towards ABL ran deep:

I had done [Boy] Scouts, and I already believed in play. I already believed in running around and being physical, I already believed in climbing through trees, I already believed in trust falls. I already believed in kids leading kids, I already believed in debriefing, I already believed that kids were capable of having the locus of control for their own education.

He then corrected himself, saying “I'm pretty sure that's a concept I got from NEISP... If

it wasn't, it certainly paved the way for it.”

A primary responsibility of all NEISP staff was ensuring Crusaders' safety, both physically and emotionally. This was a regular and explicit part of conversations with youth, as “the program is predicated on... [the idea that] if you're comfortable in your own skin and you're making the people around you comfortable in their own skin[s], you're gonna be more successful in whatever you undertake.” He questioned whether “a lot of those kids were ever asked what they're feeling” outside the program. Rich conversations with Crusaders operated as “an ecosystem” which “made NEISP... not an after-school babysitting program, not just a recreational program.” Developmentally, “you start with the games, you promote the interaction around those games, create the culture within our sub-units, and then have [Crusaders] process that.” Jonas described the peculiar role of NEISP Mentor in expansive terms, as “mother, father, brother, neighbor, counselor.”

According to Jonas, the ultimate success of the Saturday NEISP program would be observable on the following Monday morning in school:

We'd see a kid who was better equipped to handle stress... a kid who was less likely to drive a fist through a wall... a little bit more ready to learn when they went back to school on a Monday, more likely to go back to school on Monday. More likely to contribute in school on a Monday. If I were looking for things to measure, for instance, would they write more in school on Monday? Would they contribute more, would they interact more with their peers inside and outside of class, would they have more positive relationships with peers and adults inside and outside of the classroom on a Monday? Would they be less likely to succumb to some of the common peer pressures... drugs, alcohol, nicotine, sex, bullying?

In working with his NEISP colleagues, “what we were preaching to the kids, we were doing too. It worked on our level, the same way it worked with kids. We would debrief with the kids after a game, and we would debrief with each other after [each day of NEISP].” In general, “we were big about roles and goals, and it wasn't just something we're trying to teach the kids. It was really a practice that was implemented among the staff.” The culture encouraged honesty, as “sometimes... you have to be willing to say, ‘whoa, I made the wrong choice there.’ I think we did that in NEISP. We said, ‘you know what? That hurt my feelings. I wish you wouldn't do that.’ He noted this disposition, “if it comes from the ground up, it'll work. But it can only work if everybody on board is a believer. I guess I just kind of sought out that, and continue to seek out that.” In his current school, he found “a very similar feeling... we really care about each other. Well, not everybody, it's work... but there's a lot of us that care a lot about the others.”

At NEISP, Jonas was surprised that Mentors “were allowed to not like a kid... That didn't seem very teacherly... We could ‘vote kids off the island’” and move them to a different Mentor pair's team. This was “never a mean thing, like ‘I just don't like this kid 'cause he's a jerk,’” but an opportunity for a fresh start within the program:

I remember there were times where a kid wouldn't participate, he wasn't writing in his journal, he wasn't toeing the line... and I'm not getting through to him, but somebody else would say, ‘oh, hang on, put them on my team. I think he's gelling better with me. Put him on my team,’ and people would draft him like the NFL.

As a result, Crusaders were rarely, if ever, dismissed from the program, “‘cause there's always somebody like, ‘no, I think I got that kid.’ I think kids could sense that, instead of being booted, they were being recruited.”

Personal Development.

Jonas regularly returned to the theme of “roles and goals.” As with staff, each week Crusaders rotated functional positions within their teams --- Leader, Co-Leader, Timekeeper, Goalie, Sergeant, Scribe, and Rah-Rah --- each of which entailed certain responsibilities --- with the end goal being that Crusaders understood how to function in a variety of capacities in collective endeavors. As the program progressed, teams (and eventually, each individual) established SMART goals (‘specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, trackable’) for what they sought to accomplish for the program day, then the intervening week.

With his family, Jonas has “adopted the NEISP model. We have roles and goals in my house, and when those roles and goals aren't clearly defined, things go poorly.” He found such routines particularly relevant during summer vacations:

The best years we ever had as a family [were] when the kids were both in swim lessons. It was clear where the kids were supposed to be, what time they're supposed to be there, what we're gonna do during that time. I knew exactly what was going on. I was comfortable. I was great. We were happy that whole summer through... But lately, the kids aren't in swim lessons, and I don't know who's supposed to be where, and how much time have they spent on those tablets, and is that really healthy? And ‘where is your mommy? Where is she right now, and when is she gonna be back? Am I supposed to make lunch, is she supposed to make lunch? What is going on?’ [My wife] asked me, ‘this is summer. You should be relaxed. You should be happy. What's wrong with you?’ Like, ‘no, this is why I'm Catholic.’ I love the Catholic Church. I walk into the Catholic church, I know exactly what I'm supposed to do, when I'm supposed to do it, how I'm supposed to do it, how long it's gonna last. If I have any questions, there's a

manual right there that will explain it to me. NEISP was the same way. There's roles, there's SMART goals, there's a clear beginning and end, and we know how to measure it... I think NEISP taught me how Catholic I was. I didn't realize how much I love rituals.

Jonas shared that his wife “says all the time, ‘I couldn't do what you could do.’ I think she's right.” He described her as “very methodical. She's very clinical, 'cause she believes that there is a right way to do things. I believe there are so many right ways to do things.” As a result, “she can't see certain things the way I see them,” which he identified as a strength of their marriage.

Professional Development.

Among study participants, Jonas holds a unique notion on the connections among his Catholic faith, becoming a Mentor, and his classroom practice. He said “it was serendipitous that NEISP came into my life... I'll go on record saying I think it was God-sent. It legitimized play in the classroom, to be messy with teaching. You read some of that in the literature, but you really see it with NEISP.” Faith “helped determine why I became a teacher in the first place, largely, and definitely towards that demographic” of urban youth. He was initially compelled “to teach where I teach, and teach what I teach, to whom I teach, because it's my calling. If you gave me the choice again, I would absolutely make the same choices.”

As a Mentor, Jonas developed “core tenets” of his teaching philosophy, one of which was “moving the locus of control from me to the students. It's certainly something we did in NEISP. The sooner they can be in charge of the learning and the discovery, the sooner we've done our jobs.”

Jonas summarized his work with NEISP as “‘the toughest job you'll ever love...’ It's professional development. Everything that I learned there is applicable in my regular job.

Whether or not I have time to integrate everything into it is another story.”

Professional Practice.

At the beginning of each school year, Jonas introduces his classes to Group Juggle, resulting in an “inordinate” number of small, squishy, stuffed penguins soaring around the classroom. He feels this “sets a tone” and “usually gets people laughing.” Processing the exercise revolves around “being overwhelmed,” including the admonition not to “overwhelm your English teacher” with a slew of overdue assignments at the end of a quarter. This routine has become part of his professional persona at Wanskuck; on the first day of school, a new ninth-grade student asked if Jonas was “the guy that threw a penguin at my sister?” The sister, with whom Jonas has stayed in contact three years after graduation, still jokes with him about the incident from her own freshman year. At the time, she was “painfully shy” and “wouldn’t talk.” Over the next three years, Jonas watched her “really come out of her shell. I’m proud that she came through my class, and I’m proud that I hit her with a penguin.”

Jonas struggled with the reality that “every year, people are more and more concerned about a curriculum” which does not necessarily represent the best interests of student learning. When he entered the teaching profession, “the big trend was toward trade books, ‘give them as many trade books as you can.’” This “big push” mirrored what he had been taught in graduate school as research-based “best practices.” Within ten years, “we were given these giant tomes, just like you used to get... these anthologies that you could club a man to death with, and they said, ‘you gotta teach from these.’” When he asked his supervisors to explain the shift, “they were like, ‘the district spent a lot of money on these, you gotta teach from these.’ That’s almost a direct quote.”

Operating from the “huge curriculum I gotta cover” in Wanskuck, Jonas has found limited opportunities for the more kinesthetic challenges he learned through NEISP; “but I can do a lot of the debriefing. I can ask questions about ‘how does this relate to you? How does this make you feel? Where are you on issues like this?’” Diving deeply into processing means I could spend the entire year on two texts; I don't have the entire year for two texts.” This Socratic approach yields “some really cool stuff along the way,” as “it was all metacognition. It was talking about what we thought about what we did, and why what we did worked, didn't work, how we felt about it, why it went wrong, why he's so angry about what happened.” At NEISP, “that was my job. And I'm still doing it. I just did it in my last class. Every prompt I write, I'm still doing that. That's my job as a teacher.”

Jonas' focus on engagement and reciprocal dialogue is particularly salient when applied to writing tasks where students “can't get it wrong. As long as they stay on target, they can't get it wrong.” Removing the pressures of evaluation allows students greater access, and they often find “once they start writing, they *do* know, they *do* have an idea, and often they surprise themselves.” A similar process “did happen a lot in NEISP; they surprised themselves all the time. They think they don't have thoughts, and they do have thoughts, and that is great. That's gratifying. And I know my job's gratifying.”

NEISP equipped Jonas to ask critical questions, of both his students and colleagues, through the program's focus on metacognition. The staff “spent a lot of time thinking about why we're doing what we're doing, and thinking about the thought process itself, ‘why do we do that, why are we doing this, why are other people having us do this?’” As a result, “if there's ever a life skill that's more important than any other, it's [asking] ‘why are other people having me jump

through these hoops?” This plays out in his professional work, where “there's been many moments in my teaching career where somebody says, ‘you gotta do this,’ and I said, ‘do I?’”

He described his critical stance towards authority as “one of the driving forces of my teaching practices,” and a “quality of life thing, which goes back to... ‘why are we educating?’ Is it so that we know, or so that we are? The pursuit of one is wrecking a lot of people over the other.” In the classroom, he challenges his students with “are you paying attention? Why are people having you do this? Why is the district having you read this,” tempered by the understanding that “we shouldn't just sit on a couch and eat chips all day either. That's not the answer. That makes me equally as angry, these kids are on phones playing Fortnite.” He quipped “I wanna run about with a hammer smashing all of those phones,” though he noted the school would make him pay for the damage.

Jonas stated part of his role as a Mentor was “to provoke [students’] interaction with each other, and to provoke thoughtfulness around those interactions.” At a recent ‘open house’ at his school, he “gave [families] my mission statement and the word ‘provoke’ was in it, so I think that's the right word for it... [NEISP] gave me permission to be provocative.”

When asked to elaborate, Jonas said “that it's like, ‘I dare you...’ I think that is what ‘challenge by choice’ is, when you throw down a challenge. It's an invitation to engage.” He parsed this further, as “oftentimes kids, like my daughter, want to engage, but they want permission to [do so]. That's a nudge. I think that there are other students who will miss out if they don't engage. That's when you gotta push.” The nudge is “an invitation,” and the push “a little bit more.” Thus, “provoking” is “a decision to get somebody to engage, whereas provocative, although provoking is provocative, you can be provocative without intention. ‘Provocative’ can be a by-product of something else.” Done well, teachers “wanna evoke and

engage... Get them over the finish line, you wanna get them to come out. So, what's the difference between the word 'educate' and 'provoke' really? You're just trying to get them to come out."

Encouraging student criticism, not cynicism, entails complications and inconsistencies, as teachers are "supposed to be the authority, but [students are] your clients, so how do you be *[sic]* both?" In NEISP, Jonas worked with Crusaders who "started with attitudes like, 'fuck this, fuck you. I don't need you; I don't need this.' And then once they saw us having fun, they wanted to have fun too." As a Mentor, "it was easier 'cause you were playing all the time. As a teacher, it's harder... [but] you can create that dynamic." Mitigating his authoritative role, he strives "in all cases to make it clear that it's not personal, it's just the job." As a result, "when you're exerting your authority, this isn't because 'me, me, me big boss, me swinging my dick,' this is what the job description says I have to do here... This isn't personal." However, "do I take it personally? Yeah, I do. Do I let them know it's personal? No, it's acting."

Jonas declared "allowing kids to fail is a wildly foreign idea to adults." He sees this from both his Wanskuck colleagues and other adult leaders in Boy Scouts:

I am forever telling the adults, 'no, no, let the kids do it,' and they can't get it. They're like, 'but he's doing it wrong.' Exactly, that's right. He's doing it wrong, and he'll still do it wrong. He's 12. Of course he's doing it wrong! Let him do it wrong. That's how he's gonna learn. And then afterwards, have that other kid who's 15 go help him, and he'll learn how to do it. It's... a macro system, they'll all learn from each other, and they'll build and build on it, [until] hopefully those kids are someplace sharing it with their kids.

In his school, he sees this manifest as “God forbid, little Johnny gets an ‘F’ or a ‘60’ on something. Everybody wants him to retake it. I’m supposed to be letting everybody retake everything,” rather than capitalize on the learning opportunities such situations present.

Many of Jonas’ colleagues “have problems playing games, being juvenile. I have no problems with that. *Whatsoever*. Nobody has more fun in the classroom than me.” However, as with NEISP, “it’s not the games; it’s the relationships. It’s not the writing either; none of it happens until you build a culture.” Only “then you can go forward with whatever it is you wanna accomplish. If it’s to have fun, it’s to have fun. If it’s to learn it, it’s to learn. If it’s a cocktail of those, then it’s that.”

In Jonas’ classroom, students are “always allowed to say, ‘no. I’m not comfortable with it... And I think that’s big. The option to say ‘no, I’m good.’” For example, he requires students to read their work aloud; “but it’s ‘challenge by choice...’ Okay, so that they have to do it is not a choice, but they’ve got several opportunities throughout the quarter” to complete the assignment. If students are “not comfortable with the people in their class, they can come do it after school, they can come during advisory, so student choice is a best practice anyway, and I try to build it in... to fill in that challenge by choice, use that particular terminology.”

As a broad precept, Jonas noted “intellectual safety has been something that I’ve taken forward and subverted [*sic*] into the culture of everywhere I’ve gone,” even managing to massage the idea into his Wanskuck’s mission statement. In committee work preparing for an accreditation review, he “stole the idea from NEISP, about being safe, both [physically and] emotionally, and... it got adopted into our school mission statement, and then across the city. [A rival school] stole it from us, so Wanskuck pretty much adopted NEISP policies without really knowing it.” He gleefully confided “it was a little bit subversive. I’m kind of proud of that.”

Risk, however, is not incommensurate with safety; it is a necessary corollary. In NEISP, the message was “if you don't take a risk, you're going nowhere.” He teaches his students something similar:

‘It is a huge risk,’ this is a direct quote, ‘it is a huge risk to step outside in the morning... You're afraid to speak? Yes, absolutely. When you speak, you are being judged. But you know what? When you step out your front door, you're being judged. For your shoes, for your clothes, for your hair. I'm sorry. That's a terrible thing to tell you... Yes, you have anxiety. Me too. I get it, I get it. You're being judged for your family, you're being judged for the color of your house, your skin, your clothes, your teeth, your eyes... It sucks.’ But when people participate, when people read their ‘quick-writes’ in my class... I ask that people clap; and clapping is not that you agree. You may not agree, you may think they're a racist shit head, but ‘you're clapping to recognize that they took a risk,’ also a direct quote. You're clapping that they took a risk because taking a risk sucks... Showing up, writing down, writing anything, putting pen to paper, all of those things. Speaking, writing, acting, all of it, all of it is a risk.

Jonas’ experience as a Boy Scout built his initial affinity for ABL. Now, as a Scoutmaster, he has found ways to integrate what he learned through NEISP into working with his son’s troop. He shared an example of a recent event, wherein, at the last minute, he was tapped to lead “an event that we were unprepared to run,” which was based on “sketchy directions... it was like ‘okay, essentially you have to throw a bunch of logs from point A to point B, and then back from point B back over to A.’” Rather than endorse an opportunity for Scouts to “just start throwing logs and clubbing each other to death like baby seals,” he

structured the experience around the premise of a “Yeti Defense Station,” at which logs needed to be transported for “certification” before they could be used against the imaginary snow monsters. The activity was timed, which “like [at NEISP], the timing is irrelevant, it’s just something to get them to move.” He capitalized on the physical limitations of the space (a large outdoor pavilion), wherein chaotic log-tossing attempts resulted in the “natural consequences” of objects hitting the ceiling, and thus impacting the group’s final ‘score.’ He made explicit provisions for including Scouts with different abilities, such as allowing younger Scouts to throw a shorter distance and instituting a unique role for a Scout who used a wheelchair. Extra points were awarded to patrols who gave a hearty “Yeti roar” at the end. However, the most important connection “where [NEISP] came up” was building in a five-minute block for patrols to strategize before the ‘timed’ portion began. As a result, “the teams that did the best were really the ones that thought it out,” devising efficient ways to capitalize on patrol members’ unique strengths.

Educator Preparation.

Jonas joined NEISP in 1998, and the program ended in 2000. “We’re talking about something that was 22 years ago,” he noted, and time has blurred some lines between what he learned in his educator preparation program and what he learned from NEISP. He described the combined result as a “cocktail” of both theory and practice.

Jonas is skeptical of the efficacy of his teaching practicum experiences, suggesting that in lieu of student-teaching, “everybody should be forced to substitute teach instead. If you can survive that, you can have a [teaching] license.” When asked if he felt similarly about NEISP, he responded, “that would be great,” as being a Mentor

requires you to set aside your ego a little bit. I think in order to play, you have to be willing to be silly... NEISP gave me permission to be silly. It has some theory to back it up, and I saw it work. I saw kids walk away with a little more comfort level, and they sat down and did some work too... It did work. Kids came on a Saturday to write. And I was studying to be an English teacher. I never went anywhere on Saturday to write... You gotta be willing to set aside some of your ego, you've gotta be willing to give kids the locus of control, that's all student management. Everything we talked about is student management... Not being personal about discipline, that's student management; not buying into both aggressive and passive-aggressive behavior is student management. An openness to be surprised by the kids, I think it's characterized by most good teachers. By no means have I mastered any of these; I most certainly have my bad days, and I have to manage my own anxiety and demons and whatever along the way. I'm still a work in progress.

The other area of crossover between pedagogical theory and Jonas' NEISP experience was reflective practice:

I think the 'reflective practitioner' model is not bullshit. A lot of the stuff you learn along the way [in teacher preparation] is bullshit, but that isn't. You've really gonna stop and think about what you're doing, which is really what you're asking the kids to do. Just stop and think and process it. We're teaching them a reflective practitioner model too, on a smaller scale, to think about what you're doing

Conclusion

Jonas views teaching as a profession well suited to his personality—enthusiastic, sarcastic, playful, and driven. His focus on physical movement and emotional engagement, which he believes should be part of more classrooms, has earned him mixed reviews from his Wanskuck colleagues; yet he revels in the complications of his maverick persona.

In describing his teaching, Jonas seemed to thrive in chaos, as he is “not really that fond of structure to begin with.” At the same time, he shared a longing for scaffolding and structure. Similar contradictions arose in his views on authority and choice. He enjoyed flaunting rules, yet repeatedly mentioned the notion of achieving “permission” to do so. While he incorporated elements of CXC into his protocols for student writing, he also used the terms “provoke,” “nudge,” and “push” in describing his pedagogy.

Jonas maintained fond memories of his time as a Mentor:

I really loved doing it... We were just doing a good thing, and I think we were good at it. I just... enjoyed doing that, and the kids mostly responded to it. I think that they knew that it was about them... They were the center of it, and I think that's what school is not about... The kids are in school, but are not the center of school. That's problematic. If you made kids the center instead of everything else, that might solve some problems... Look at what happens with sports. They're the center of attention with sports and they love it... And they'll bleed for it, they'll lose teeth over it, they'll lose sleep over it. And their parents will too... [In NEISP], I think kids were 100% the center of everything, and... that's the thing I took away from it.

He concluded, “I have regrets in life, but I don't remember any of them coming from NEISP.”

Case III: Robin**Introduction.**

At the time of our interviews, Washington Middle School had recently moved to online instruction in response to COVID-19, making Robin's role as Dean of Students "a constant challenge." While he dealt with students deemed "virtually disobedient," his main role was "to focus more on school culture, and to just have kids feel more comfortable. Just trying to find some type of normalcy in this whole process."

When Robin joined CAAP in 2000, the Crusade was subcontracting the program to community-based, nonprofit social service agencies around the state. A sophomore Communications major at the time, he was working part-time for Station One, which coordinated the program in Community Falls. Robin's then-girlfriend (now wife) and a cousin-in-law worked for CAAP and encouraged him to apply. At his initial staff orientation, Robin "fell in love, from that moment on." He recalled his first impression as "wow, this is really a thing... Damn, I wish I'd been through this my whole academic career!"

While his career ambition was to "be the next Spike Lee," Robin's job experience was "always working with at-risk youth," beginning with his first job at a local Boys and Girls Club "working with kids as a kid." He gained experience at summer camps and in mentoring roles before CAAP, where he eventually became a Facilitator. Subsequently he counseled youth in juvenile drug courts and served as a full-time Crusade Advisor. He would go on to earn an M.Ed. in Counseling, where his youth-work experience gave him a distinct advantage over his cohort peers. He then returned to his middle school alma mater, Washington, and "can't imagine" working anywhere else.

While he had no previous ABL experience, the “hands on” aspect of CAAP catered to Robin’s own learning preferences. He described himself as “definitely not your traditional deep-into-the-books” student, and readily recognized the impact of challenging youth to be creative and “think outside the box. That phrase I use a lot, ‘think outside of the box.’” Such creativity is a prerequisite for the staff as well, as “there’s really no written script for it, there’s no, ‘oh, if A-B-C happens, you can do this, this and that.’ No, it’s pretty much ‘roll with the punches.’” He believes that ABL experiences are “amazing,” and wishes they “could be incorporated more into traditional school settings, because I think students will excel a lot more and be more engaged in academics,” because youth “are supposed to learn that way. You start challenging kids and their thought process and utilize their creative skill sets.”

Robin noted a strength of CAAP was that “the same things we’re teaching kids to do, we’re modeling ourselves.” The staff would “help each other grow by working as a unified team.” He stressed that “you can’t say ‘collaboration’ without saying ‘teamwork,’ and that’s something the CAAP program always instilled. You gotta work as a team. I’m a big believer in ‘it takes a village.’” Experience in collaboration later became a “key point” in his graduate school internship, which involved assuring that stakeholders and he “were on the same page,” with each bringing “different ideas, perspectives, talents, backgrounds, expertise.” He collaborated with “science teachers, art teachers, math teachers, whatever,” agreeing that “we are all here for the same purpose, that is to improve young lives.”

Professional Development.

Robin noted that his time as a CAAP Mentor “gave me the tools to move on, navigate through college into the professional world,” including building relationships and rapport with youth. The experience “molded” him “to be a better leader,” a role which he sees entails

empowering his students. In practice, this means not “just standing up there and tell[ing] the students what to do.” He has developed a “very unique style” of working with youth, “kinda like a cocktail” of his work with CAAP Facilitators, other youth-work programs, and his counseling background. He shared “sometimes I sit back and [think] ‘where did I get this from?’ And a lot of this stuff comes from CAAP. A lot.” Robin shared that “growing up in Prudence schools, your parents said early on ‘you have to survive.’ It sucks thinking that way, but it's all about survival, for most of these children out here today.”

Robin and his family lived a few blocks from Washington and remained “very visible” in the community. Unlike some of his colleagues, he was comfortable encountering students and their families “outside of the four walls of the school,” to “let them know that I am a real person from up the street, around the corner. And that's really where I'm from, and I still wanna be a part of the community.” He took pride in being “from the neighborhood,” as his experiences afforded him first-hand insights into students’ struggles and an informed perspective on how best to navigate them. He saw himself as “always available and open, to always have conversations. I have had parent meetings in the middle of the food court at the mall, at the beach, at a bar... Again, I just feel like that's my role.”

Robin positioned himself as a role model who “leads by example,” particularly for his male students of color. At Washington, being

one of the only Black educators, the eyes are always on me. Students are always observing what I'm doing, how I move, how I react. When it's a frustrating situation, if I'm gonna spaz out, respond in a sarcastic tone. Students are testing the limits and the boundaries, to see how I'm gonna react to it... I'm a true role model. But I'm also a person, so people have emotions... If the student does

something. I would check him on that and I would process that with the class, 'look I'm frustrated because I know this kid can be here, but instead he chooses to go down here, so this is why now I have to raise my voice.' Because, again, I think that is a part of good role modeling. It's not just 'there's another adult, just yelling at us.' For me, it's more of 'I'm taking the time to explain to you why I'm frustrated...' Being a remodel is definitely a very big task. It's from the hours of 24-7 to 365.

Professional Practice.

In his role as Dean of Students, Robin spends much of his time at Washington with students who have been removed from their classrooms for disciplinary infractions. He described himself as a "very hyper individual" who can relate to students with ADHD, particularly those whose families forgo medication. While his colleagues "kinda looked at me like I was crazy at first," he has found success in employing physical activity to help students manage their energy. He recalled telling a student "listen, you're very hyper. I understand. I'm not a doctor, but I'm gonna give you a prescription right now." He has found exercises he learned at CAAP help students to focus, along with the pushups, burpees, and sprints he does alongside them. This particular student "was out of his mind. His eyes were buggin'. He was so hyper, but by the end of that, he's like, 'oh, can I go back to class?'" Afterwards, the teacher contacted him to say "I don't know what the hell you did to that kid, but can you do that every single day?" Robin now uses these strategies "on a regular basis... It's become like a lot of my routine. I don't think much about it." His colleagues, however, continue to ask "'what is that? Where'd that come from?' I'm like, 'oh, this is part of the CAAP program.' I definitely give CAAP a lot of credit for teaching those types of skills."

Robin shared that “CAAP gives you that way of thinking... to just sit back, take a deep breath and ‘let's try to figure this out, let's try to put your point of view in check,’ empathize with everyone in a situation.” In his work at Washington, he has found empathy key to helping students manage antagonism from their teachers. He emphasizes perspective-taking, asking students to put themselves “in the teacher’s shoes for a moment... responsible for 30 students in the class, for six different classes.” He acknowledges that there are teachers who make “bad decisions...by overreacting” yet challenge students to consider their own actions: “if you come in, you wanna play the class clown, and then you get mad when a teacher challenges you, and now you wanna be disrespectful? Think about if you just... came to class on time, not disruptive and focused. You'd be a leader.”

For Robin, the “big thing is processing. That was always the thing about CAAP, you gotta process what we do.” While discussion takes many forms, the goal is for youth to understand “this wasn't just a conversation just to have a conversation. It was to reach some type of point, and the goal is to solve whatever issue you have going on,” particularly in conflict resolution. Working with several different CAAP Facilitators allowed him to “take their styles, intertwine it, and just make my own style” of questioning and debriefing. His emphasis on dialogue “always... let[s] students know that it was worth reaching out to me. I let them know ‘I have invested in whatever you have going on. Let's do this. We're gonna work on an end result.’” Compared to perpetuated illusions of adult infallibility, Robin attributes to CAAP his “different way of thinking, prompting questions and just allowing students to come up with answers on their own,” rather than “looking like an old head who just keeps on talking and preaching...[and instead] engaging, asking questions, and leading [students] in a direction to come up with their

own answer, the same answer I was telling you when you criticized me as being an old head.” Through such experiences, he came to “trust the process of processing.”

Robin employs “a lot of the same techniques” he learned at CAAP at Washington to “have the young people figure out the problem and get the answers on their own.” To foster this at Washington, he kept a small wicker couch in his office, where he would “put all my junk on each end and make kids sit pretty much with their knees touching each other.” Depending on the students involved, “I would start the conversation and I’ll walk out and go.” When he returned, “the students are talking and thanking me a lot. I’m like, ‘you realize I didn’t do a damn thing. All I did was provide a space for you...’ That’s really all they need, to have an open dialogue.” As a result, “I’m looked upon as this learned genius! I didn’t do a damn thing, man. All I did was provide a wicker chair.” While some colleagues are incredulous at his unorthodox approach, “CAAP allowed me to have that confidence, and I say this because I was a college student doing this type of work... so that’s why I’m gonna give CAAP that type of credit because that was my first job.”

Professionally, Robin has encountered “some people that have the ‘old school’ mentality. ‘You’re the child; I’m the adult; and I’m not really trying to listen to you speak. You speak when you are spoken to.’” He shared “obviously, CAAP didn’t support that. It was more of, again, trying to empower young people to think outside the box, and that way of thinking is gonna help them progress, whether it’s in school, in life, or to navigate through the system.” At Washington, he continues to “do my own thing the way I do, my own style.” As for his colleagues, “if you’re gonna follow my lead, then let’s go. If not, I’m very much gonna do it ‘cause I am more about the student” than the adult.

Robin repeatedly described himself as an “outside the box thinker,” a trait he seeks to instill in his students. He finds youth “definitely buy into that way of thinking, I think just based on me leading by example and just constantly doing things that display that.” He takes pride that his students have applied their creativity to academic projects, sometimes to the astonishment of their teachers. When these students “had a lot of the freedom to do things... they just went in a totally different direction with it.” They were able to complete assigned tasks and meet the stated criteria, yet still could “look at it from a different angle,” and “didn't just write a paper.” He found “creativity and outside of the box thinking definitely displayed” when his students used visual arts, technology, and performance as vehicles through which to demonstrate academic achievement.

One of Robin's many projects at Washington is a “men's group” focused on personal development through athletics and “initiatives that I actually got from CAAP,” including Stepping Stones. ABL forms the “philosophy behind everything that we do” with the group. Unfortunately, they often meet when students would otherwise be in academic classes, causing some friction with teachers. Additionally, ABL initiatives can take “a very long time,” depending on participants' skills and collaboration and the depth of necessary processing. Thus, implementation is still in its nascent stages.

Educator Preparation.

Robin affirmed that ABL experiences like CAAP would be of significant benefit to beginning educators. When asked why, he stated “hands-down, team building, man. Yes, I think team building is very, very crucial.” He recalled activities from CAAP staff meetings were important because “you have to trust and be comfortable with the people that you're working with.” He believes education “is a stressful job. It can really beat you up, especially being a

teacher for 180 days in Prudence.” Addressing these circumstances requires more than just collegial conversations:

I think it needs solid facilitators and it needs to be more than just ‘oh you're going to do a team building activity.’ This needs to be an approach of how we had it when I first started [at CAAP. The staff] were pretty much the kids doing these games, and then you process them. If you want teachers to understand how it is to be a middle school student, you pretty much put them in that situation. So, if you had a program where we are doing training and team building activities, you're given the same direction, the same expectations or whatever, that a middle school student would have and try to have them fully navigate with that mindset, then you can start to talk about the challenges and the barriers that they're coming across... I think it is an issue with connection. I don't think teachers are fully connecting with these students, and I don't mean just sympathizing and feeling sorry.

Conclusion.

As a Mentor, Robin “taught kids in CAAP a lot of great lessons, and it wasn't always putting them in front of a book.” Although not a classroom teacher, he is still at heart an educator, even creating a shirt which reads

‘I teach what textbooks can't.’ That is something I actually learned from CAAP. I might not be giving you textbook knowledge, but I give you knowledge that's gonna help you get to the next level. That is something that I took away... I can make a lesson out of everything, anything social, because I became a very relatable educator that just *gets it*.

His current position as Dean of Students at Washington suits him well, affording a wide variety of opportunities to “think outside the box” with faculty and students. While he acknowledges the many challenges his school faces, he places high value on connecting with students whose background he shares --- often to the surprise of his colleagues. His focus on experience and creativity took root in CAAP and continues as an important element of his professional practice.

Case IV: Lynn

Introduction.

After completing an undergraduate degree in Environmental Science, Lynn spent several years behind a microscope before being in front of a classroom. She entered graduate school in her late 20’s, and has since taught Biology, Physics, Astronomy, and Anatomy at a variety of charter and public high schools in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. She currently teaches part-time at a scholarship-based Catholic school in Prudence which serves high schoolers from marginalized populations, in addition to her work as a licensed massage therapist.

Lynn described her high school experiences as “boring, and I never got much out of it,” as she was “just talked at all the time or told us ‘read and answer questions at the back of the chapter.’” She found “shortcuts to getting assignments done, like looking the answers up in the glossary, or using those yellow-and-black striped books.” In general, she “was never really taught how to get information out of a text, and how to process it. I was just told to read and know what I read, and that was very frustrating because I did not learn much, and retained even less. It felt like a huge waste of my time.” In college, Lynn favored courses with “real life application, like identifying different soil types or learning how to flag a stand of trees in a forest.” She described one course where the final task was an environmental assessment of a local watershed:

We applied our newly acquired knowledge of looking up soil types, over- and underground water flow, plant and animal identification, and runoff calculation. Our class had made a few visits to the site, and we worked in small teams. If something was going to be built in this location, we were able to say if it was environmentally sound to do so, and if not, we could make suggestions to the builders. I found that type of learning the most interesting and useful.

The experience was “was more than just, ‘here's some information to memorize,’ it was, ‘here's some information. Memorize it, and then here's what you can do with that information. So, the utility of it.” More so, she felt “trusted to make decisions with the information I was given. That was big. I had never been asked to do this at that point of my life. I'd never experienced that before.”

In the laboratory, Lynn quickly “realized that a lot of things that I was taught in high school, I didn't really need or use to be a scientist.” She recalled a teacher who insisted memorizing the parts of a microscope was essential to being a scientist; “oy, was my teacher wrong. Fast-forward to my time as a marine biology assistant... For the two-plus years that I was working on a microscope, I think I used the names of microscope parts twice.” In contrast to her own high school experience, which “did not prepare me for the real world, have confidence in myself, advocate for myself, how to communicate with others,” she decided “I could be a different kind of teacher by using lessons that prepared kids for the 'real world.'”

Lynn quipped she became a CAAP Mentor in 2002 because she “needed some income” while in graduate school. In truth, the appeal of the program was her belief “that there is a better way to teach kids about life, besides demanding that they instinctively know and obey ‘the rules’ and, if they don't, they get punished. After all, that is how animals learn in the wild.”

Lynn described the purpose of CAAP was “to assist students being productive members of a community, because they have skills to communicate and get things done, and become leaders, rather than just accepting what's given to them.” Learning experiences “simulate possible ‘real world’ situations without being ‘in the real world’ practice, and sometimes the best practice is done when you don't have the pressure to get it right.” Crusaders generate their own analogies, which will then “trigger participants to think of different ones, and then it kinda cascades into a brainstorm of real-life scenarios in which skills can be used.” Thus, they were “learning to take risks and learning how to deal with stressful situations in a non-threatening, non-stressful way of play where it doesn't really ‘count’ for any life-altering negative-ness if you do it wrong.”

With her fellow Mentors, Lynn discovered a “bond that I don't think I had ever found with other situations as an adult.” She felt they were “able to see beyond just the person that they're working with, just doing a job.” Instead, she was “seen as a person that could, did contribute value.” Key here was setting explicit expectations for interactions; “rather than, ‘hey, you did this wrong,’ or, ‘this is the way you do it, and this is the only way to do it,’ feedback was always structured in a way of, ‘here's something positive, here's something you could have done differently, and here's how to be more successful next time.’”

Lynn noted that this culture “didn't happen by accident,” but was an outgrowth of the overall ethos and processes of the program, wherein “we did our job in a way that we wanted the kids to do their job.” Before a session began, the staff “were in the roles of kids to learn how the activities would be performed from the kids’ perspective. Then the trainer... processed the activity as they would process with the kids in front of them.” As “all the activities are designed to build trust and confidence in ourselves and others, and to instill... it might be a strong word,

but *desire* to include others... Everybody had the chance to be a part of the group.” The time spent understanding and processing ABL activities as a staff team was “key to not only the success of the program, but the success of bonding as a group, because we got a very similar experience” to Crusaders. Thus, Mentors were “learning the games and activities and processing by doing the activities and the processing as participants,” providing both experience and empathy before leading such experiences themselves.

According to Lynn, effective educators believe “students are multi-level, multi-faceted. They're more than empty vessels.” Based on this understanding, a Mentor’s role in Crusaders’ education is “setting them up for success through the conversations,” leading them to “be more thoughtful members of whatever community they're involved in.” While Mentor questioning is structured, it is not predetermined, “and it’s not a ‘gotcha,’” as daily themes are made explicit. Unlike disingenuous questioning towards a predetermined conclusion, she quipped “Surprise! [Crusaders are] trusted with that information right from the beginning!” Through modeling, Mentors provide Crusaders “a blueprint of sorts” for leadership. By the end of a session, Crusaders would have primary control of their CAAP experience, “and that can be very powerful to both the students leading the activities and the students participating in the activities. Even the processing afterwards is almost always turned over to the participants, rather than just the adults.”

As a result of participating in CAAP, Lynn saw Crusaders move from “‘yeah, I’m here to play some games,’ to being thoughtful people capable of channeling their feelings and emotions into thoughtful actions.” While relationships started off awkward, “we learned about each other's personalities, if they were good leaders naturally or if they needed to be encouraged.” As a

result, “we became more familiar as the program went on, meaning family. Like maybe even a big brother, big sister fondness,” even when things became competitive:

And I don't mean like ‘win or lose,’ I just mean there's a competitive aspect to it, in challenging each individual and how they work together. Sometimes that could lead to some frustrations or insecurities, and then anxieties of, ‘we have to finish, accomplish the goal. We have to win.’ And sometimes they didn't ‘win,’ as in accomplish the goal that was set out, and then we always took the time afterwards to process what happened, and ‘how did you get to the place that you got to at the end?’ Through those guiding questions, students were challenged to think beyond just the activity. That's kind of what big sisters do, they guide little sisters by sharing experiences as an older sibling or somebody wiser and sharing experiences with younger minds.

For Lynn, the most challenging part of facilitating ABL challenges was “to not just tell [Crusaders] what to do. The point is to try to guide them by thinking at least one step ahead of them. What's their next step, what are you gonna do next?” This process models how Crusaders can “think about what are their next steps in life, and what are their resources, who can they rely on in a situation” outside the low-stakes environment of CAAP. Thus, challenges became a form of rehearsal, as “it's very important to practice skills when you're not under pressure.” Through such “practice with a purpose,” Lynn stated lessons are “more likely to stick.” She hopes this will “translate into knowing how to do that when they're in a serious situation, rather than trying to figure it out when there's some serious consequences.”

Personal Development.

Lynn described the Prudence suburb where she was raised as “a town that was mostly white and fairly well-off financially. Most households had a mom and a dad, and strong ties to the community, so I had never really interacted with any other populations before” her time with CAAP. Working with Crusaders opened her eyes to “challenges much, much greater than what I grew up with. And I got to see that those challenges can be overcome but can also affect what the student brings to a program on any day, in a positive or a negative way.” She became “a believer” in providing youth “more tools to help deal with the absence of opportunities” found in more affluent communities.

Lynn “quickly came to realize that a lot of what was important to this population [of Crusaders] was respect, respecting each other, being shown respect. That just seemed to be a common desire from all the participants that I worked with in CAAP.” She saw respect as “currency,” as “Mentors got to show respect to students that may not have it on a regular basis in their own schools or maybe their community, or even sometimes maybe their family,” even though “so many of the participants were very family-oriented. Their family was usually top priority in any conversation.” If an adult demonstrated that “you respect who they are and why they are the way they are, then you can reach them, you can teach them, you can mold them. They'll listen to you, and they'll give the respect back,” thus serving the needs of both Crusaders and Mentors.

Lynn’s lack of self-confidence was a significant challenge growing up, and impeded her success in the early stages of her career:

I think if I were taught how to advocate for myself and think about what I wanted and how to ask for it, I probably would have discovered, a lot earlier in my life,

the confidence to become a research scientist. The route that I took was winding all over the place... So, my thought process was 'I'll just take whatever job I could get in science.' And then that was gonna be my life. Ugh, that was depressing.

In describing her first session as a CAAP Mentor, Lynn found it “emotional” and “eye-opening” to learn “that there were techniques to communicate effectively.” In her family, “a child was always seen and not heard. It didn't matter what I thought, didn't matter that I had ideas and beliefs, and I was rarely asked my opinion.” As a result, she was surprised to learn the degree to which young adolescents, when given the proper scaffolding, could express complex ideas. Lynn found her communication skills, such as speaking before a large group or leading processing sessions, improved during her time as a Mentor. Prior to CAAP, she “was never really taught how to have a conversation with somebody, to process things and process information.” Eventually, she “learned that I could do it by seeing it being done, by it being modeled.” Mirroring interactions with her CAAP colleagues, she built skills in “how to have one-on-one conversations with students in a way that is mutually respectful, rather than something like, ‘hey, you did something wrong.’ It can be a conversation of like, ‘hey, what happened here?’” This approach would lead Crusaders, and later her high school students, to “come to the realization on their own. They're more likely to own it, whatever it is, when they do that.”

When asked explicitly what she gained from CAAP, Lynn stated she “learned how to set goals, achievable goals, and to follow through [on them]. How it's okay to try something out and possibly fail, and for that to be okay.” Perhaps most importantly, she “learned how to be part of a group of people, whereas before, I preferred to be alone, just because that's easier.”

Professional Development.

Lynn stated that her teaching philosophy “revolves around giving students tools that can be used in many situations... not just information,” as “applying the skills to other situations is the most important” outcome of instruction. She noted that, in processing sessions, CAAP Mentors “often ask the question, ‘well, how does this relate to something outside of the situation?’” This added a “more useful component to just the lesson of the day.” Such explicit connections were modeled in her CAAP staff development, where “all my supervisors and my trainers in the program got me thinking about, through the processing, ‘how would you use this in your classroom? How would you use this if you were working with a different group of kids?’” Transfer was thus woven into the scaffolding of the program for both youth and staff. As a novice educator, she “practiced in a situation that was fun and safe, and that practice helped me become better in scenarios where I was teaching and also learning how to get information out of students through purposeful questioning.”

According to Lynn, “because of CAAP... I think it's just really important to know why students do what they do. I've learned to talk to a student about what's going on in a way that they feel respected and safe.” Being a Mentor also “helped me become a more compassionate teacher.” She began to recognize that “everybody comes to the table with challenges” which necessarily impact their academics. As a result, rather than “simply assume a student doesn't wanna do his homework,” she questions if “there might be something going on at home, there might be something going on in his head or her head, or he doesn't understand how to do the homework, but doesn't wanna ask.” At CAAP, “we take a step back and look at the whole picture, the whole person, the whole group, the whole activity, the whole goal, and figure out why things are what they are, and how things worked out, rather than just coming to

assumptions.” She contrasted this with “jumping to the conclusion that [students are] irresponsible or if they're acting up in class, maybe there's a reason rather than ‘they're just a jerk.’” When she “hear[s] a teacher say, ‘well, they didn't do that work for me,’ [I ask] ‘did you find out why?’”

Lynn drew this view from “giving students the freedom to have ownership over their actions, and if students own their actions, they own their consequences, and are more likely to have a group of people working together.” She contrasted this with schools which rely on “a lone authority, scary figure” of a teacher or administrator. However, she recognized the reality that “schools are often overcrowded. There are hundreds of people coming and going. Every hour, hour and a half, people are going to a different place, and they have to be there on time and there's some places that students are not supervised all the time and things can get a little crazy.” To a limited degree, she felt this legitimizes a pragmatic top-down approach to management, as this is “the most safe way... It's not necessarily the best, the only way to do it, but you only have a certain amount of time in the day, in the year.”

Lynn stated successful CAAP Mentors “believe that kids are people too.” As a teacher, this translated to the belief that youth “have the capacity to learn more than just definitions at the back of the book. They have the capacity to learn compassion and communication, to be leaders and to problem-solve on their own with a little bit of guidance.” Her students “are not just empty vessels, they are whole human beings with thoughts and feelings and emotions that can get in the way or can enhance learning.” She saw herself as “a very successful teacher because I went through [CAAP]. I see my students as whole beings.”

In education, Lynn endorsed both “silly for the sake of being silly,” and play “that can lead to breaking down barriers [and] cutting down on nervousness. If everybody can get silly,

then there's usually less anxiety in a group.” Unlike the businesslike nature of traditional schools, “no matter what circumstance or language or background you have, a smile is a smile, and a laugh as a laugh, and it's something you have in common.” This is particularly important in the first days of a school year, when students “don't know everybody else, and they're in a place that they may be not familiar with, so there's a lot of anxiety and trepidation.” A teacher’s priority is thus to make students “feel welcome” and “become interested, rather than completely shut down.” This is supported by “silly games” which “introduce them to other people,” and “getting people to smile and shifting that anxiety in the group from ‘not knowing’ or even feeling not completely safe, to ‘this place can be fun. Everybody's here to have fun.’” From this foundation, both CAAP and successful classrooms build “towards more and more trusting activities, more activities that build confidence, activities that help build inquiry skills and leadership skills.”

As a CAAP Mentor, Lynn was “taught how to process activities, asking questions to get the kids to think about the activity.” These conversations revolved around a group’s goal, “whether they accomplished it or not, and what that meant, and then how could that be applied to a whole different scenario with a similar thought process,” simultaneously teaching her “how to communicate with young people without being threatening or bossy. I think students are more willing to learn or try things with a teacher when there's mutual respect and mutual understanding that it's a safe place to make mistakes.”

Lynn is skeptical of “schools that are more traditional, 'cause they're not modeled after ‘real life.’ They might have been modeled off real life when the Industrial Revolution was the mainstream.” To her, students in traditional classrooms are “seen as empty vessels to pour knowledge into, and then spit it back out.” Thus, like herself, “too often, kids hate school.” She believes “rote learning and memorizing are not enough,” as most contemporary workers “don't

work towards getting tested, that's not your job.” Instead, “your job is to communicate with people, to problem-solve, to get things done, to be part of a team, and those things aren't often taught within a school structure.” An explicit focus on these skills would lead to “being a well-rounded human being by the time you graduate from high school,” which she believes “is not the norm, and that really is a shame, because I think our society could be a lot more productive and have more compassion and work together to get things done if we were taught at the young age how to do these things.”

Professional Practice.

In teaching, Lynn said she will “always start a year with games, such as the games that we used in ABL, even some of the simpler games... There's so much that I can get by observing” these activities. By using ABL challenges as diagnostic tools, she built an understanding of “the dynamics of the class themselves. Do they cooperate already? Do they know each other's names, do they help each other out?” Personalities began to surface, giving her “an idea of who's gonna be the leaders, are there gonna be any bullies in the group, are there any jokers or clowns, or if there's kids that are just gonna start completely shutting down when you ask them to do something.” Her instructional planning is thus based on questioning “what do I have in front of me? What do I have to work with? What needs to be strengthened? And how can I use what's already there, so that we all work as a functioning community where everybody cooperates and knows how to work together?”

Lynn takes pride in bringing her ABL experience into the science classroom, with a focus on “group problem solving” and “taking risks.” In her practice, she encourages students to “use their skills as artists and dreamers” to explore scientific principles through play. For example, after facilitating Stepping Stones in a Biology class, she “asked each student to take on the role

of a component of a cell.” Rather than crossing imaginary peanut butter, “we pretended that the classroom was a cell and that the pieces of paper were components of amino acids and proteins and DNA.” Students created a sort of performance, incorporating writing, drawing, and movement, and from this followed discussion, a performance for another classroom, and a “traditional science test,” to outstanding results. Five years later, she encountered a student’s mother, who shared that “her daughter wasn’t always big into science, but she enjoyed my classroom and she still to this day knows what an endoplasmic reticulum does.”

Lynn shared “the students that I’m currently working with are not encouraged to be leaders of their own learning and leaders of their own group.” Students feel intense pressure “to do it ‘right,’ they didn’t wanna make a mistake, they didn’t want to get less than an A.” Thus, they are easily overwhelmed by loosely structured tasks, becoming so “nervous” that “a lot of them did nothing for a little while, and it was hard for them to catch up.” Thinking back on these frustrations, she decided she would “have to fall back on my CAAP and ABL training in scaffolding.” Here, she reflected that the solution would be to provide students with roles in their groups:

I did say ‘you’re the captain of the team,’ but I could have explained what that meant, and I didn’t. I could have had somebody be like a note-taker, question-asker, someone be a reporter out... I did on some level, but I didn’t structure it, and I just assumed that these kids could fall into those roles. So, relating it to CAAP, the [Crusaders] were 12, 13, 14, and by the end of their scaffolded activity program, those students had the skills to take ‘here’s a set of directions. Here’s an activity, go do it the way you think it should be done.’ Versus these students, who are 11th graders. What is that? Sixteen, seventeen years old? I just assumed they

had that capability of doing something like that without scaffolding it. It was kind of a disaster.

Lynn's inclusion of ABL practices in her teaching has been a double-edged sword. She found that, while schools may endorse the level of engagement such work fosters, they are often unprepared for "messy" exploratory learning. At a job interview, she once used Pipe Dreams, which involves arranging cardboard tubes to guide the roll of a marble, as a demonstration lesson illustrating Newton's third law of motion. The assessment came in students' ability to explain the relationship between scientific theory and the challenge. The principal was "so enthralled by my lesson, she hired me on the spot."

However, Lynn soon discovered "a disconnect between the principal and the department head," who told her "here's how you teach this class. You give the students a lecture with slides, you give them examples at the back of the book for homework. The next day, you read and show them how to solve the problems," and begin the cycle again. She "could see the students were used to being lectured, but they were bored, and I was bored. If I was bored, they must have been really bored, so I started using cooperative learning." She decreased the volume of homework, instead directing students to "solve the problem, and then they had to teach it to another person in the class, and then they had to write out the problem or use examples on large sheets of paper around the room." Her approach to "cooperative learning by doing... wasn't encouraged by the other teachers, but it was encouraged by the principal and the vice principal, so I was very conflicted." When she was not rehired at the end of the year, she asked her department head where she had gone wrong; they replied "well, you do too much of that interactive learning stuff, and we don't want that on this team." She found this "devastating," but "didn't even try to fight for the job after that. I just left."

Educator Preparation.

In Lynn's educator preparation program, "one of the first things we learned was 'just because it was taught doesn't mean it was learned.'" The alternative was an "active learning" approach her professors consistently endorsed. She gave the example of "teaching how to make observations in science using a simple cube with codes on it. 'How do you break the codes?' And then relating that to how scientists make observations and conclusions." While "it wasn't exactly 'play,' but it wasn't a lecture either." Overall, Lynn was satisfied with her educator preparation program, as it "really focused on the different learning styles. Lessons that had components for all learners were very important, and those are similar aspects of the ABL program. Everybody can participate in some way and get something out of it."

In theory, Lynn's program endorsed the notion "that you don't necessarily have to have a written traditional test in order to assess one's learning," emphasizing assessments through which students "can come up with a reason behind the activity on their own or through some scaffolding." This "graduated learning" approach can become "a really great assessment if [students] can figure out why they're doing something, and then if they can transfer that knowledge to a 'what if' scenario." However, she found "the reality is, there's a lot of pressure on standardized testing and high-stakes testing and using data to measure growth. We were taught how to interact and prepare students for those kinds of parts of school. ABL didn't have those components."

Lynn proposed that experience in ABL should be "required" for teacher candidates, because

a lot of people feel that just because they've survived the classroom, that they could be good teachers. If they do become teachers, they fall back on what is

easiest and what their teachers did, which is often lecture and telling, then [students'] spitting back the information. I don't think that makes a good teacher, not for all [students]. I think a good teacher is well-rounded and brings lots of different learning styles and cooperation and questioning, getting kids to think about *why* rather than just the *what*.

Conclusion.

Lynn was candid in describing how her upbringing resulted in skill and attitudinal gaps that her CAAP work helped ameliorate. Being a Mentor built her confidence, improved her communication skills, and demonstrated ways to “scaffold” learning beyond direct transmission. It taught her ways to work with youth much different than herself and led her to pursue urban teaching positions. The ways in which staff members were trained before the program began, and how they interacted throughout, served as models of caring relationships which directly paralleled the goals of the program for youth. CAAP became a space to “rehearse” taking risks and building relationships in a low-stakes environment, and Lynn’s success therein helped govern her teaching practice.

Lynn’s pedagogy emphasizes collaboration, compassion, and joy while foregrounding students’ responsibility for their own learning. In practice, she has employed modified versions of ABL challenges as means towards purposeful, “hands-on” learning; however, her aversion to traditional teaching has made navigating school hierarchies challenging. She concluded our interviews by saying teachers default to two dimensions, forwards and sideways. I think ABL, or the practices within ABL, bring it to a different dimension. Meaning students are not just machines in front of you, or numbers, or bodies in desks in front of you, they’re human beings that have problems and strengths and struggles all on their own.

Case V: Chris**Introduction.**

Chris began his education career as an AmeriCorps volunteer with Civilization High School ('The Civ') in Prudence in 2007. Subsequently, he earned an M.Ed. in Curriculum & Instruction, and a M.A. in Counseling. At the time of our interviews, he was the Math Department Chair at Chafee High School, one of Prudence's most successful charters, and coaching women's soccer at a local private college.

As an undergraduate, Chris majored in Sports Management, and saw education through the lens of a coach. While that was his intended career path, "the more I worked with youth in afterschool programs, the more I just wanted to work with youth in any capacity." When asked what distinction he saw between teaching and coaching, he responded:

Not much. It is literally the content. The way I teach now is very team-based, it's problem solving, it's being able to look at a situation and find a solution. That's essentially what you do on any soccer field or basketball court. You have to adjust on the fly. You gotta know what questions to ask, you have to know how to use your teammates, and that's what I try to do in the classroom.

Without teaching certification from his undergraduate program, Chris found limited employment opportunities in education. He saw AmeriCorps as a chance to "explore, 'okay, it doesn't just have to be sports, you can tie it in, you can use that to relate to kids.'"

Chris came to CAAP in 2008, looking to "branch out" and supplement his meager AmeriCorps stipend. Becoming a Mentor "sounded awesome. It sounded like not just an educational program, but one that was active and engaged." The opportunity to work at CAAP "was like, 'this almost bridges the gap, this is academics, kind of, but it's play.'" It was "more of

the leadership from sports and the active nature of them, with the skill-building of academics, so it ended up just being perfect timing.”

CAAP was “very much unlike traditional approaches” to education with which Chris was familiar. Unlike the “buzzwords” he encountered in schools, CAAP ensured Crusaders “actually are the active participants.” Rather than simply assessing “are you right or wrong, do you know it or not, based on if you can tell me and show me,” Mentors “take the time to get to know that Crusader, to know if they're actually understanding what's happening, actually learning and gaining from the program. They're not just a number, they're not just the letter grade.” He has come to believe “CAAP does wonderful things” for both Crusaders and staff.

Chris declared the title of Mentor to be “a wonderful description” of the job. In working with CAAP staff, Crusaders build a “connection with someone who looks like them, who has been successful, maybe has gone through their struggles.” Mentors have the credibility to say “I know. I went to this school, I came here. But guess what? I made it to college, and I loved it. Now I'm here to help you see your true potential.” Such messages from a staff of young adults were “way more impactful than a room full of much older adults who are just saying, ‘yes, you need to know this.’” Crusaders understood Mentors were “not just making stories up to pretend to connect. They know the Mentors mean it.” As such, a successful Mentor “gives [Crusaders] guidance, whether it's on the specific activity or just in life, a small nugget of life experience. I think that's the biggest thing that they can give to the kids.”

Chris summed up the beliefs of successful Mentors as “all kids are worth it. Kids are kids and they all have the ability to learn to be better.” Despite the high cognitive demands of CAAP, outstanding Mentors understand that some of Crusaders’ “behaviors and ways of processing are just normal for their developmental ability, and that’s okay.” Weaker Mentors would “skim the

surface,” and equivocate when Crusaders “don't learn it right away” with ““they don't get it.’ That they're detrimental to the group, and it's not gonna change.” Instead, effective Mentors find ways to “help [Crusaders] find ways to adjust their behaviors. That’s too quick of an assumption, that if they don't fix right away, it's not gonna happen.”

Midway through his third session of CAAP, Chris found himself thrust into the role of Facilitator due to an unexpected vacancy. This new role “pushed me out of my comfort zone, in a really rewarding way,” though the sudden change “definitely set me up on a different path.” He oversaw Mentors who struggled with the flexibility required of the job, who “just wanna go by the book; ‘tell me what to do, how to do it, how to say it,’ regardless of the fact that “your group is not the same as the group in the classroom next door to you.” As a new Facilitator, negotiating the “individual needs of the Mentors, to be able to trickle down to the kids, was extremely difficult. It was almost like differentiating on the fly all day, every day, for the Mentors.”

Personal Development.

Chris agreed “100%” that CAAP helped him develop the same skills he taught to Crusaders, as “we had to go through the same thing with our fellow Mentors.” This included staff training and meetings where “it was obvious that the intent was to get us working better as a team, to then help the kids work better as a team.” For a self-described “very ‘type A’ Sagittarius,” this process was “a big challenge. We had a lot of differing personalities and opinions, just amongst the eight of us, so we were trying to help the youth navigate through those issues in their own teams.” At the same time, “entering the professional workforce... we were going through exactly what the kids were going through, and we needed to navigate those conversations ourselves as young adults, recent graduates of college.” In this regard, he saw CAAP as “a transition into the real world for us. It was, ‘okay. We're figuring out what we

wanna do. We think we're adults, we know it all, now we're out of school,' but like, 'oh crap, maybe I got a long way to go.'”

In his own school experience, Chris found the type of rich dialogue he built with Crusaders “did not happen, unless you had a specific relationship with that teacher,” and was thus “not necessarily embedded in the culture or the curriculum of many schools.” He singled out an English teacher who “made a huge difference for me personally... who really focused on trying to build my confidence in one of my worst subjects.” Chris repeatedly enrolled in this teacher’s courses “because I felt confident with her, and that's what got me to pass English.” He believed, regardless of ability, “that confidence can really make or break how successful a student is.”

CAAP helped Chris in “being able to say ‘no’. That was something I always struggled with,” especially during his time as a Program Coordinator. He “always wanted to take care of everyone, and sometimes taking care of someone is being firm, in showing more ‘tough love’ than just ‘love.’” This came with a price, as “it did cause a lot of stress, and did cause some rifts in personal relationships that had a crossover with professional relationships.” By moderating his impulse to unequivocally care for others, even at his own expense, he “was able to define better boundaries in my personal life.”

Professional Development.

Chris’s perspective is unique, in that he has held four different positions in CAAP --- Mentor, Facilitator, Program Coordinator, and Coach --- providing him four “totally different perspectives on working with youth and adults. That has completely changed a lot of assumptions I had before I took on more leadership roles here at [Chafee].” He stated that “being

a Mentor really shaped [my] working with the kids,” and that he “really gained a lot of perspective on meeting kids where they're at.”

Chris identified as white, and described his biggest challenge, and greatest accomplishment, as a Mentor was to establish “common ground” with and among diverse Crusaders, “all of these kids with different personalities, some introverts, some extroverts, some sixth, some seventh, some eighth graders, boys and girls from different parts of the state.” For quieter students, he would

help them see that does not mean you were not a leader, that does not mean that you do not add value to this team, to this activity. And conversely, to those who were extroverted, always had something to say, always participating, sometimes that does not mean you are helping this team.

Rather than “pointing fingers,” he addressed these concerns “through conversation... in a way where they felt empowered and encouraged.

For Chris, Mentors’ efficacy was measured by their ability to thematically connect CAAP endeavors with “real life.” Structurally, the daily sequence began with introducing “keywords that kids are familiar with, but that they maybe have not had a chance to really go into depth on what those mean,” such as ‘trust,’ ‘communication,’ or ‘support.’ Outlining these themes explicitly helped Mentors “engage in conversations, [like] ‘why are we focusing on this? Why is this important here today?’” The day’s activities were opportunities to “practice” addressing important topics in a low-stakes environment. Through processing, Mentors would “take it from just that little nutshell experience... then start building connections with the real-world applicability.” This helped Crusaders to “start digging deeper and get underneath that surface. So not just ‘what is trust,’ but ‘why is it important? Who can you trust? How can you build trust?’”

Daily themes were woven throughout experiences, and “reflection activities allow for [Crusaders] not just to dig deeper into the definition, but into examples and practices... to have ideas as they grow out of our program and into high school and college and the real world.” This allowed Crusaders to “shake up initial definitions” and “widen the scope” of their understandings of CAAP themes, moving beyond “tunnel vision on what some of those themes mean.”

Becoming a Facilitator entailed a change in how Chris “address[ed] the needs of the kids. ‘Okay, so if I have a group who is struggling with XYZ, how can I adjust to meet their needs? ...Okay, what can I implement to meet those needs?’” He came to see the Mentors in developmental terms, as new staff “have no idea, no context of what we're talking about, until they see it. They come in with this training, ‘this sounds fun,’ like ‘we do these games, and then we talk about it.’ But then, once they see a day, they're like, ‘whoa.’” This was based on “a misunderstanding, when new Mentors come on, of how much ‘surface level’ learning there is in our program.” Mentors “who truly invest themselves in the program eventually see that it is not surface level learning at all.” Staff who invest in processing “truly understand how deep the work that we do is.”

Chris described himself as meticulous, in part because he “was raised very strict in a lot of ways, when it came to academics and making commitments. I tend to micromanage.” Through CAAP, he “learned the hard way, I'm still working on it, the more you micromanage, you're not actually accomplishing more. So, the more you think you're hanging onto the reins nice and tight, that doesn't actually mean that you're getting more quality out of the situation.” He struggled with “being open to adapting on the fly, in letting things happen, see how it goes... in terms of the way the conversations go, the way activities end up flowing.” He felt that, in having a plan, he would “need to meet every single piece of that plan. I was one of those.” At CAAP, he

felt “empowered” to “let go a little bit, and let things flow a little bit more, and let the kids take charge.”

As a Facilitator, Chris helped his Mentors understand that verbal participation in processing was not the sole measure of engagement or understanding, especially for bilingual Crusaders. He believes encouraging youth to journal in their native language and partner with a more fluent bilingual speaker for discussions are “step[s] in the right direction” in balancing the verbal “bias” of the program. Chris saw Crusaders’ not verbally sharing did not mean a lack of engagement. He would ask Mentors “how are [bilingual Crusaders] showing you that they are actively engaged in that conversation?” He encouraged Mentors to translate if they could speak Spanish, and closely study Crusaders’ body language to gauge engagement. Ultimately, “if they’re not sharing, that either means we’re not doing our job and including them in a way they feel comfortable, or that’s the way that they feel most comfortable in participating.” He believed “we all have power; we don’t always have a voice. it’s all about trying to make sure everybody feels that they have power, at least in our setting.”

Being the math department chair at Chaffee, Chris now addresses structural changes with his building administrators. At the time of our interview, he was advocating for more co-teaching. Whether or not he was successful, “I at least have to do what’s in the best interest of the kids and pitch it as the department head. It’s my role to ensure that the kids’ needs are met.” He shared that “building up from Mentor to Facilitator and then Coordinator really built that confidence, to feel a different kind of empowerment --- not just empowerment working with the kids but making decisions that impact kids.” These roles “definitely helped me in working with the adults... All of those different perspectives have played a role in me getting to this point and feeling much more confident in it.”

Professional Practice.

Chris described his teaching as “ever-changing, ever-changing.” After his time at The Civ, “I actually never thought I'd go back to the classroom.” He began “applying to a lot of dean positions, because I love logistics and thinking big picture and overseeing,” He was not hired in that role at Chafee but was offered a Geometry position instead. While he initially thought “no, I don't wanna get back into the classroom, not my thing,” he came to realize “it does not matter how I work with these kids, or in what capacity I work with these kids; I wanna work with these kids.” His priorities were “problem-solving, critical thinking... working in teams with roles, just like we do in CAAP, asking for help, breaking things down.” His work supported “kids who don't typically feel strong or confident in math. They finally experienced that because I didn't just focus on ‘are you good at math? Yes or no. Can you do this math?’” Instead, he asked “can you be a resilient learner? Can you find this strength, can you find an area of improvement you need to focus on?”

Chris stated “CAAP really helped me think outside of the box, on the transferable skills as the most important... Okay, maybe I'm using geometry as a vessel, but my goal is to make [it] way more broad than the Pythagorean theorem.” CAAP was “about how you find ways to make sure everyone feels successful, and in math that's tough. So how can I work around the content?” As “some kids barely ever feel successful, [asking] ‘how can I ensure that, at least in my class, they feel successful at least once’ has been pretty much my main priority in the past two years.” A focus on skills increases student confidence, and decreases the need for memorization,

because in the real world, if a boss asks you to complete a project, maybe you've never done it before. There's nothing wrong with that but figure it out. Ask someone, look it up, try it on for size, give it a go. Those are the qualities that

matter in the real world, not whether or not you remembered the formula, but can you identify the right formula and apply it? Those are the skills that I will never, never, never shy away from... If they learn those, I will feel better about their future, knowing that I'm providing not just content education, but life education.

In his classroom, breaking down barriers and taking risks is “what I tell my kids to do all the time.” He actively works against students’ “mental barriers,” particularly the belief that “if you don't get it right away, ‘oh, I'm bad at math, I can't do math, I can't do this,’ or ‘I don't get this, I can't do it.’” He instead re-focuses students’ attention onto effort, even when it does not correlate with assessments, as “you will always gain something by at least trying. And I think that's essentially what we encourage in CAAP, you have to push forward to find a solution, or to be as successful as possible. You're never going to be successful if you don't try.”

Chris anticipated students would “be panicking and mad at me” when they saw the final exam for his course, “which is gonna have zero math in it.” Instead, “it's going to be questions about the skills, like ‘what's the best thing to do if you didn't finish an assignment on time, that you worked hard on, should you just not turn it in?’” He hoped this will provide “some good feedback in terms of the skills that they've learned in geometry as opposed to the math,” a stance “that was a huge game changer for me,” and to which he credits his students’ gains on end-of-year assessments --- the highest in the school.

When asked about CAAP activities he has utilized in his classroom, Chris rattled off a list including low-prop activities he can “mix up” and make “math related,” and others that stress student collaboration. Due to his focus on teamwork, he “strategically picked these activities where [students] thought they were just having a fun game... but it was just helping them continue to build those relationships and break down barriers, to feel more comfortable with each

other.” In his ‘advisory’ class, where “they're gonna have the deep conversations to connect with each other,” he has employed ABL challenges to break down physical boundaries “so those emotional, mental, academic and social barriers don't seem so strong.” As in CAAP, processing these experiences has helped Chris’ students explore interpersonal relationships (particularly “asking for help, which is a huge one, no matter what classroom you're in”) and strategic decision-making.

While Chris “would love to” incorporate more ABL activities directly into his math classroom, he “can't just kinda throw it all out the window and do all of these other things.” He tried to help students understand that mandated assessments represent “what some people, some higher-ups in society, think makes someone successful. So, we gotta prepare you for this test, even though we know, especially as educators, that those tests don't define how successful you are as a human being.” Ultimately, “in these situations, I gotta say, ‘screw it,’ throw the fun stuff out the window, and we just gotta do what we gotta do”

However, Chris stated “all of the theory behind ABL, I pretty much try to include it as much as possible. In some ways it can't be done, but in a lot of ways it really, really can.” A focus on metacognitive processing “can break down activities and make sure [students] don't think, ‘oh, it's just a math worksheet.’” Instead, he asks his students to analyze

‘why did I give you this extremely challenging word problem, and just one of them, as opposed to 20 regular problems, which I know some prefer, but why am I doing this?’ Now you're actually practicing, annotating, asking questions, drawing your own diagram to make your own resource. These are all skills that you just need, no matter what the context is, and that's just like in CAAP. Like, ‘okay, we just do this activity,’ but it's not just a game. ‘What are all of these

things that we incorporated, that you didn't even realize you were doing?' It's the same thing in the classroom. Never say never. Don't give up. Find it, figure it out. You do more than you actually think you do. You're more successful than you actually think you are.

Conclusion.

As our interviews ended, Chris shared his belief that “more young teachers should have had experiences like [CAAP], because there is so much in terms of behavior management that you learn in meeting kids' needs and meeting them where they're at.” An experience like CAAP “gives you a chance to explore your own strengths and being able to do that and try out different things and really gain experience.”

CAAP proved to be a formative experience for Chris in both pedagogical theory and practice. Empathy, motivation, and role modeling guided practice rooted in collaboration, discussion, and “real world” application. Knowing, feeling, and doing were all central to his work with youth.

At Chafee, Chris's unsuccessful application for dean proved a “blessing in disguise.” By remaining in the classroom, he “was able to really get in it with the kids,” and, a year and a half later, became the math department head. His roles at CAAP helped in “taking experience from the ground level and pulling it into my next role up, and saying, ‘okay, now I'm in this leadership position. However, I've been in your shoes....’ not just coming in as a dean and saying, ‘I know what's best.’” In sum, his leadership roles have made him “more confident in what I'm doing and have the ability to change when it's not working.... That's something I used to struggle with, saying ‘no’ and always wanting to please everyone.” However, “at the end of the day, sometimes

you have to say, ‘No, we can't, this can't be done...’ So that skill, I believe, is helping me become more successful in my leadership roles, hopefully, moving forward.

Case VI: Aaron

Introduction.

After finishing undergraduate studies in his native Arkansas in 2009, Aaron began his “journey” into education in Rhode Island with AmeriCorps-funded City Year. He spent two years working with middle schoolers, first at a public school in downtown Prudence, then at a nearby public charter, providing classroom support, tutoring, and enrichment services.

The first year “really exposed me to the urban education landscape and all the problems that come with it.” The environment was “toxic... It was awful. It was horrible. I'd never been exposed to anything like that before.” Despite his best efforts, “it shocked and dismayed me how students would cut each other down so much and be rude to the adults and their building... getting in fights and just this awful situation.” Observing other teachers, he found those with several years of experience “tended to be very strict, very authoritarian.” Beginning teachers “felt the need to adopt that kind of mindset. But it didn't work for them.” The experience “put a conviction in me that students, especially students in urban neighborhoods, need really good teachers.”

Despite these challenges, Aaron decided to reenlist with AmeriCorps for a second year, this time in a literacy classroom at a charter school in Community Falls. Using the Wilson Reading System, he worked with small groups of students on spelling, fluency, and articulation. At this school, he “saw a lot of things... that grew my knowledge of how students and teachers can be impacted by very intentional systems that are designed to help them thrive.” This

experience is what “made me want to become a teacher. I was very inspired by the teaching that I saw in that school,” which he held in “very high regard.”

Upon fulfilling his AmeriCorps commitment, Aaron spent four years as a Crusade Middle School Advisor. In addition to case management services, after-school programming, and academic support, he worked as a CAAP Mentor during the program’s summer sessions. He stated CAAP was his “favorite thing” about the role:

CAAP really did help inform my understanding of what teaching could be. Before coming to the College Crusade, I... [held] all these ideas of what teaching looks like and a lot of that did have to do with, well, 'the teacher maintains the order and they are the authority and they are the source of knowledge, and I'm supposed to listen and do my best and I'll learn.' CAAP definitely taught me to let students explore more on their own... and learn to think for themselves and work together, rather than just raise their hand and have something really good to say every time.

Aaron believed the “true value of learning doesn't just lie in being able to 'regurgitate' knowledge. It has more to do with how to apply that at the right time in the right way.” ABL experiences afford youth an opportunity to do so, as they “look more like real life.” He saw that ABL “is not a 'memorize these terms' or 'learn this sequence,' it's 'learn how to work together when you're faced with a task or a problem or an issue.’” This is accomplished through “a focus on teamwork and critical thinking to accomplish a goal,” and “takes you beyond the traditional classroom.” For him, the “essence” of CAAP is “character building and... more of that social-emotional aspect of learning that I think is just as important, if not even more important, than excelling in a certain content area.”

As a CAAP Mentor, Aaron engineered and implemented experiences “that challenged students to think on their feet and work together.” He saw the role as “facilitator,” which he contrasted with beliefs that “teacher is the central figure, teacher is the authority, teacher is the driving force of learning.” Mentors “act as a catalyst for the learning, but you are really there to ignite the discussion, and kinda step back and see what happens. You're there to give students the parameters to work within and allow them to figure out the rest.”

After four years with the Crusade, Aaron applied to several teacher residency programs, including Teach for America (TFA). After considering TFA’s eventual job offer, he decided such programs “perpetuate this idea that teaching is pretty simple, and that you just need to have charisma and you can engage a group of students, and they will do exactly what you want them to do, if you just learn how to be kind of a drill sergeant.” He acknowledged “that might work in some places, perhaps, but it's not the type of learning that we do in CAAP, and I really think the type of learning at CAAP is excellent.” He declined TFA’s offer, choosing instead a one-year residency in Dallas, Texas, concurrently enrolling for a graduate degree in education.

Aaron’s mentor teacher in Dallas had nine years teaching experience, and “looks like the students we had in my classroom.” The two “couldn't get past the behavior thing,” especially with one class:

Our sixth grade was really tough. We ended the year with the principal bringing in other paraprofessionals to split up our classroom, and the last month and a half the school was just me teaching small groups and everybody breaking off and teaching small groups, which was a little better. But it just goes to show how it wasn't just unmanageable for the two of us, it was very, very difficult for the other teachers as well.

Aaron is now an Education Counselor at the Little Rock University (LRU), where he intends to earn an MSW and pursue a career in mental health counseling. Currently, he advises undergraduate students in civil engineering, construction management, architecture, and computer science. He had no prior experience with these fields, but in his interview for the position, he spoke of his work with Crusaders as providing “someone who would listen to students and advocate for them.” With over 9000 students at LRU, “there is definitely a feeling of being anonymous that happens when there isn't an advisor there full-time.” His advisees are “grateful to have somebody who's looking out for them, because they've been passed from a professor to coordinator to graduate students... It's been messy, so I'm gonna try to clean things up the best I can.”

Personal Development.

Serving as a CAAP Mentor helped Aaron separate personal feelings from professional work. He initially found this difficult, as “there's a fine line with teaching, you have to be in it so much that you want to keep getting better and you care about it a lot, you almost take it personally, but you can't take it personally when you get feedback, or you have to do something differently. That is a very tricky balance.” His growth in accepting and acting on feedback from his CAAP colleagues paralleled how Crusaders learn “to separate the behavior or the action from yourself, you can't internalize 'oh, my idea didn't work, so I don't have good ideas. I'm dumb.'” Instead, both Mentors and Crusaders can reframe success as a process, maintaining “okay, so that idea didn't work, let's try a different one. Let me ask someone else what their idea is, receive that feedback, try it out,' and do so with the understanding that it doesn't necessarily mean the other person is better than you, or smarter.”

Aaron stressed the importance of keeping the work “lighthearted” and “funny to students” to free them from concerns about image and “just act goofy, act like kids.” This entailed serious consideration of his image as a role model. He recounted going “overboard, acting silly and making kids laugh” because Mentors’ antics gave “the kids permission to do that most of the time.” He observed that Crusaders took to this quickly, relishing his explicit sanction to be foolish. As a result, CAAP “taught me to be more patient, and to bring a sense of humor to things,” because middle school students “need to see that you're comfortable in your own skin, and that you are not... phased by everything... You don't need to seem cold and unapproachable; you need to seem warm and understanding.”

Through being a Mentor, Aaron learned that “as a teacher and a mentor, I need to be even more forthcoming in letting students know that ‘hey, this is a place where we can all speak up. I am not the person who holds all the answers. I am not commanding silence all the time.’ I think that learning isn't just about one student or a few quiet students,” but all members of the classroom community.

Professional Development.

After two years with City Year, Aaron had come to believe that for “students, especially middle school students, to be held accountable, they really needed a firm teacher, a firm authoritarian teacher in their life.” His mindset began to transform when he saw “not just the potential, but the effect that CAAP has on middle school students.” He saw confidence build, friendships form, and creativity flourish. This “really spoke volumes to me about the importance of letting students explore what it means to work together, and think through something, and try, and fail, and try again, and know that that's all part of the learning process,” which he juxtaposed against authoritarian principles of success in linear, empirical learning.

Aaron believes that asking questions, expressing needs, and appreciating the dignity and values of others are important not only to problem-solving but to broader societal improvement. He stated such processes are rare in schools because “some teachers are just afraid that things will get out of control if they were to introduce that kind of a concept. Maybe some are afraid that students will just not respond, and it'll end up being... one or two students doing the brunt of the work, and everybody else slacking off.” He believes implementing ABL-aligned practices is “not something a beginner teacher will typically do” --- himself included --- as “it's risky, and it can be difficult. I think there's a lot of prep work to do to get students ready” for a new way to learn.

At CAAP, Aaron attributed Crusaders' initial “hesitancy to really step up” and engage fully to their previous schooling experiences, wherein “the types of behaviors that are really praised... are following the rules, being quiet, raising your hand to speak, completing work quickly, not causing any distractions. Things that are 'good.'” He found such behaviors had little correlation “to be[ing] a better person, but school sends that message very loudly.” These “detrimental” dispositions are based in students' desire to “please their teacher,” who can validate “‘I'm smart' or ‘I did a good job.’” Students learn “‘I need to stay quiet; I need to sit and get,’ rather than step up and experiment, or just take charge.” He declared this “brainwashing,” and placed responsibility firmly on teachers who were “actively oppressing students, even if it's not intentional, by not giving them opportunities to engage with one another, by [only] showing value to students who seem to grasp the material more quickly or [who] don't have to ask as many questions.” As a result, “there isn't real ownership of their learning experience, and they don't really learn to view themselves as an agent in their growth until that shell is broken.”

Aaron found that CAAP roles, such as Timekeeper, Leader, and Scribe, were “a very direct way of putting students in a seat that they are probably... not used to.” In the role of Leader, even quieter students “had to step up,” which also challenged other group members to “respond to them like they would any other leader, and that's a really critical component of CAAP.” By experiencing leadership directly, Crusaders came to realize the quality as not merely extroversion, charisma, or some mysterious “innate ability.” To Aaron, these are vestigial connotations, “in the same way that we're used to relating to teachers as being authoritarian.” Instead, “you can be a great leader and soft-spoken and prefer solitude or something. You just have to know how to considerately involve your team and step up, take charge of your role and all of that.” For Aaron, the role structure was mostly successful, though he “would never want a student to feel ‘less than’ just because they didn't excel at any one role... So, I think what I tried to do was open minds to the idea of leadership styles. One student leader won't look exactly like another student leader.” Roles can be limiting when “a student feels like 'I'm not the leader today, so it doesn't matter what I do or say.' And that's not true.” Part of the Mentor's role is to help Crusaders “understand that everybody's participation is necessary and we're just asking for more of a specific responsibility on any given day, depending on what your role was.”

According to Aaron, being a “better person by allowing yourself to experience the struggle and the triumph of working with a team and trying to achieve your goal” is a significant challenge for middle school students. Ultimately, it entails “becoming more comfortable with who you are and accepting others for their differences as well.” Aaron tied this to middle schoolers' developing interpersonal relationships, where “social hierarchies and stigmas” begin, such as the “popular kid who wears name brand clothes,” the female athlete who plays every sport, or “the student who is shy and quiet [that] everybody thinks is a nerd or something.”

Aaron's CAAP experiences reinforced that "becoming a better person starts with dismantling those stereotypes and realizing that everybody has something valuable to contribute, and everybody is unique, and that is a strength of the group."

Professional Practice.

In the first few weeks in Dallas, Aaron instituted ABL experiences to "try to get everybody working together, and just getting comfortable being around each other." Students enjoyed the experience, and it helped them understand that "everybody's participation is valued and important," that "school's not always gonna feel easy, but we're in it together and we can still have some fun," and "there will be rewards for the hard work that we put in together." Not recognizing the goals or benefits of these activities, however, Aaron's school principal told him that he "should 'make the students be quieter,' even though I tried to explain to her that they're doing a group activity. There was a lot of that."

Aaron said he and his Dallas co-teacher ultimately "failed to make the students 'want it,' so to speak, and for them to want it, there has to be something in it for them. There has to be... a belief that we speak into, on a daily basis, that really causes them to want to pursue a goal." The context did not permit him to explore his "teacher identity," thus preventing him from "helping students learn about who they are and learn to value their identities and learn from each other." He noted "it wasn't like I didn't do any lesson planning. I did some, but I had to learn that my idea of a perfect class session is... just not always possible." He concluded the experience was "awful... I wish I would have quit," based on both his challenges in the classroom and the goals his graduate program left unfulfilled.

As an Education Counselor, Aaron had seen dispositions in college students that he decried in his middle school Crusaders, especially during advising sessions. Often, his advisees

wanted him to tell them what courses to take, and then for him to ‘drop’ them from difficult ones. These students “aren't taking ownership, and they're really not benefiting.” Aaron responded by using relationship-building and questioning techniques he honed in CAAP. He often began one-on-one advising meetings by asking students to share their experiences of the semester, asking “‘what is it like to be you right now, how has it been going?’” By “getting a little personal,” he encouraged his LRU students to think critically about their school experience. This allowed him to “affirm their experience, sharing 'okay, yeah, that sounds really challenging. I wanna make sure I can help you move forward' or... ‘great... have you been thinking about what comes after this class?’” Once they “open up about that, I can usually learn quite a bit,” helping him better serve his students, who in turn appreciated having someone dedicated to “‘looking out for us.’”

Educator Preparation.

Aaron advocated experiential education for preservice teachers, contrasting his Dallas residency program with “other models that train you for four to six weeks and then put you in a classroom... and you're expected to know how to deal with a group of students in front of you, in a town or city that you may have never lived in before.” He preferred a more “immersive” apprenticeship, wherein “you ideally spend time with an experienced teacher in the classroom every day or most days, and you couple that with feedback from that teacher.” This should be augmented by “formal learning at the university level, with opportunities to practice what you're learning every week.” The key, he felt, was lowering the stakes; while “your lesson might flop or you might run into a problem with students,” novices would not be held solely responsible as teachers of record. However, the success of such experience “depends on the type of school that

you're working in, the type of the teacher you happen to be working with," decisions often outside a novice's control.

Conclusion.

Aaron recognized the importance of not only experience, but also failure, in building students' academic confidence and willingness to "step up." He worked to create circumstances in which learners explored their thinking and relationships as self-advocates. He believed schools should empower, not oppress, by supporting effort and risk-taking through universal participation premised on universal engagement.

Aaron shared "I love that CAAP always allowed me to be a high energy, goofy, charismatic, at times serious, but always fun-loving mentor/teacher. I almost never felt that way in a classroom." He found his values and practices stymied by material realities which reinforced his critique of traditional schooling as oppressive. As a result, he left teaching.

Case VII: Sydney

Introduction.

Upon finishing undergraduate studies, Sydney became a Middle School Advisor with the Crusade, which entailed working at CAAP during its summer iteration in 2011. She completed six weeks of the program (the equivalent of three ten-week Saturday sessions) before leaving the Advisor position, then subsequently returned as a Mentor, then Site Manager, while in graduate school. At the time of our interviews, in addition to doctoral studies, she worked with 'first generation' students at a local public university and served as the CAAP Program Coordinator.

CAAP is the place Sydney "learned to have fun at work... I enjoyed it as a Mentor, I enjoyed it as a Site Manager, and I continue to enjoy it in my role currently. I always feel happy

at CAAP.” She contrasted this with workplaces where decisions are made “on feelings and not fact,” as part of her joy comes from the CAAP staff culture and processes:

When I come to CAAP... I know that my team is strong, and we will work together to find a reasonable solution without judgment of strengths, or areas of expertise, or personal characteristics, but... [based on] what we need to do for the program. And I think that collectively, we have this at heart, and so we can put our personal feelings aside and make professional decisions... This is the work that is part of my core and part of my values, and not ‘just to check-the-box’ stuff.

Sydney described CAAP outcomes “problem solving” and “critical thinking” through a Crusader’s eyes: “‘I’ve been able to try to figure something out, whether it’s processing a difficult situation or a great situation or experience, a way to figure something out or how to do something... collectively or by myself.’” She similarly outlined “confidence” and “self-esteem” not just as willingness to take risks, but as “way[s] to say ‘it’s okay if I don’t wanna play or participate in a game that involves touching... But I can still participate in a way that makes me feel okay.’” This mentality ensures Crusaders feel “‘I’ve been part of a group and part of a team, but maybe my participation looks a little bit different than everybody else’s.’”

Sydney reported the educational efficacy of the program lies in the framing and processing of ABL experiences. As a result, “any activity, I believe, can be a learning experience, if given proper directions and a proper opportunity to explore what that means for your group or an individual.” At CAAP, this was accomplished through careful questioning, wherein Mentors would “probe [Crusaders] in thinking about... what their role was, and what their participation looked like, and then what can they learn from that experience moving forward.” Reciprocal dialogue also allowed Mentors to gauge how well Crusaders were

“working together as a team to do something that seems to be really easy, but in fact is really difficult to do with a team that's not communicating effectively.” Transfer depended on Crusaders’ sense of “ownership,” as “if you’ve actually learned how to do something, you can apply it in new spaces. If you haven't learned how to do something, you're really gonna struggle to make those connections in other places.” CAAP provided Crusaders a place to experiment and rehearse, “to try to do this thing that's really difficult to do or try to figure out this new challenge.” Experiences had tangible applications, such as “‘how do I have a conversation with my mom about something that's really frustrating me, and can I do that effectively?’ And so, I think that that's part of that transferable skills that we hope that they can take away.”

All CAAP supervisory staff, Sydney included, began working for the Crusade as Mentors. They thus had a “direct understanding and relationship with the program... they understand the role of the Mentor, they understand the responsibilities of the Mentor, and they know what it means to have that direct impact on a regular basis.” As the Program Coordinator, she “hope[s] that, through my leadership, it doesn't feel as though I'm the ‘boss,’ but that I'm part of the team, and that I genuinely want to support and give feedback on a regular basis to my team.” Rather than micromanage, she encouraged staff to “figure things out themselves first, and then bring it to me, because I think that it allows for them to feel some ownership over the things that they're trying to work through.” This allows staff to develop “their own problem-solving skills and critical thinking, in a way that is supported and enriched by the team at large.”

Sydney’s focus on open and honest conversations with Mentors starts before they are even hired:

My interviews with candidates for Mentors are less of an interview and more of a conversation, because I think it allows for that pressure of ‘I have to sit up straight

and be super-professional,' if you will, 'and try to impress someone.' I don't need a candidate to try to impress me. I want to see if they're someone who's willing to learn, and willing to talk out the really difficult situations... as opposed to, 'you check off all these boxes and on paper, so you should be hired...' I have a way to kind of figure out if someone's just looking for a part-time gig, and if they're just gonna show up and do what they're asked minimally and keep it moving, or if they're really invested in growing and learning as a Mentor. Because CAAP is a space to do so.

Professional Development.

Sydney had no ABL experience prior to her first summer with CAAP, and feels she “didn't really have any training at all... We had an overview of what the program is, but it was more of figuring it out day-to-day.” When an Advisor, “you're pretty much working alone in your school... I was kind of on my own on a regular basis, doing my work with Crusaders.” At CAAP, she was “expected to work side-by-side with a Mentor partner and share responsibility. Thus, “it was really trying to work with another person when I was so used to working very individually.” The transition was “ugly in a way, that I didn't really care at first about sharing responsibility because I knew that I could get the job done.” As a result, she was “not really allowing for [her Mentor partner] to contribute to the conversation. And so... he would just sit back and not really do anything, because we weren't sharing the responsibility to co-lead. I didn't know what that looks like.”

These issues in working with a partner came to a head in the middle of her first session:

I vividly remember asking him, 'can you kind of work with these Crusaders to find the next place that we have to go' on our scavenger hunt, and 'I'm gonna

kinda fall back and make sure that we're collectively together and safe.' We started to clearly define what those roles were. And then we talked about what that looked like, and how it was different during the scavenger hunt compared to prior, where it was like this really uneven balance. And so, we started planning, 'okay, you're gonna do this in the morning, I'm going to lead this.' I started asking him 'hey, what do you think,' instead of just kind of running with it.

The "scavenger hunt" day also provided a turning point in her leadership with Crusaders, as Sydney realized she was taking too direct a role in her group's success. In her sincere efforts to help, she was "not setting the expectations for the Crusaders to figure it out" themselves. She would "continue to chime in and ask them more questions or 'have you thought about this? Maybe if you went this way, this might lead you to this...'" In retrospect, she saw herself "giving them too much information... as opposed to allowing them to figure it out based on the skills that they were learning up to that point in CAAP." She "wasn't giving [Crusaders] an opportunity to explore."

Much of what Sydney detailed as her own learning through CAAP has come from the leadership opportunities the program provided. She shared that working with the program "has allowed me to take a step back and let the team shine." Even a few years earlier, she would have tended towards micromanagement, coming across as overly eager: "I wanna know all the details; I want my hands in the pot; I wanna be part of the process." Instead, she now looks to provide staff "a set of expectations, work with members of the team to their specific style or their specific needs, and not be like a cookie-cutter" manager. Examining "different lenses" and honoring individuals' unique experiences has helped her "to think about things in different ways... and have different levels of approach."

As a Site Manager, Sydney recognized the importance of “not expecting ‘me’ from other people,” and instead based her work on individuals’ needs, not “the collective” group or her expectations of herself. The result was greater empathy with her university students “on the academic side, and then working with Mentors in the adventure learning side, have helped me understand how to have conversations, through my advising and coaching them, in asking questions.” In her subsequent university work, CAAP helped her recognize how “all the studying and learning strategies that I’m going to share... need to be shifted and redirected for individual learners.”

Sydney identified “transferable skills” Mentors developed which could be useful in classroom instruction. Mentors gained direct experience in positive, relationship-based management, and “learn[ed] how to give directions and facilitate conversations with middle school kids” in a supportive, lower-risk environment. In addition, CAAP supported professional dispositions which readily transferred to college and life success, such as “being on time for your job, putting in your hours on time to make sure that you get paid... What it really means to work on a large team, but also how to communicate with your Mentor partner... how to share responsibility.” She believes that, just as “we expect Crusaders to learn things at CAAP and then implement them in their community, in their school, in their families, we should practice that too.” As a result, “it’s not just about ‘what I’m doing at CAAP,’ and when I leave Washington [Middle School], it stops. It’s ‘how can I take and share what I’m learning into new places?’”

Sydney prided herself on not only what CAAP did for youth, but for staff as well. She reported “we do a really great job at making sure that Mentors are growing and building their skills, individually, but also collectively, with those shared experiences and mentor partnerships.” Staff built “a collective understanding that ‘we’re all here at this new program,

learning stuff that maybe we've heard before, but in a different way...' Here's a place to understand that maybe you've never learned this, and 'how can I support you in this space to adapt to this new thing?'"

Over her years as Program Coordinator, Sydney has found hiring her university students as Mentors to be

really refreshing... knowing the things that they're working on academically, and the types of transferable skills that they're trying to build before they leave the institution, [that] they can get from CAAP. I like making those connections and helping college students build those skills in a program where I can actually see that happen. It's not just like, 'oh, go intern at this place and help make your connections,' or 'I know somebody over there...' I think it speaks to some of my strengths and being able to connect people [and]... to hire the right types of people that don't just want a job. Because it takes the right kind of person, especially a college-age student, to wake up early on a Saturday morning... to be energized and full of life, to give part of that and share that with young people. So, for me, that's gratifying.

One Mentor shared with Sydney that implementing CAAP roles resulted in "the best study group I ever had in four years" at his university. The group "had someone who was the note-taker, we had someone who came prepared with the agenda for the day, we had someone to be able to facilitate the conversation in a way that didn't feel as though that they were the one that knew all of the information and was calling the shots.'" He reiterated that working as a CAPP Mentor gave him a new understanding and appreciation of facilitating effective group work.

This type of Mentor feedback continues to inform Sydney's university work, where she asks her advisees to “tell me about this group of people that you said that you were studying with. What did it look like? Was everybody on their phones, were they all taking notes? Can you use a Google Doc and share notes?” She saw this as example as evidence that “I've been able to take some of the things that we do, the structure and the framework at CAAP.” She continued to consider “what I hear from prior Mentors, and ‘how can I use it as a way to prepare current college students to think a little bit differently about whatever it is that they're doing?’”

At CAAP, Sydney “learned about myself as a Mentor, to be able to improve, to reframe my own thinking, my directions, to have a better result with kids.” She saw that “when I changed my instruction or I changed my approach or re-framed it, I could immediately see a difference in what the Crusaders were doing as a result.” What she “learned from kids was how to improve in my own style of reviewing directions, in how to ask the right questions, and how to support the Crusaders... that were standing in the back, not always contributing verbally, maybe playing with the lockers in the hallway.” As a result, she “learned how to reframe my own thinking in my own approach, and sometimes even pivot to have a different but really successful result, even if it meant I had to change the instructions of the game or activity.”

Educator Preparation.

Sydney was the only member of her graduate school cohort who was not a practicing teacher. She “really had a sense of what they were experiencing in the [K-12] classroom, and I kind of brought this ‘outside of the classroom’ lens to the conversation.” Her colleagues regularly discussed school expectations “that are not realistic for young people, they're not realistic to deliver in a classroom, and if they might seem to be realistic, there's a lack of resources and support” for their implementation. Sydney came to see traditional systems of

educator preparation as “absolutely not enough,” in part because they focused on reinforcing hierarchies of authority over building teachers’ capacities. Her own experience in higher education, both as student and worker, reflected similar observations. She noted limited structure or expectations, excessive faculty autonomy reinforced by protective collective bargaining unions, and a lack of professional development towards improving teaching quality as impediments to reform. Many colleagues endorse an attitude of “‘I’m the expert in this topic, and I know it all.’ But how do I actually get people to learn in a way that meets their style, meets their accessibility needs? There needs [to be] a lot of work in both” educator preparation and the mechanisms of university practice.

Conclusion.

Sydney credited CAAP for raising her awareness of the importance of self-directed learning for both youth and adults. For Crusaders, an ethic of care and focus on relationships foregrounded experiential learning, while processing connected CAAP to their homes, schools, and communities. For CAAP staff, a parallel process helped Mentors develop transferable skills, provided they invest in the program beyond the paycheck. In both, she saw her role as supportive and facilitative, recognizing and amplifying individual strengths and needs as means towards meaningful learning.

While Sydney’s university work did not directly incorporate ABL activities, it was grounded in the dialogic model of continuing growth embedded in CAAP staff culture and processes. While structures at her university were prohibitive, she maintained an open mind and willingness to model the changes she would like to see in, for, and with her colleagues.

Case VIII: Melissa**Introduction.**

Melissa shared both a childlike glee and witty gravity when it came to her work with youth. She identified as Hispanic, and at the time of our interviews, was teaching 22 third-grade students, primarily native Spanish speakers, at an urban public charter school in Community Falls. Of study participants, she was one of the youngest, and the only one who was teaching in an elementary school.

Melissa became a CAAP Mentor in 2014, the first of her five years of undergraduate studies. A former Crusader, she had fond memories of the program, though she could recall few specifics. Part of her motivation for joining was the opportunity to work with middle school students; while she had “always wanted to be a teacher,” at that point she “wasn’t sure if it was [in] elementary, middle, or higher ed[ucation].” As she had experience with elementary students through her teaching practicum experiences, working with middle schoolers seemed a reasonable next step.

Initially, Melissa “didn't really see how games could be played with a point... I always thought, ‘we're playing a game, to play a game. To have fun... There's no messages.’ I never even thought of playing games to teach lessons.” She several times caught herself using the term “game” and corrected it to “activity,” as “a game is just something you do for fun. [At CAAP,] an activity is something you do for fun, but there's also a purpose to it.” She found “the activities the kids most enjoyed were the thinking ones” which “challenged them to pay close attention to what was happening and knowing what the other people around them were doing.” She identified the same experiences as most enjoyable and beneficial for herself as well.

As a Mentor, Melissa “wanted to be that... person that the kids could come to if there was ever a problem, but also that person who helped them work through themselves, work through this at CAAP.” For her, “the best part of the job is interacting with the kids, forming those relationships, because I feel like if you don't find the relationships, then the job isn't gonna be a good job for you.” Thus, “in order to be successful as a Mentor, you need to be willing to give and take with the kids and listen to them.” Ultimately, however, her “responsibility was to make sure that these kids left differently than how they came in, so that's how I see my job as a Mentor.”

Personal Development.

According to Melissa, “CAAP isn't just about the growth of [Crusaders],” but staff as well:

Yes, you're the Mentor, but you're also learning from the kids. You learn about yourself through them. The way you act toward them says how you are as a person, and it just takes a lot of self-reflection to even think of it that way. And I do a lot of that. So, for me, the purpose of CAAP is to grow, so I've grown there in my teaching life, my personal life... through the experiences that I've had.

These are experiences I'm not gonna have outside... I'm learning how to maneuver through life in this program.

Thus, the skills Crusaders learned through CAAP “were skills that I was re-teaching myself at the same time.”

Melissa shared that becoming a Mentor was part of a quixotic personal journey. At first, she was “so very shy... timid. But at the same time, I wasn't, because I always wanted to argue... But I was uncomfortable speaking out in front of people, even though they were kids. I had to get

through that, considering I wanted to be a teacher, right?” She “learned to be very patient, very understanding through CAAP, so I take that into my personal life.” Formerly, she would view others “as like, ‘you’re an adult. You should know how to do X. So why are you not doing X?’” Through her work with the program, “I’ve learned that not everyone is like me in the way that I think, so I have to be more understanding when people don’t understand something the first time, or if they do something differently than how I would.” She came to see difference as “okay, that’s just their way of doing it, or it may be easier for them than it is my way.”

Melissa connected this with effective communication, “and a big part of communication is listening, and I never really realized that until working with CAAP.” Previously, she might have “listen[ed] to you talk for an hour about something that’s really important, but if it has no connection to me, it goes in one ear, out the other... If I’m not listening to what the other person is saying, we’re not going anywhere.” She shared that she “used to have this mentality where, if we’re talking about something and I disagree, I need to get you to agree with me... No matter what, I needed to be right... I couldn’t get past someone ‘beating’ me in my head. Everything was always a competition.” Through CAAP, she had “learned to listen, even if I disagree. Just listen to what they’re saying, hear people out and have a conversation” and “accept that things are done differently than the way that I do them, and that’s okay... I needed to stop trying to micromanage everything.”

Melissa’s communication skills also dovetailed with her self-concept. In contrast to the combative stance she described, she also saw herself as someone who used to be “just very quiet and just like, ‘I’ll do whatever you want me to do, no questions asked...’ I used to do everything that everyone wanted me to do... I didn’t mind giving, even though I never got back, even though I wasn’t receiving anything.” As a Mentor, she initially “needed to get [Crusaders] to be on my

level... I'm gonna act up with them like 'snap, back up,' then we can go back and forth." As she better understood her status as a role model, Melissa "realized that definitely was not needed at all. That comes with change." She described a process of "just finding who you are... And that [is] okay. Just understanding that not everything has to be exactly the same." She described "not all giving... if you're not giving back" as part of this "learning to be who you are at CAAP."

Professional Development.

Both formally and informally, Mentors receive a significant volume of feedback and advice from supervisors. Melissa described learning to accept constructive criticism as

a process... it took me time to... one, accept that I needed feedback, because I thought I was great, and then to accept the feedback... I didn't agree with it, I was like, 'I don't need this.' Then I grew, and the feedback was given to me, I was like, 'alright, I accept it, I'm not going to make any changes, but I hear you.' And then finally, I'm at that place where, 'okay, you're giving me feedback, you're helping me grow. I'm going to take whatever you're telling me, I'm gonna try it. If it works, it works; if it doesn't, I'll get back to you...'

In her teaching practice, Melissa stresses commonalities over differences, aiming for universal inclusion:

You always have those students who are either too cool... or they just don't feel like [engaging]. There's no reason, it's not like they're hurting. They just don't feel like it. So, you have to find a way to incorporate them, because they are still part of the team... A big part of CAAP is learning to work as part of a team, so I would tell [Crusaders], you know, 'okay, you don't wanna participate in this activity, but you need to do something. What would you like to do?' And it could

be something like making sure people are following the rules, making sure people aren't crossing a border... cheering the teammates on... If they don't wanna say anything, they can clap. If they don't wanna clap, they can just do this [waves hands], just getting them to do something to show that they are still part of their team, that was a lot of the adapting that we have to do.

Melissa recognized that, while ABL endeavors can be enjoyable ways for participants to engage in certain topics, it is the discussions afterwards wherein meaning is constructed. She stated youth “can always run around, that's something they do in school... they also don't play the more thinking games that get... their brain juices working there.” She described her way of approaching processing, first establishing for herself “what is the purpose of this game?” Rather than immediately jump to the destination of the conversation, or to Crusaders’ potential contributions, her planning began with her own view of the central theme,

apply it to my own personal life... That way, I can try and ask the questions to the Crusaders and try and get them to that place of understanding that you don't only communicate in this game this way, you can communicate at school with your teacher, you communicate at home with your mom... Whatever problem you're having... there's ways to communicate. It's not always verbally... So just applying it. We have to apply it to their life, let them know that it's not just here, and I think when you give them that personal reflection, then you give them that time to be like ‘hmm, let me think about this, when do I actually do this in my life?’ And then before you know it, they're like, ‘oh wow, actually I do it a lot.’ Now that they're aware that they have done it, they can continue doing it 'cause they made that connection already.

This approach helped her build empathy, ensure relevance, and resist the temptation of a single “right answer.”

Professional Practice.

For Melissa, “playing activities where you're actually doing the skills that you're trying to teach them is much more effective” than traditional instruction, where

you're just being told... It's not a lot of engagement and back and forth... I think everyone has that mindset that when you were in school there's a teacher, there's a student, they're sitting down, they're listening... When I think of school, I literally think of sitting at a desk with paper and a teacher is teaching me.

She elaborated “I think that we are stuck in this idea of ‘the teacher has all the power, you need to listen,’ but... we should move into more activities to help [youth] learn.”

Melissa summarized how, despite her desire to decenter herself as an authority figure in her classroom, she

definitely grew as a leader through CAAP. I was very shy, and I hated speaking in front of large groups, so leading games was something that I was horrible at because I would get nervous... Then I learned to be more comfortable and just go with the flow of it... So that's what I learned most from CAAP. I take that into my teaching life... it helped me learn to think quick on my feet and just keep it moving. Definitely CAAP taught me how to think on my feet, be a teacher, be a leader and adapt.

Despite her position as teacher, she modeled being a learner, telling her students that, “‘right now what I'm doing is the same thing you are...’ I think letting [students] know that you're growing too... you're not here ‘just telling [me] what to do, you're actually doing the things with me.’”

Working with Crusaders, Melissa realized the importance of “listening for what they're saying, not ‘the’ answer... I was like, ‘whoa, I'm always seeking the answer in my head...’ [Now] I don't really care for ‘the’ answer, more for the processing... To me, man, you need to be more of a listener, instead of just waiting for people to say what you're saying or expecting people to know what you're gonna say.” In her teaching, this meant “learning to dive into things, dive deeper into just not the surface, you're going deeper into activities,” entailing an attitude of discovery and connection. When teaching ‘cause and effect’ in a literary narrative, for example, she did “not just stick to it being in a story because it's not just in a story,” but a pretext for a discussion about how the narrative relates to ‘real life’ in her students’ homes, schools, and communities. She elaborated that this breaks down into three components: “giving them that question, giving [them] the chance to think about that, and mak[ing] that connection to home.” By instituting this framework for classroom dialogue, she centers students and their worlds through legitimately democratic discussion.

Melissa described one of her professional goals was to “figure out how I can turn this math lesson into an activity that you're still gonna learn the content, but in a much more fun way, that you can apply.” She saw experiential learning in the ABL vein as an evolving process for her teaching practice:

In the future, once I get the basics down, I know that I can then go back and say, ‘hmm, this timed activity. This was something that we did on paper, but that is something that we can do as a game. What game can I play to get these kids to understand the same concept?’ Because it's much more fun, one, and two, everyone is engaged that way. It's one thing for kids to sit on the rug and we give you this information, and I'm teaching you... [Instead,] let's do this to learn it, and

doing something is always much more effective than being talked at, in my opinion, 'cause everyone learns differently, but the majority of people learn from doing... [rather] than just listening.

Educator Preparation.

Melissa held a cynical view of her university program, which “just wasn't anything like my teaching life... CAAP is more related to teaching... than my teaching prep program.” Her coursework and field experiences fostered a simplistic, formulaic approach to instruction; “it was, ‘as a teacher, you are going to do this, this and this; if this comes up, you do this.’” While some of her professors “would emphasize that ‘it's more about the kids than you,’ when I went into my practicums, it wasn't the same way. I saw it was about the teacher and not the kids.” She concluded “I think CAAP has had the greatest impact on my teaching experience, even though I went to college for teaching because... I learned a lot about how to work with kids.”

Conclusion.

Melissa demonstrated great enthusiasm for her work as a Mentor and teacher, and readily credited the former in shaping the latter. Through CAAP, she learned to be patient and listen, eschewing both passive acceptance of others' demands and her own aggressive approach to interactions. This built her self-confidence and assisted her in finding her “voice” as an educator. She valued transfer of learning, including the “life skills” which go beyond formal curricula. Her approach to discussion leadership, based on her own meaning-making, ritual, and spontaneity, provided a particularly nuanced view on the intricacies of her craft.

Ultimately, Melissa reported that “CAAP has had the greatest impact on my teaching... Everything I'm doing with these [Crusaders], I can apply to my third graders; I just have to change the language of it. So, in CAAP, I was able to find my voice. Figure out my teaching

style... The processing is really the biggest part for me that I take with me in every aspect of my life.” She then quipped “I just process things *way* deeper than necessary, all thanks to CAAP!”

Case IX: Marney

Introduction.

Marney was a Crusader and participated in CAAP on the advice of her school’s Crusade Advisor, who portrayed the program as activity-based and focused on “learning and grow[ing as] individuals.” She recounted a few favorite activities, several of which remained longstanding parts of the curriculum, and recalled talking with her own CAAP Mentor “about success, and what achievement looks like as a team.”

When she rejoined the program as a Mentor in 2018, she confronted some of the complexities behind the scenes:

I remember being overwhelmed, 'cause there's so many different aspects... remembering all the activities or rules, the objective[s]. I know that I struggled with processing... 'cause that was something new, being more reflective, and how can you engage the students to be reflective in their own learning and how... I need[ed] to be more reflective as well, in the activities that I do.

At the time of our first interview, Marney had recently earned a degree in secondary education, and was serving as an ‘intervention’ math teacher at Rockland, a suburban public high school in northern Rhode Island. At Rockland, she worked alongside math “content teachers” to support struggling students through ‘pull out’ small groups and individualized instruction. During her colleagues’ lessons, she would “circulate and check in on the students,” but “only help out afterwards... [when students] might forget what they are confused about, or just dismiss

the entire thing 'cause they find it too confusing, so they don't even know where to start.“ She reported “I don't wanna be disruptive to the teacher who is giving the lesson.”

As of our second interview, Marney was leaving Rockland for Chafee, with Chris as her department chair.

Marney described the role of Mentor was “to be there for the ones that you support... being able to listen to the other person and give advice, but not make the decision for them. Have that person make a decision for themselves.” The position entailed “communicating with the kids, but also building relationships with them and getting to know who they are.” However, “it's not just for fun. There's a message that one can take away from the activity. It's up to the Mentors to craft that message in a way that their Crusaders can understand.” As a Mentor, she “learned that... a metaphor heightens the understanding of the meaning itself... because we can connect with real world examples.” A central metaphor “ties it together in a way that, even if students don't have a specific real-world connection, they can still understand the message.”

At CAAP, Marney came to appreciate that “each Crusader that I work with is different, just to hear their story, their challenges, and their successes, and just being a part of their journey and seeing their growth. I think that's... rewarding in and of itself.” She found working with middle school students both enjoyable and “critical, because they are beginning to learn who they are and how to navigate” their worlds. CAAP provided Crusaders a “setting to actually have conversations about their experiences,” as they “sometimes... get overlooked in their own school, [by] those people who are involved in their life, but they're opening up here in CAAP. I think that's really eye-opening.”

Marney noted the Crusade explicitly hires Mentors from similar backgrounds to Crusaders, so that youth are “able to relate with someone who looks like them.” She found this

“empowering” for youth, “‘cause I know there’s connections, either cultural, or even experiences that are similar. Kids are able to find that connection with their Mentors.” However, she continued, “in the regular school, their classroom teachers might not look like them.” In Rockland’s math department, she was “the only Asian person... There's only one other Asian-American, leading the Science department. There's no person that identifies as Black or African-American there.” The transition from her student-teaching placement, with 50% teachers of color, was “a culture shock.”

Personal Development.

Working at CAAP fostered Marney’s self-confidence, as she had “always been timid of taking the spotlight.” At first, her Mentor partners “had to step it up a bit” to support her work. As she became more familiar with the program, she “did challenge myself to come out of my comfort zone, to understand the roles and the activities of CAAP.” She took this active role because “internally, I knew that I had to grow... I was conscious of the things that I needed to improve on.” She did this by “reaching out to other Mentors, not only my Mentor partner, so I can get a better grip on” the role. She came to believe “I’m always growing, and there's always something new to learn.”

Serving as a Mentor helped Marney in “being more reflective and having good relationships with other people.” She continued that “it is also rewarding to see that you're making an impact, and knowing that you're able to work with young people... Even though what you say to them might not impact them right away, they might think about [it] later in the future.” For her, the program came to feel “like a second home.”

Professional Development.

Marney believed educators must assist students to become “more socially aware, emotionally aware, and culturally aware of what’s going on, either at school or in the community.” This sentiment has become “a big part of my beliefs of education, making students able to use what they learn and apply it to a community.” She immediately followed with “I know that CAAP [staff have these] ... conversations with students, and work towards building students who feel empowered to do the right thing and make the right decisions and to be better in the community and have communities that are better.”

Marney viewed processing as the heart of the CAAP endeavor, and the reflection it engenders a lasting benefit for Crusaders. She described the exercise as “a very deep conversation that you have with yourself or someone else or a team, where you reflect on what you can take away from the activity and what you can do better next time,” wherein others are “able to share what they perceive, because sometimes one can be too critical about oneself.” Reflecting through dialogue “can make it more realistic... They can hear what you're saying and also give you suggestions or advice, as well as feedback.” While these “conversations” are embedded in the context of a particular experience, the learning is transferable “because the skills or the discussion that you have [through] processing can be applied to anything in your own life.” Crusaders “will take away the reflection piece, and diving into, like, ‘okay, what can I do to better improve? What can the team do to better improve?’” When encountering a future challenge, she hopes youth will examine “the pros and cons, then they weigh it out, and then from there, they try to evaluate, ‘okay, what should the next step actually be...’ You move back to look at it, ‘okay, what's easy? What was challenging? Okay, now what can we do to move

forward?” Reflection thus helps bridge the gap between engineered learning experiences and a young person’s “real life.”

Professional Practice

While “both teachers and Mentors wanna see their students be successful, and they want them to be able to be confident in what they do,” teachers often “don't have as much freedom to ‘touch base’ on other situations... [or] cover more real-life situations.” At Rockland, Melissa worked to personalize the curriculum, but came to realize students’ conversations were “not deep enough” to promote meaningful transfer, in part because “there's not that much time to give to students to process and reflect.” She also “know[s] that certain schools have different ways of wanting the teacher to run the classroom,” restricting autonomy and limiting how teachers can assist students in challenges that, while not necessarily academic, can have profound impact on students’ education.

As an intervention teacher, Marney was “more focused on the students who... need more help. I have seen them get frustrated, and I’ve seen them lose confidence in the process of not figuring out a math problem, or... them just giving up right away.” Sometimes, “I just have to sit down next to them and tell them that they can do it, and I will walk with them through the first problem... But just being there with them is how I can help them get through the process.”

While having quick games and challenges “in the back of my pocket” was beneficial, Marney found fewer direct applications of CAAP practices than ABL concepts. She recognized that her role as a teacher was not limited to delivering instrumental math instruction, but also to developing relationships and fostering academic confidence and persistence. Towards this end, she aimed to engage students in conversations with “real-world connections” as she did in CAAP. She stated “I love to have dialogue with my students and try to squeeze in dialogue”

whenever possible. These conversations regularly address “persevering [in] doing math problems, 'cause that's a key skill, to be able to persevere into a challenge you might see as unattainable and being able to use the right tools or resources.” This dialogue is not “focused so much on math problems but being able to have the skills to think about it in a different way.” She described that “part of it is engagement, part of its motivation; but I think there also comes some skill building with the collaborative work that might go beyond just math class. Hopefully you can make some real-world connections.”

She further detailed how this intersects with “social justice,” noting that it is critical for students to realize that they have a voice, and to practice using it in situations “when there is no power dynamic at all.” Such rich conversation

is what I think enables them to be stronger in the school setting. I think the fact that students have all these experiences and stories, and yet we're not using [these] to have them learn from it and grow from it... At CAAP, we are using it, so that they can learn from it and then set a goal to be more successful next time. But in the school, this is not really happening. And kids, they have their own voices. We need to hear their voices and let them know they are heard... We do that at CAAP. I am validating their feelings, and to have them be able to make the connection from an activity to other aspects of life... really makes kids feel smart, when they can do something like that and then get the correct support for it.

Approaching her small groups with a Mentor’s perspective, Marney found opportunities to reframe the relationships among students and teachers:

I was still able to engage them with each other because they were just getting help from each other. I think when I talk about how ‘yes, I'm the teacher in the

classroom, but you guys also have teachers in your peers can be your teachers as well...’ what I try to get across is that they're not alone, in that they can turn to someone if they need [to], who could be sitting right next to them... just trying to build that mindset that there is a support network, and I try to tell them a lot, that ‘I'm always there for you guys... And you guys have to be there for each other.’ Many of her students share this approach is “different from the traditional setting, it's more comfortable. They're still learning, which is good, but just the fact that they're able to actually get to know each other, collaborate and take risks and actually get engaged with the task itself.”

Marney recognized that the struggling students on her Rockland caseload faced not only academic but also social stigma “because they know my role, and that they're selected in this small group, and they were like ‘why me?’” To build motivation, she began incorporating “games [with] an educational purpose, something that relates to math,” Such strategies helped mitigate student resistance and “make it [as] fun as possible, just to buy them in.” In this, she has found success: “I had one student who shared with me... [that] his friends asked him like, ‘why are you in the special math class?’ And he is like ‘it’s actually pretty fun in there.’” Relationships further developed as students came to “know that I care for them a lot.” Like her work with Crusaders, “I also try to get them to realize that they're not alone, that they have a support system.” In the end, she felt it was worth the effort: “I think they have grown a lot. I think it's the same amount of growth as... in those 10 weeks [of CAAP] as well. It's a difference. I see a difference.”

Marney saw collaboration “opposed to direct instruction... it gets boring [when] we just do notes.” She solicited her students’ perspective, “and they enjoy reciprocal paired teaching.”

This resulted in students being “actually engaged and actually investing into this learning, [which] is beneficial for them.” Conversely, she feels “in traditional classrooms, yes, some students can learn from taking down notes, but that isn't true for all students... It has to be learning in an engaging way.” Collaboration is also pragmatic, “because they're already with the peers in the classroom, why not have them work together?” Similar strategies could work with larger groups; while it “can get chaotic,” it can be successful “if planned carefully, or maybe thought of in a different way” than Rockland’s norms.

Ultimately, Marney felt defeated at Rockland. In our first interview, she came to tears when talking about the school’s response to her tactful and well-reasoned objections to “Hawaiian Shirt Day,” seeing it as culturally insensitive. Her supervisor and principal simply dismissed her concerns without consideration. At the time of our second interview, she shared “it sounds so sad to say this, but I feel as if I make more of an impact on Crusaders... than being a teacher.” She had found herself in an environment “where teachers are only teaching a certain way, and I asked them ‘do you have any projects you would like your students to do, or any other way of teaching a certain lesson?’ There's always more direct instruction, more practice and tests. It's, like, very traditional.” The working environment

has made me feel... as if I'm not able to have more genuine conversations with the kids. I know that schools are trying to implement social-emotional learning... But I don't feel like this is happening... The school has different priorities. Teachers have different priorities. And so, I would just say that if the schools are not implementing it, then the students are not benefiting from it.

She found her ideas rebuffed, especially in “integrating social justice with math and having a conversation about... analyzing data or graphing mathematical models in order to make folks

more aware about issues in the community.” She gave an example of a lesson she had designed, in which students would have examined the “‘school to prison pipeline,’ and try to make it into a system of linear equation problems and analyzing that.” Being the ‘intervention’ teacher, she did not have the authority to negotiate with her ‘content’ colleagues, and the lesson was never taught. The situation left her “having this idea and being inspired to do this type of work, and not being able to actually implement it in my own classroom. It’s a terrible feeling.”

Contrasting CAAP and Rockland, Marney decided she wanted to “be a workplace that’s more collaborative, ‘cause I love collaborating with Mentors, Facilitators... I wanna be able to collaborate with the students. Schools need to have that collaboration.” When she asked about the lack thereof, teachers blamed students for not having the skill sets for collaboration. She responded, “that is not a good reason.” She agreed that students were “not engaged,” not for lack of skill, but “because the teachers are up there and throwing facts at them... How can they attain it if they don’t do it a different way? ...Maybe that’s why they’re not obtaining the skills.” She believed teachers’ “mission is to motivate, so why not be more engag[ing]? Why not try something new?” Eventually, she decided to leave.

Conclusion.

On a personal level, CAAP helped Marney develop reflective dispositions and interpersonal skills. Choice and self-advocacy remained consistent themes throughout our interviews, both in Crusaders’ and students’ decision-making and teacher agency. She detailed how collaboration and dialogue fostered motivation and engagement for reluctant learners and supported her work in differentiated instruction.

At Rockland, Marney found a “traditional” school explicitly opposed to the values and practices she encountered at CAAP. This dichotomy helped her recognize the consequences of

unsound pedagogy. Despite a dry curriculum and an inflexible co-teacher, she attempted to maintain prosocial rituals, institute collaborative learning, and stress dialogue to both frame and encourage academic success with her small groups. Her attempts to adopt ABL practices and ideas on a larger scale were unsuccessful. At Chafee, she looked forward to putting these ideas into action.

Case X: Emma

Introduction.

Emma earned a BA in Elementary Education and English Literature in Rhode Island, despite her family's offer to pay full tuition if she attended a school in her native New Hampshire.

She needed to get away.

Emma described her "rough childhood" as involving "a lot of emotional abuse and trauma from my parents." This resulted in "a lot of anxiety, a lot of self-doubt. Shutting down, lashing out. Becoming very defensive." She observed the same from students in "absolutely... every [school] district I've been in."

Growing up, school became a solace, "a place where I could be myself, and I made friends. People who cared about me. I did love reading and art, and I loved a lot of the subjects, except math." This significantly informed her desire to become a teacher:

I wanted to give back, in the way that teachers that I grew up with... showed me care, 'cause I know a lot of kids, especially in these urban areas, don't have that. So, for eight hours a day, I wanted to give them a safe place where they could come and not have to worry."

Looking for job experience in education, Emma joined the CAAP staff in 2018, in her junior year of college. The appeal was

a new way of looking at education, and I liked the idea of teaching kids that don't always get the life skills from their parents... the people that, you know, for lack of a better word, should be teaching them this... It fell back to me wanting to give kids a safe place, give them someone to look up to, someone they feel safe with.

While Emma repeatedly stressed empathy and compassion for youth, it was framed by the deficit-based belief that families are not sufficiently fostering “life skills,” thus causing the responsibility to fall on the schools:

That's kind of the role of the parent, to teach your kid how to face life and be there for them and talk to them. But not every parent is there, whereas the teacher's job... it's to be there for them and be a friend or a confidant. But also, the teacher is supposed to teach them math and science and reading and all of that stuff. So, they've got all of that going on, on top of having to teach your kid to say ‘please’ and ‘thank you.’ That's something that I personally feel that a parent should have taught their children.

Emma stated that schools “stupidly assume that parents are gonna be there to teach their kids that stuff.”

Emma identified trust, communication, self-confidence, and teamwork as central themes in CAAP; “all those things that you don't learn necessarily in a general education setting, but are still very pertinent to general education, and just life itself.” Through CAAP, Crusaders “learn without even knowing what they're learning, and then by week 10, they're all talking to each other and they're all happy and they all know how to trust each other and collaborate and communicate and work together with people.”

A late hire, Emma missed the onboarding Mentor training, and was paired with another novice for her first CAAP session. As such, she “hit the ground running” without the typical informal apprenticeship with a more experienced Mentor. She noted “I was a little unprepared, a little nervous, a little confused. But I felt like I kinda just picked it up pretty quickly... but that's also part of my life. I just wing everything, and eventually it falls into place.”

Emma described that hiring college students and recent graduates “gives [Crusaders] an example of their possible futures... But they also gain someone that they can ask questions that may be personal to them or confide in something that they wouldn't feel comfortable talking to, somebody like a teacher.” Identifying as white with a middle-class rural upbringing, Emma said most Mentors “not myself necessarily included, come from a similar urban background [to Crusaders]... they know what it's like to grow up in these scenarios.” As a result, Mentors readily achieved credibility with Crusaders, and could “make them think, ‘how do you do this in your everyday life?’”

At the time of our interviews, Emma had left a middle school ‘fellowship’ in Community Falls to teach at Rhode Island Academy (RIA), an ‘out-of-district-placement’ for children with significant behavioral challenges. Here, her childhood experiences helped her to empathize with students, because “I kinda know what it's like to be in the mindset of a lot of the kids at this school, not having an adult to look up to, or having someone who cares about your feelings [instead of] someone who only just sees your flaws and tells you how awful you are.”

Personal Development.

Emma was open about her personal challenges, and credited being a CAAP Mentor with helping her “mental health in general... I used to not believe in myself. This was a product of my youth and growing up.” While she still has “a lot of anxiety,” CAAP “has helped me manage

some of that. I've learned how to process my own feelings just by processing with kids. I'm taking my own advice a little more.”

As a Mentor, Emma felt “safe in the environment [where] I'm working, and that's not something I'm used to with home life.” Much of this stemmed from staff relationships, as “my peers are also my friends. My colleagues [and I] had strong, comfortable relationships.” She was “not used to someone believing in me... so it's had a positive impact on the way I view myself and the way I work, and how I feel about my work... that it's okay to fail. I shouldn't beat myself up.” She later said her Facilitator was

the only person who never made me self-doubt myself at a job, even... when I knew I was struggling, but I was struggling for other reasons, and [he] called me out, [and] still didn't make me feel like I was failing. Constantly... I forecast, ‘I'm gonna fuck this up... it's just gonna not be great, I'm failing, I'm doing bad,’ but I always have [his] voice in the back of my head.

Emma found herself learning many of the same skills she was fostering in Crusaders:

I've definitely learned how to process better. I know how to have those conversations with people... If I'm fighting with someone, if I'm just stressed out... and I'm frustrated, I could take a step back now and be like, ‘okay, this is what's going wrong, this is why we're failing. What do I need? How can we go back and make this work?’ I think that's made me definitely a better person to communicate with... The way I grew up, it was you just get mad. You get mad and you leave.

Eventually, such self-management tools became “a natural thing” as she “kind of grew out of what I grew up with, with my parents and how they taught me to deal with anger and stress and frustration.” This led her to believe that the “program should not necessarily just be for

kids... I'm an adult, and I didn't have the right processing skills and communication skills that I needed in every situation. I worked for CAAP for a year and a half, and here I am. I know how to do it.”

Professional Development.

While Emma’s introduction to CAAP was abbreviated, she readily made connections to her concurrent child-care work, notably in the transparency of communication between youth and adults. Rather than immediately reprimand children in disputes, she came to “have them talk it out, ask about feelings... Explain [to them] why you do what you do.” For her, “as a teacher, [CAAP has] given me the skills to make my students comfortable enough to come to me with these problems and concerns.” She continued that CAAP taught her building relationships is

the first thing that teachers should do. If you don't have a relationship, you're not gonna be able to teach. You're going to know nothing about [students]. They're not gonna like that. They may not even like you. They're not gonna care what you have to say. Kids [also] need relationships with other kids, ‘do you not want to be isolated in school? You don't wanna not have *[sic]*... any friends?’

According to Emma, schools “don't focus on the individual learner, like CAAP does. They don't focus on life skills; they focus on numbers.” As such, traditional schools “don't see the individual student, they see the grade. They compare [students] constantly, and CAAP doesn't do that.” Instead, Crusaders were seen as “their own people, they all learn differently, they're all valued. Mentors take initiative to learn about their kids, taking consideration into each individual and getting to know them individually as well.”

Emma struggled with building her professional confidence, and she described that her default self-criticism gave way to the idea that “teachers learn from their mistakes.” She credited

CAAP with instilling the belief that “it's okay to know that you're gonna fail sometimes. And it's okay to know that you can always try again. You know, ‘growth mindset.’” This stemmed from the program’s emphasis on processing, where “even though you didn't succeed, maybe with a challenge, you've still got something out of it, you know better next time, and you know how to relate that to a life skill.” Her growing confidence resulted in a greater sense of resiliency and a decreased desire for control, “‘cause you know, deep down, you couldn't control the situation, not everything is perfect.”

Professional Practice.

Emma’s use of ABL activities in her classroom ran counter to messages she received growing up, where “a lot of teachers... were like, 'you can't learn from games, can't learn from fun.' My French teacher actually told me, ‘you don't learn from games.’” In her classroom, Emma attempted to foreground experiential learning, especially in kinesthetic experience, as “all those things that we do [at CAAP], they're not just sitting at desks the whole time and hearing, ‘this is how you trust somebody... this is how you talk to people, this is how you...’ [We] *do* all the things that you need to learn *how to do*.”

Achieving positive relationships with RIA students required “be[ing] open and honest from the get-go, being very consistent, and compartmentalizing a lot of your [own] emotions,” as her students “have outbursts, 'cause they're going to test you. That's a given. Right off the bat... they're going to say, ‘fuck you. You fucking suck. I fucking hate you.’” She saw this mainly as a byproduct of past trauma and academic frustrations: “they don't mean it; they just can't figure out that one times 18 equals 18... and they don't know why.” As a result, teachers “can't just take that personally. Show them that those words can't hurt you, and you're still going to help them, no matter what.”

When she began teaching at RIA, Emma “had no control. The students had all the control. They knew that I had no authority. So ABL helped me kind of gain a little bit of that authority with them.” Central here was not just relationship-building, but confronting students’ preconceived notions:

they figured I was just this ‘random white chick’ walking in, ‘who thinks she’s gonna be able to boss me around.’ That’s what they thought. ‘She’s just gonna sit there and boss me around telling me all this stuff that I don’t wanna do.’ But then it turns out, this ‘random white chick’ doesn’t just ‘want me to sit there and do math problems that I don’t know... She wants me to have fun, she wants me to play games and work with my friends. It’s not just learning, learning, learning.’

Well, it is, but they don’t know that.

As a byproduct of the process, “they’re bonding... because they’re having fun. Fun helps you build a relationship with someone... so that means gaining their trust and communicating better.”

Educator Preparation

Emma’s teaching is rooted in the sentiment that “engagement equals enjoyment,” an aspect of learning notably lacking in her preparation program, where

there are so many... tools that aren’t being shown for engagement... We’re not taught in general education courses that these kids learn better through movement or activity. ‘They just need to sit there and use the little manipulative pieces, or read the passage that is about a Fortnite character, [sarcastically] so that has to be engaging...’ No, no. Get them moving, have them do a Fortnite dance while reading the Fortnite paragraph.

Emma stated she “didn't learn any of this in my teacher prep program, which depicted only “the perfect scenario... always the cookie cutter perfect lesson,” in which every challenge or conflict reached a smooth and comprehensive resolution.

Emma described an example of this incongruence, when she broke down in tears after a student-teaching evaluation. An hour prior to the observation, she was told her cooperating teacher would be absent, and that she would oversee the class. This meant she was suddenly responsible for “a lot of stuff” while simultaneously reconfiguring her instructional plans. The lesson was chaotic and ineffective. Although Emma tried to explain the scenario to her supervisor, she was met with “well, you didn't do this. I didn't hear that. Why didn't you do this in your lesson plan? You said you were gonna do that. What happened?” And she just couldn't grasp the idea that, well... shit happened. Yeah, it was a time. It was bad.”

In contrast, CAAP gave Emma an opportunity to explore her practice without the expectation of perfection. It made her “a better teacher” by fostering greater self-awareness and professional confidence. The experience taught her to be “more flexible, go[ing] with the flow better, [realizing] that there's always gonna be eight thousand outcomes that [you] can't forecast, and you don't know which one is gonna happen, and you just gotta be happy with whatever outcome you get and work with it from there.” In her classroom, this translated into “a lot more hands-on or physical activities.” She “also learned how to work with kids that are having a tough time emotionally... how to talk to them a little better”

Overall, she declared her university program “a mess,” in large part because “the professors and the supervisors have been out of the educational system for so long that they don't actually know what it's like in a modern classroom.” Instead, “they preach... 'this is how it

works.’ But they've never seen it in action, so they don't actually know... that's not how it's gonna work every time.”

Conclusion.

Emma’s work as a Mentor was rooted in her own still-raw experiences growing up, giving her a unique perspective on the vulnerable, disaffected, and disenfranchised youth in her care. To her, emotions mattered, and manifested in the ways she viewed herself, her work, her school, and her students. She expressed a sincere desire to support struggling youth through role-modeling and pragmatic skill-building and relied on classroom affect to negotiate relationships and deliver academic content. She found more ready application of CAAP strategies than many study participants and understood that skills taught to Crusaders can also be of significant benefit to those who Mentor them. Much of this came down to motivation, as the ‘fun factor’ was central to student learning, especially in the challenges she faced at RIA.

Table Completion Exercise

Eight study participant completed university-based educator preparation programs (EPP’s) before they taught in K-12 schools. Each filled out a table completion exercise asking them to rate the emphasis of 24 themes in teacher education, such as “engagement,” “pre-designed curricula,” “differentiation,” and “teacher identity” in their ABL experience and in their EPP’s on a 1-5 scale. Simple quantitative analysis highlighted ten areas of distinction (Table 4.1), meaning there was a statistically significant difference, or minimum one-point difference in mean value, reported between participants’ ABL and EPP experiences. These areas are represented graphically in Table 4.2.

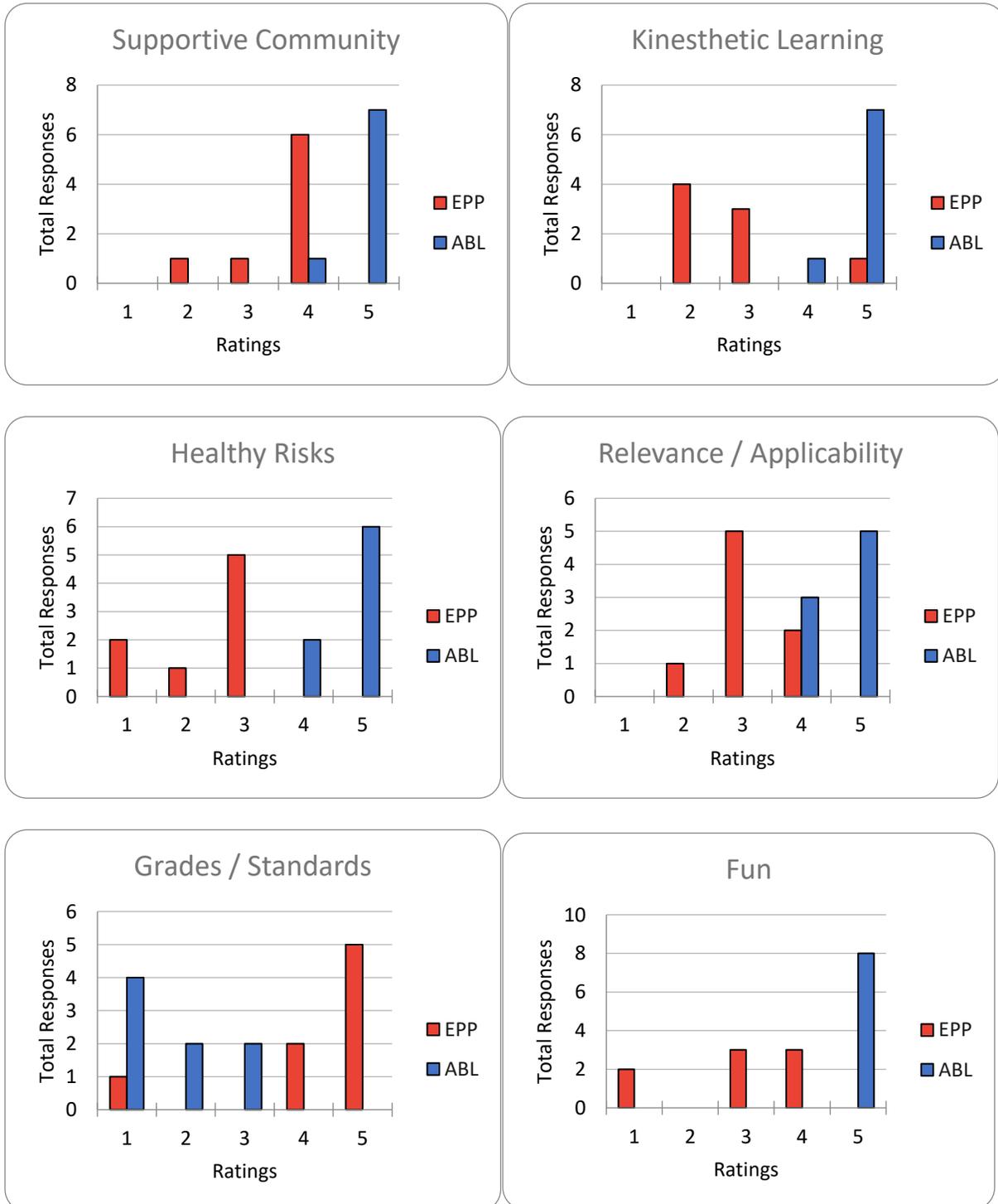
Table 4.1: Table Completion Exercise Areas of Distinction

Critical Issue in Teacher Development: Areas of Greatest Significance	Table Completion Item	Mean		Mode		Standard Deviations		Level of Significance (P Value)
		EPP	ABL	EPP	ABL	EPP	ABL	
Achieved Statistical Significance								
	Supportive Community	3.63	4.88	4	5	0.74	0.35	0.0001
	Kinesthetic Learning	2.75	4.88	2	5	1.04	0.35	0.0005
	Healthy Risks	2.38	4.75	3	5	0.92	0.46	0.0007
	Relevance / Applicability	3.13	4.63	3	5	0.64	0.52	0.0008
	Grades / Standards	4.25	1.75	5	1	1.39	0.89	0.0016
	Fun	2.88	5	3	5	1.25	0	0.0019
Statistically Inconclusive, with ≥ 1 Point Mean Difference								
	Collaborative Learning	3.378	4.88	3	5	0.92	0.35	0.0025
	Reciprocal Learning	2.71	4.43	3	4	0.95	0.53	0.0031
	Creative Problem Solving	3.63	4.88	3	5	0.74	0.35	0.0053
	Reflection / Metacognition	3.63	5	5	5	1.3	0	0.0203
Key:								
Greater Emphasis Reported in Educator Preparation Program (EPP)	Greater Emphasis Reported in Adventure-Based Learning experience (ABL)							

Nearly all respondents on nearly all metrics, identified more emphasis on these criteria in their ABL work than their educator preparation programs. For most, it was a matter not of kind but of degree; none of the themes in question was rated ‘0’ in either category. Anecdotally, a few participants added commentary describing their educator preparation programs merely gave “lip service” to ideas such as “creative problem-solving” and “reciprocal learning.”

Given the small sample size, tests performed were statistically underpowered. When adjusted using Bonferroni’s correction, six items emerged as statistically significant in comparing ABL and EEP’s: supportive community, relevance/applicability, kinesthetic learning, healthy risks, grades/standards, and fun. Of these, it is to be expected that EPP’s would place a higher emphasis on assessment, and ABL on enjoyment. The other three were seen to have greater emphasis in ABL as well.

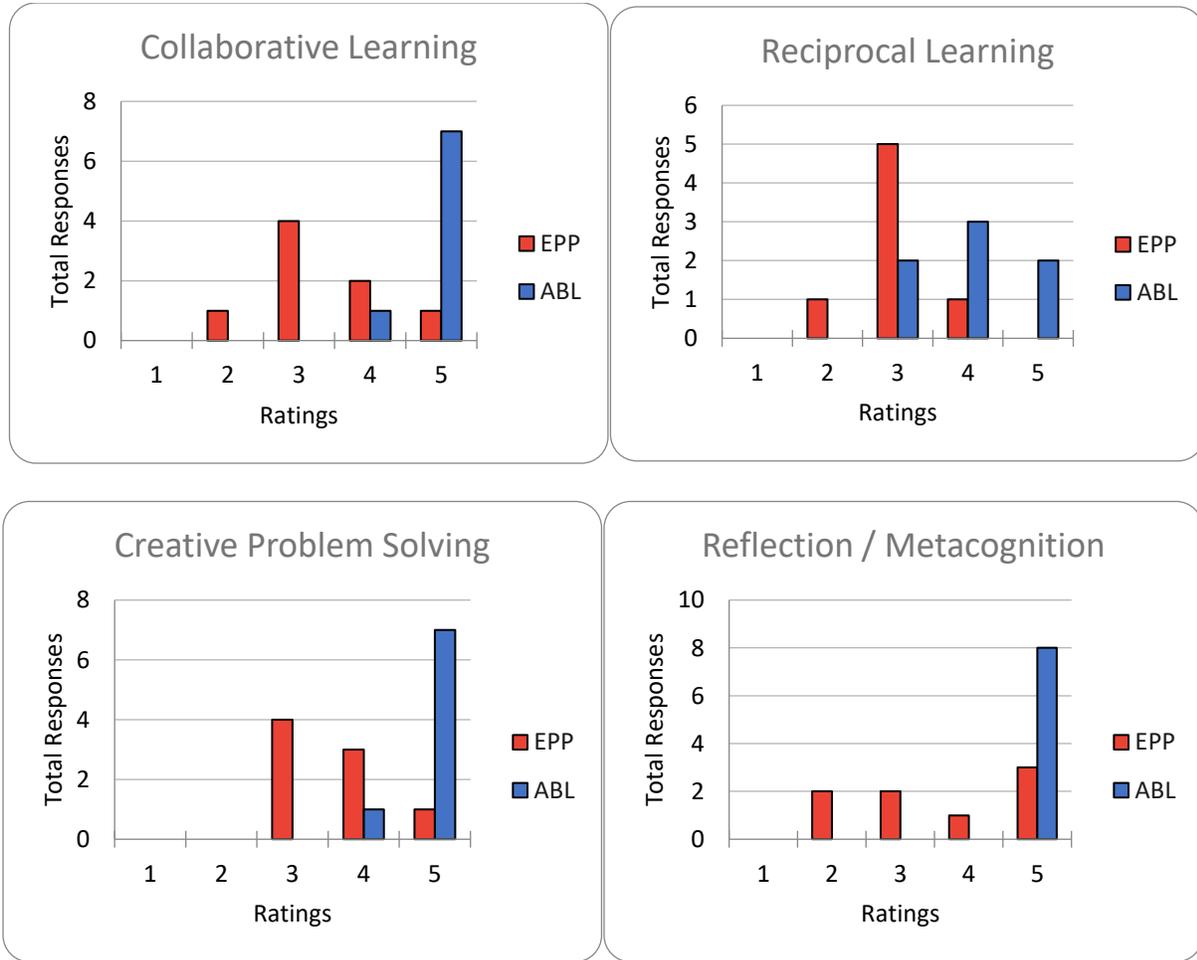
Table 4.2: Selected Graphs of Table Completion Exercise: Areas of Statistical Significance



It is likely that, with a greater sample size, additional categories would have reached the threshold of significance. Thus, it is also important to draw attention to ‘inconclusive’ areas were

participants' responses showed a significant mean difference. Themes of creative problem-solving, collaborative learning, reflection / metacognition, reciprocal learning, teacher identity, and peer feedback each averaged at least one point of difference in mean value. ABL was rated higher in each (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Selected Graphs of Table Completion Exercise: Areas with ≥ 1 Point Mean Difference



Overall, participants who attended more selective private universities found closer alignment between their courses of study and their ABL practices. Similarly, participants with graduate degrees reported a higher degree of connection; anecdotally, they were significantly more satisfied with their preparatory programs than more recent graduates, who were more skeptical than those with years in the profession.

On average, ratings for ABL were nearly one point higher overall, indicating that most of the 24 themes selected were perceived to have a greater degree of emphasis in ABL than in educator preparation programs. This alone should not be conflated with participants' satisfaction or program quality; the intent was not to establish the superiority of either program in any area, but to highlight aspects of difference. However, it does establish participants, while Mentors, perceived significantly different and more prevalent opportunities to explore themes of “supportive community,” “kinesthetic learning,” “healthy risks,” “relevance / applicability,” “fun,” “collaborative learning,” “reciprocal learning,” “creative problem-solving,” and “reflection / metacognition” through CAAP than their formal teacher training. When viewed in concert with interview data and participant comments on the Table Completion exercise itself, many found these aspects of their ABL experience to be more relevant personal and professional development in these areas, as reflected in Chapter Six.

Chapter V: Transformations

While common themes emerged, each participant shared distinct ways ABL impacted their life, even though “transformative learning can feel quite threatening when it brings into question the identity, or an identity, through which we have interacted with ourselves and the world” (Cranton, 2016, p. 53). Personally, they gained confidence and perspective; professionally, they refined or reconceptualized their pedagogical philosophies, and initiated instruction outside traditional classroom practices. For many, serving as a Mentor was an opportunity to enter the world of professional adulthood, develop relationships, and enhance their coursework in education. While the result of transformative learning always involves a deep and lasting shift in perspectives and actions, “the ways of getting there can differ depending on the person or people and the context or situation” (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 3). Thus, it is the unique experience of each participant which speaks to meaningful changes in their epistemologies, beliefs, skills, and practices.

This research was designed to investigate the overall question: In what ways can experience as an Adventure Based Learning (ABL) leader impact the subsequent epistemology and practices of professional educators?

Sub-questions include:

1. To what degree, if any, do participants’ epistemological beliefs about teaching and learning change through serving as an ABL facilitator?
2. What, if any, epistemological beliefs, philosophical concepts, and pedagogical practices have participants adopted or adapted from their ABL experiences to their pedagogical practice? How do participants make sense of and negotiate the differences? What, if any, similarities and differences in philosophy and practices did participants identify between

their educator preparation programs, their ABL experience, and current professional practices?

3. To what degree, if any, do participants' ABL experiences meet criteria for transformative learning?

These questions focus on recognition of dissonance, discontinuity, exploration of difference, and change in belief that leads to change in action --- all fundamental tenets of transformative learning, which entails three necessary, corollary steps. First, there is past experience, which anchors our understandings of the world. Second, there is new experience, which allows us to reconsider, reevaluate, and reconceptualize prior experiences in terms of the new. This questioning of previous assumptions or beliefs distinguishes learning as transformative. Third, understandings from both old and new experiences must be reconciled and applied to future experiences. Without this final step, according to Mezirow (2003), transformative learning has not occurred.

Recognizing Transformative Learning

In this chapter, research questions are explored through Mezirow's (2000) definition of transformative learning as

the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying those assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight (p. 8).

As a process, only the learner can declare or quantify to what degree an experience is transformative. Thus, transformative learning is subjective in designation. Mezirow's definition was selected because it presents criteria for transformative learning as a set of outcomes which are descriptive, not diagnostic. While participants' internal processes may be inscrutable, what they identified as the *results* of their time as Mentors suggest transformative learning.

Using Mezirow's definition (above) entails asking eight questions:

1. What participant frames of reference were "taken-for-granted" that are now not?
2. How are participants more discriminating?
3. How are participants more open and inclusive?
4. How do participants interact with / learn from the experiences of others?
5. How are participants more capable of change?
6. How are participants more reflective?
7. How have participants' beliefs changed?
8. How have participants' actions changed?

These categories should not be viewed as mutually exclusive or "linear, discrete, or independent" (Cranton, 2016, p. 47) of each other. The discussion below is not an exhaustive list of all criteria for each participant, but illustrative examples.

What participant frames of reference were "taken-for-granted" that are now not?

Individuals build their unique views on the world based on their peculiar interactions therewith. Formative experiences, especially those of significant consequence or repetition, become sources of subjective 'truth' about the world. They lead to "habitual expectations," (Cranton, 2016, p. 7), and serve as a "lens through which we see the world and form the basis for

our actions in the world” (p. 22). These “meaning schemes function... as the rules and expectations that govern our lives” (Cranton, 2016, p. 17, citing Mezirow, 1985).

Prior frames of reference serve as touchpoints for growth and can illustrate the expansion of an individual’s mental frameworks. This is traditionally seen as a distinctively rational and volitional process which involves being honest with oneself, remaining open to change, and being willing to act differently in the future. Once a person’s frame of reference expands, it becomes “impossible for individuals to revert to the old perspective” (Baumgartner, 2012, p. 101); it may continue to grow, but it cannot return. Educators are in the business of fostering such growth and must therefore be willing to undertake it themselves to combat prejudices, enhance their practice, and model the capacity for change. This requires critiquing and changing frames of reference to create new understanding and learning.

College-age Mentors are positioned to make assessments of their own upbringing with a growing degree of critical distance. For Jonas and Carlos, working at CAAP entailed the recognition that their childhood experiences were not universal. Prior to becoming a Mentor, Carlos believed “kids are just kids,” and such ideologies as “toxic masculinity” were simply accepted parts of life. There was little differentiation in his view, and thus a low level of understanding the unique needs and behaviors of individuals. CAAP helped him develop an “educator’s perspective” which recognized the individuality of learners, or the processes of knowledge construction through the focus on personalized learning. As a child, Jonas encountered a unique racial and cultural diversity which, to him, was normal. When he moved away, he recognized that racially and culturally, this was not a universal experience; however, he still took for granted the economic security and academic success he enjoyed as a young person. He discovered salient disconnects in economic status and academic abilities when he worked

with Crusaders who faced food insecurity, interpersonal challenges, and significant gaps in literacy. The experience helped him recognize some of the privileges he had been afforded. He has subsequently drawn on these disconnects to build empathy with youth in his care, keeping a careful eye towards the student “off in the corner being quiet” as a primary concern. For both Carlos and Jonas, this was more than just exposure to difference; it stemmed from active engagement in the challenging work of connecting and empathizing with those different than themselves. In recognizing their positionality through their work with Crusaders, they came to better understand their work, and themselves.

In school, Lynn was “just talked at all the time, or told ‘read and answer questions at the back of the chapter,’” and thus “did not learn much, and retained even less.” She was intrigued at the possibility of change. Becoming a Mentor exposed her to pedagogy which, rather than alienate learners or transmit information, necessitated affective engagement and knowledge construction. To Lynn, CAAP eschewed the deficit model inherent in transmission pedagogy, and stressed explicit avenues for transfer. To her, relationships were key in expanding her views; her CAAP colleagues modeled a different type of education, and a different type of educator. While this led her to be even more angry at her high school and college instructors, it laid the foundation for a new conceptualization of teaching and learning.

Each of Chris’ various positions at CAAP brought a “totally different” perspective on working with both youth and adults which “changed a lot of assumptions.” These shifts helped him understand the behind-the-scenes logistics of the CAAP endeavor, such as food service and transportation, which he had taken for granted as a Mentor. This both broadened his understanding of what needed to happen for the program to be successful, but also contextualized his work with others. The process culminated when he became CAAP’s Program

Coordinator, “trying to think about everything, not just, ‘I’m a Facilitator, these are my Mentors, this is what I need. This is what works for me and us.’” Instead, “I was like, ‘okay, I hear you Facilitator, but I also hear this Facilitator, and this manager, that manager, these Mentors, these kids, and the Crusade. It was just a whole different ballpark.” Rather than attempt to please all parties, his viewpoint broadened, and he was better able to leverage the available resources in the best interests of the program. As a result, he “gained a lot of perspective on meeting [Crusaders and staff] ‘where they’re at,’” helping them negotiate the systems in which they operate. Now a department chair at Chafee, his “career in CAAP is actually mirroring my career in my school community now,” in his evolving understanding of the systems he negotiates.

Changes in frames of reference entail a different perspective on prior experiences, and thus prior knowledge. They can be humbling, even threatening, to embrace, as they entail recognizing the limits of one’s earlier views. However, for these participants, these changes were framed as growth in their understanding of school, the nuances of their practice, and their understanding of others.

How are participants more discriminating?

Discrimination, or perhaps better framed as ‘discernment,’ is the capacity to carefully distinguish salient differences in order to make informed decisions. Ultimately, discrimination allows individuals to make more thoughtful and strategic decisions based on justifiable mental frameworks for assessing quality, relevance, import, and impact. To some degree, these schemata are under perpetual revision as individuals adjust to new and sometimes disorienting experiences (Mezirow, 2000). In these moments, individuals can “critically examine their habitual expectations, revise them, and act on the revised point of view” (Cranton, 2016, p. 15).

Such a process results in perspectives that are more “discriminating” (p. 15) and “better justified” (p. 60).

In being discerning, educators must recognize and carefully weigh myriad factors which constitute the context and assessment of learning experiences (Baumgartner, 2012). They are entrusted with decisions both momentary and momentous and are responsible for exercising precise judgment and insight to parse the complexities of classroom practice. Discrimination seen through the lens of transformative learning is a conscious and rational process which helps teachers bridge their values with their actions.

CAAP offered participants opportunities to grow both personally and professionally, and Chris did both. At work, he struggled with perfectionism and the impulse to “control every single thing that happens.” He came to realize that “the more you micromanage, you’re actually not accomplishing more.” He responded in two ways: seizing opportunities for Mentor leadership and reordering his own priorities. He progressively released more authority and responsibility to his staff, advising Mentors to “[l]oosen up... don’t micromanage,” but instead to “slowly step back and let the kids take over.” He began to deliberately incorporate ambiguity in his practice, capitalizing on multiple interpretations to manipulate expectations, ensure success, or simply foster “really great conversations.” Recognizing that CAAP “wasn’t flawless,” and that ambiguity can result in productive struggle, helped him reconcile his leadership role, and become more comfortable with the messy unpredictability of experiential learning.

CAAP also helped Chris reorder his interpersonal priorities. He “always struggled with” the urge to unilaterally “take care of everyone.” As a Facilitator, he shifted his professional decision-making criteria from nurturing others and maintaining status-quo relationships to working in the best interest of Crusaders. He felt “a different kind of empowerment—not just

empowerment working with the kids, but making decisions that impact kids.” This “definitely helped” in leading adults as department chair at Chafee and understanding the priorities and responsibilities of a teacher-administrator. His leadership positions at CAAP helped him in “being able to say ‘no,’” recognizing that caring for others includes “being firm, in showing more ‘tough love’ than just ‘love.’” While this caused “rifts” with colleagues, his experience making difficult decisions led him to greater self-confidence and helped “define better boundaries in my personal life.”

At CAAP, Sydney “learned to have fun at work.” She found meaningful relationships with her colleagues, and satisfaction in helping youth to grow. However, it was still definitely “work.” To her, the CAAP staff were a tight-knit and collaborative group that made decisions based on “what we need to do for the program.” The culture encouraged staff to “make professional decisions” within lateral leadership structure wherein each member “has a role to play and value to add.” Thus, her CAAP supervision became more support and encouragement than oversight, providing her a tangible alternative to the problems at her university position where systemic inertia, ambiguous hierarchies, and ego politics took precedence over service to students and collaboration with colleagues. She was an Associate Director with no direct reports, and her suggestions for improvements were regularly dismissed in a culture of “this is what it is, and this is what it’s always been.” Her attempts to implement constructive feedback thus “fell flat.” Her CAAP experience helped her to delineate criteria for a satisfying work environment. At the time of our interviews, she was preparing to resign from her university.

Aaron developed a critical eye towards some of his fellow Mentors’ “behavior that would be more typical of an authoritarian teacher, like yelling over [Crusaders] or getting a little too involved in stopping things and not letting [youth] have more autonomy.” This became a default

stance for those who did not understand the purpose of struggle in growth, or who were unable to contain their own competitive natures. Making the connection to teaching practices he decried, he saw these tendencies result in feelings of incapacity and disappointment for youth. In part from these recognitions, Aaron declined a job offer from Teach for America (TFA), because such programs “perpetuate this idea that teaching is pretty simple, and that you just need to have charisma and you can engage a group of students, and they will do exactly what you want them to do, if you just learn how to be kind of a drill sergeant.” In describing teachers as both “charismatic” and “drill sergeant[s],” TFA’s expectations appear self-contradictory. They involve both character traits and commensurate behaviors which belie the complexities and nuances of teaching. While he acknowledged this formularized approach “might work in some places, perhaps,” he saw it juxtaposed against “the type of learning that we do at CAAP,” which he believed was “excellent.” By gaining an insider perspective on teaching at CAAP, he was better equipped to make this decision.

Unfortunately, his internship experience in Dallas did not reflect similar values and practices. The “turnaround” model he witnessed was premised on increasing the amount of instructional time and the frequency of evaluation. Simplistically, the school believed “just bringing in the ‘best’ teachers to teach more” would ameliorate the school’s systemic failures. For Aaron, the result was another “awful” experience, and his decision to leave the classroom.

Central to discernment is the ability to understand multiple perspectives, as it is only through understanding all options that an individual can make the most informed decisions. While Lynn endorses CAAP’s emphasis on increasing student autonomy by inverting traditional structures of authority, she also expressed an understanding of forces prohibitive to this mindset in many contemporary schools. Unlike other study participants, she recognized that material

circumstances, such as lack of funding, overcrowding, and necessary (though convoluted) scheduling can make schools “a little crazy.” There are also safety concerns when “there’s some places that students are not supervised all the time.” The pragmatic solution is to centralize authority and standardize expectations. While “it’s not necessarily the best” solution, she understands “you only have a certain amount of time in the day, in the year” to meet academic expectations. As such, she was able to parse her views on top-down authority in school in greater nuance.

Discernment is a facet of judgment which allows individuals to clearly and carefully define the context of their decisions. When used effectively, it allows individuals to eschew surface interpretations, and results in greater depth, complexity, and nuance of opinions. For Chris, discernment resulted in an improved understanding of boundaries and responsibilities. While Aaron and Lynn came to different conclusions, both demonstrated how their CAAP experiences informed their evolving views on the justifiability of authority in school.

How are participants more open and inclusive?

Individuals’ life experiences fall into mental categories which create patterns. People learn what types of food they dislike, which careers and hobbies interest them, what beliefs they follow, and what relationships they seek. Without these patterns of preference to reference, it would be impossible for an individual to navigate the world. However, overdependence upon established categories is limiting. Becoming more open and inclusive requires a “deep shift in perspective” (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 3), but not uninterrogated acceptance. It acknowledges the validity of other ways of thinking and living through active investigation and a desire to understand before passing judgement.

Both openness and inclusivity entail an acceptance of unpredictability in both process and outcome (Cranton & Hoggan, 2012), and rely on an acceptance and operationalization of alternate and divergent perspectives, strengths, and challenges (Cranton, 2016). Educators who foster transformative learning “lead by seeing differently, from outside the normal boundaries of their own experiences... in order to allow the future to emerge” (Watkins, Marsick, & Faller, 2012, p. 379). They use this positioning to “create space for others to share in this process” (Watkins, Marsick, & Faller, 2012, p. 380).

The more diverse and divergent perspectives one considers in conceptualizing the world, the better equipped one is to make informed decisions, avoid bias, and accept new learning. Actively including others, especially those traditionally marginalized, is essential to working for justice—a critical responsibility of teachers. Genuine openness, on the part of educators, is the key to fostering a classroom which is inclusive of all its members.

While a Mentor, Marney “learned that all kids are different, and all kids have different needs.” In working with Crusaders, “just to hear their story, their challenges and their successes, and just being a part of their journey and seeing their growth... that's... rewarding in and of itself.” She worked to honor and include all members of her Crusader teams, especially the marginalized youth who “get overlooked in their own school, [by] those people who are involved in their life.” Seeing them demonstrate growth at CAAP was “really eye-opening.”

In interviews, Marney emphasized the role of Mentors was to listen and give advice, but “not make the decisions for [Crusaders]. Have that person make a decision for themselves.” Cognizant that “it’s ultimately their path,” facilitating Crusaders’ success “is a matter of the person seeing it as well.” This was challenging, as Mentors often “want [Crusaders] to make the right decision, so we wanna make it for them.” While she became frustrated “seeing the

Crusaders being so close to being successful,” she recognized the learning occurred when they “figure it out for themselves.”

Marney appreciated that her CAAP colleagues were friendly and “so easily approachable.” As her confidence and competencies grew, she became more open to advice, and “reached out to the support system of CAAP.” She “learned... not to be afraid to actually approach those Site Managers and CAAP Facilitators.” One thing she “learned [through] CAAP is, those [supervisors] are not different, they are there to help you, and they are there to guide you.” She contrasted that with her position at Rockland, where she “wouldn't go to my math department head about how I'm feeling.” having to rely on fellow teachers' support exclusively.

Melissa described her younger self as judgmental of herself and others. Paradoxically, she harshly criticized herself for not meeting perceived standards, yet simultaneously dismissed others who “should know how to do X,” just by virtue of being a fellow adult. Interacting with the diverse CAAP staff helped her realize “not everyone is like me in the way that I think.” She became “very patient, very understanding” of colleagues' varied ways of interacting with the world. She came to “feel for people” who “don't understand something the first time, or if they do something differently than how I would,” accepting ““that's just their way of doing it.”” In her teaching practice, this led her to see “every child is different. Every group is going to be different. Accept people for who they are. Work around that instead of trying to tell them to stop being the way that they are.”

A recurring theme in Chris' interviews was attention to the nuances of communications and the meanings they convey. Bilingual Crusaders faced unique challenges in CAAP's “bias” towards rapid and complex conversations in English. Chris helped his staff distinguish between authentic engagement and verbal participation, encouraging them to “make sure everybody feels

that they have power” by validating difference of individual experiences. By accessing translation resources, nonverbal communication, and written expression, Mentors had a variety of tools to amplify youth voices. Carrying his understanding of bilingual and introverted Crusaders, Chris became “more cognizant of those students in my classroom who are not that vocal.” As long as he “can tell that they are trying to the best of their ability,” individual students’ grades are not negatively impacted by their lack of verbal production. Students “value when they know that teachers see... there are other ways to participate.” To accomplish this work, he strove to “look individually at each youth and how they show whether or not they’re really understanding” core concepts, rejecting the idea that there is only “one way to show if they have learned this or not.”

While many participants discussed the development of dispositions, both for themselves and youth, Aaron explicitly named “character-building” as a purpose of CAAP. Such terminology is absent from the program literature. The phrase itself is rarely used in contemporary discussions of education, as it implies a narrow view of identity and moral values rooted in dominant culture. Aaron, however, sees it as more process than product, and aligned with “that social-emotional aspect of learning” he sees as equally, if not more, important than academic knowledge. Rather than a prescriptive (and thus limiting) set of outcomes, “character” is expansive, generated by the individual while discovering the unique ways they “engage” with others, concepts, and the world around them. By recognizing the moral component of effective education, Aaron moved towards a more holistic pedagogy which redefined “character-building” as a journey towards self-understanding, not conformity to social expectations. Commensurately, the role of the teacher expands beyond academic instructor to include being “a coach and a mentor” as well.

Lynn claimed she is “a very successful teacher because I went through [CAAP].” The program is based on the recognition that youth are “whole human beings” who interact with learning in nuanced and complex ways. She encountered individuals with significantly different backgrounds than her own. The experience convinced her “students are multi-level, multi-faceted. They're more than empty vessels.” As the program progressed, “we became more familiar... meaning family. Like maybe even a big brother, big sister fondness” between Crusaders and staff. This expanded her view of inclusive relationships and belonging, alongside concomitant responsibilities educators bear in the maintenance thereof. Furthermore, it impacted how she viewed her own role in interacting with youth modeled on sisterhood, the idea that “big sisters... guide little sisters by sharing experiences... with younger minds.” Viewing the diverse Crusaders she served, expanding her definition of “family” became an important metaphor driving her work.

Carlos’ emphasis on transferring “locus of control” and “power” to youth had strong roots in his NEISP and CAAP experiences. It required a fundamental shift in thinking about young people’s capabilities; a change in conceptions of responsibility, leadership, and trust; and an inversion of traditional hierarchies and authority structures. Through CAAP, Carlos developed an understanding of the different needs Crusaders brought to the program, which provided “opportunities” for them to both struggle and to shine. By opening more, and more engaging, opportunities for STEM Gen students to explore the field beyond their mandated classes, Carlos was able to ‘reach’ some youth who are otherwise disconnected from school. Carlos then took this a step further, by involving youth at nearly all levels of decision-making, helping the organization itself be more inclusive of student voice and empowerment. In both, he

has come to see development of leadership capacities, and opportunities for their application, as a means towards student success.

Jonas described a lasting influence of NEISP on his teaching as “[a]n openness to be surprised by the kids,” which he believes to be a characteristic of effective teachers. NEISP showed him a unique approach to inclusion which recognized and supported difference without resorting to enforced conformity. Staff were encouraged to develop their own ways of connecting with youth by developing their unique “skill set.” Rather than expect that every staff member could be equally effective with any Crusader, difference encouraged individualization, manifested in what Jonas described as youth being “recruited” to different teams to support their success. While initially this “didn’t seem very teacherly,” it was seen by both staff and Crusaders as genuine.

Openness entails humility and a willingness not only to understand other points of view, but to actively seek them out. It is a particular attitude towards relationships, recognizing the mutual benefits of dialogue. For educators, this fundamentally shifts their relationships with learners to include the interpersonal connection and empathy necessary to work towards greater justice.

How do participants interact with / learn from the experiences of others?

In addition to openness to alternative perspectives, transformative learning can occur through “trying on another’s point of view” (Mezirow, 1985, p. 21), resulting in “a structural reorganization in the way that a person looks at himself [*sic*] and his relationships” (Mezirow, 1975, p. 162). It is concurrently a process of association and disassociation --- the ability to empathize and find connections while maintaining critical distance. Others’ experiences become resources, connections, cautions, and points of empathy which can inform and impact an

individual's beliefs and decisions. According to Cranton (2016), it “may be the crux of the transformative experience --- entering into another's frame of mind with empathy” (p. 77).

Learning from the experiences of others entails “engagement in dialogue with the self and others” (Taylor, 2009, p. 9), exemplified in ABL by processing, as dialogue is the essential medium through which transformation is promoted and developed... the medium for critical reflection to be put into action, where experience is reflected on, assumptions and beliefs are questioned, and habits of mind are ultimately transformed... emphasizing relational and trustful communication (Taylor, 2009, p. 9). Supportive relationships with others in this dialogue become “the Petri dish --- the growth-supporting environment --- that provides both the container and space in which such learning can occur” (Schapiro, Wasserman, & Gallegos, 2012, p. 356).

NEISP exposed Jonas to youth from life circumstances quite different from his own. Crusaders' struggles with poverty emerged in a “scarcity” mentality he never experienced, and he found their academic skill gaps to be eye-opening. By interacting with students in a variety of ways—conversations meals, writing—he developed a more nuanced understanding of their positions, and the recognition that his formative experiences were not universal. While he downplayed the impact of this realization as being “less surprised” when gaps in student skills and knowledge surface in his classroom, it entailed both a greater awareness of issues youth often go to great lengths to hide, and increased empathy for the challenge of what, to him, appeared simple literacy tasks. This led to a repositioning of his own identity as a middle-aged adult, and he made several references to when “we” (presumably he and I) were “growing up.” In addition to academics and wealth, there exist generational divides, and explicit awareness thereof provided him a starting point for greater inclusivity. At one point, he corrected himself,

shifting from “what we take for granted” to “what I took for granted,” further recognizing the boundaries of his frames of reference.

As a result, Jonas paid closer attention to the needs of individual students, and how their experiences and identities outside the classroom informed his understanding of their actions and beliefs. He approached students’ unique circumstances with an openness to learn, and a sensitivity to how his words and actions could be received.

By her own description, prior to CAAP, Lynn lived a sheltered, white, middle-class life of nuclear families, financial security, and community connections, which was both comforting and confining. At CAAP, she met Crusaders who faced “challenges much, much greater than what I grew up with.” She also saw, in Crusaders’ resilience, that these challenges can be overcome by providing “more tools to help deal with the absence of opportunities.” While still endemic of a deficit-based mentality of privilege, learning more about youths’ background experiences enabled her to trace their impact on her classroom and adjust her teaching practice accordingly. Her revised perspective also led her to greater advocacy for marginalized youth, regularly resisting her colleagues’ haste to label, chastise, or punish students whose actions may be readily comprehensible in the context of their life experiences.

When he first encountered CAAP, Robin was surprised “this is really a thing” to which he wished he’d been exposed “my whole academic career!” He described himself as a non-traditional learner, preferring “hands on” tasks which encouraged creativity and problem solving. By imagining how he would have experienced ABL, analyzing Crusaders’ perspectives helped him contextualize and reflect upon his own upbringing. Were ABL experiences better integrated with “traditional” academics, Robin believed it would increase the engagement and academic success of students like himself. He came to see pedagogy as problem-posing, particularly in

challenging students' thought processes, not just their academic knowledge. He described this type of learning as natural, that persons are "supposed to learn that way"

As a member of the same geographic community as his students, Robin was keenly aware of the consequences of youth's choices. He told his students "[y]ou have to make the decision, and you're gonna be a success story, or you're gonna be like the dude that's on the corner, not making much of themselves." Many of those individuals "were my uncles, my aunts, my cousins." Reflecting on his own school and lifestyle choices, he recalled watching "a lot of people go in the other direction, and it's not a good outcome." He was able to learn difficult lessons from their experiences and sought to pass along the same to his Washington students who shared a frame of reference. In the broader context, this was part of his response to the "survival" mentality he saw "for most of these children out here today," a sentiment instilled by parents and resonant in the situations they were "faced with... every single day." To help students understand how to use what they observe in their neighborhood to inform positive decisions, his pedagogy challenged youth to expand their frames of reference by understanding others' perspectives, whether this be in peer conflicts, dealing with difficult teachers, or community situations. By showing students how to capitalize on the experiences of those around them, without having to live with the consequences, Robin made his own strategies for success visible and available resources for youth.

Robin understood that, by virtue of his positionality as a Black male "from the neighborhood," Washington "[s]tudents are always observing what I'm doing, how I move, how I react." He drew on his ABL experience to similarly craft a model of adulthood, and adult interactions with youth, based more on concern and understanding than authority or impulse. He made an explicit analog to CAAP, wherein "the same things we're teaching kids to do, we're

modeling ourselves.” However, it is important to Robin that “change[ing] the narrative... breaking cycles in your family, in your community, or whatever the case is” not be conflated with the stereotype that success is only possible by leaving. He is an active member of the same communities, in the same neighborhood, as his students. He is a role model “24-7,” a living example not only of a Providence student of color who made positive decisions and went on to success, but who did not have to abandon his roots, identity, or family to do so.

Along with several other study participants, Robin believes experience with and training in adventure education would be of significant benefit to beginning educators in their ability to build connections. This includes building collegial networks of support in a challenging profession. Additionally, “[i]f you want teachers to understand how it is to be a middle school student, you pretty much put them in that situation.” ABL experiences could thus build empathy through role-play, positioning new teachers to “navigate [challenges] with that mindset” of a young person, then debrief the challenges they encountered. He is careful to distinguish such a process as developing authentic connections with students beyond “just sympathizing and feeling sorry.” Thus, ABL challenges can be a bridge from sympathy to empathy.

Carlos framed Crusaders’ learning experiences in terms of his own position as a professional adult. He came to understand their ownership of experience as corollary to that of material possessions. Especially for young people who lack the latter, self-determination in their Saturday experiences was seen as something to claim as their own.

Ensuring Crusaders understood what Mentors encountered growing up—their challenges, their resources, their decisions—was essential for role-modeling. Carlos described such learning hinged on relationships between youth and Mentors who shared similar demographic backgrounds. As primarily local college students of color, they were “able to relate to the

students right off the bat, immediately,” in ways their teachers could not. Mentors were seen as adults who looked, spoke, and acted like Crusaders, and thus were people “who our students will open up to” who embodied college aspirations and responsible adulthood. Through Mentors’ identities and advice, Crusaders came to better understand their possible futures. However, Carlos’ portrayal was problematic, as it necessarily depended on positive prior relationships with adults in the family and community and was clearly juxtaposed with older white teachers.

Like Robin, Lynn acknowledged that ABL challenges have the potential to help adult workers understand the perspectives of the youth in their care. The experiential nature of staff trainings, based on curricular activities Mentors would soon lead, afforded Mentors a participant’s perspective. Discussions revolved around the same themes and topics the program introduced to youth, with senior staff modeling how to process issues of “trust... confidence... [and the] *desire* to include others.” Processing then included another level, explicitly exploring how the same type of experience would resonate with Crusaders. As a result, staff were able to build the collegial relationships she saw as fundamental to the work, and imaginatively prepared to learn with and from Crusaders.

Melissa stated CAAP was designed to benefit both Crusaders and staff. She found herself “learning from the kids. You learn about yourself through them.” Through extensive reflection, she came to see her words and actions towards Crusaders as a measure of her own identity, and the skills she was teaching to youth “were skills that I was re-teaching myself at the same time.” Jonas expressed a similar sentiment, that “what we’re preaching to the kids, we were doing too. It worked on our level, the same way it worked with kids... it wasn’t just something we’re trying to teach the kids.” Emma “learned how to process my own feelings just by processing with the kids.”

By the end of a CAAP session, Sydney came to understand her own success as a Mentor through the experiences of Crusaders. She knew she had accomplished her goals with a group when “I say less, they say more.” At that point, Crusaders were empowered to have “enriched conversations, by themselves.” Her impact on their learning experiences entailed less direct involvement. Recognizing this, however, was challenging. She had to simultaneously take a leadership role with her Mentor partner, while stepping back herself. This involved understanding his perspective on their shared endeavors, and imaginatively taking the role of a Crusader.

CAAP roles helped Aaron expand his view of leadership. As a “very direct way” to promote disequilibrium, the rotating Leader position challenged the individual who shouldered it to guide the group using their own unique strengths and personal characteristics. As a Mentor, he came to see “leadership” defined not by “innate ability” or extroversion, but Crusaders’ ability to take risks and engage their peers. This also entailed a revised view of followership. To work effectively with a Leader, other Crusaders had to revise and renegotiate relationships, as one Leader “won’t look exactly like another.” For this to be successful, all parties must recognize their mutual dependence, regardless of the “specific responsibilities” of their roles.

For study participants, learning from others’ experiences primarily meant learning from Crusaders—what they experienced at CAAP, as well as what they brought from their homes, schools, and communities. While each CAAP initiative was a shared endeavor, each individual involved constructed personal meanings by integrating the experience with their prior knowledge, then sharing their revised perspectives with others. Processing allowed Mentors and Crusaders to reciprocate, sharing themselves through the lens of program themes and values. Mentors were then better able to understand Crusaders’ backgrounds, values, decisions, and the

applicability of CAAP's central metaphors. More importantly, however, participants developed a disposition towards honoring what they learned of and from youth in their evolving classroom practice despite the asymmetrical power relationships instantiated in traditional schooling.

Particularly through dialogue, "we can see our points of view from the perspectives of others, which opens us up to critical questioning" (Cranton, 2016, p. 51). For educators, the experiences of others are essential to understanding identity, both students' and their own. Academically, this requires feedback data, that provide appropriate scaffolding for meaning-making and to guide future instruction through understanding situated and contextualized meanings from a learner's perspective (Merriam & Kim, 2012). More importantly, interacting with participants' background knowledge and life contexts helps educators understand them as whole human beings. Actualizing this knowledge defines successful relationships between teachers and students, teaching and learning.

Learning from, and alongside, Crusaders helped Mentors reconceptualize their own upbringings, and better understand their positionality as role models. This resulted in a greater empathy towards the youth in their care, building not just an appreciation for the experiences of others, but the disposition towards exploring and learning therefrom.

How are participants more capable of change?

From transformative learning theory's humanistic roots comes the notion that individuals are and should be autonomous and free, "capable of making personal choices" (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 6). Their capacity for growth is nearly limitless, yet the exercise thereof depends greatly on their context and self-concept. Capability to change relies on two components: concrete and applicable skills, and the disposition towards growth. When attitudes and abilities align, this capacity increases.

When Mentors teach (and through teaching, learn about making change), they build their ability to transfer knowledge and skills to novel scenarios from a combination of reflective dispositions, confidence, sense of capacity, and a goal-orientation. By building capacity for change, educators prepare their students for learning across the curriculum, and across their lifetime.

Jonas referred to the totality of his NEISP experience as “professional development... it was all professional development,” and that “everything I learned is applicable in my regular [teaching] job.” The mechanisms of ABL framed his professional learning and developed a disposition towards development opportunities. He left NEISP with an array of pedagogical tools and beliefs. Of these, a focus on reflection has enabled him to continue improving his practice, as well as work towards change in his classroom. Incorporating critical reflection in afternoon NEISP staff meetings “worked on our level, the same way it worked with kids.” This built a habit of mind, connected to what he noted as “the reflective practitioner model,” which made reciprocal self-evaluation a regular part of his teaching practice. As such, the need for change can become evident and so also the solutions to challenges. He is now able to identify needed improvements in his practice and has the confidence to experiment with solutions. This is mirrored in the dispositions he seeks to foster in his students; “we’re teaching them a reflective practitioner model too, on a smaller scale.”

CAAP helped Marney develop a critical perspective, and thus better prepare her to change her instruction, her school climate, and the institution itself. This perspective also informed her recognition of a toxic work environment and afforded her a degree of the courage to leave. Of study participants, Marney was the only one to explicitly use the phrase “social justice” to describe a focus of her pedagogy. Through math, she wanted to “have] a conversation

about... analyzing data or graphing mathematical models in order to make folks more aware about issues in the community.” She gave the example of a lesson she had planned at Rockland, which examined the “‘school to prison pipeline,’ and try to make it into a system of linear equation problems and analyzing that.” Her co-teacher refused to deviate from his curriculum, and the lesson was never taught. Marney also described “Hawaiian Shirt Day” at her predominantly white school. Her meticulously-prepared and conscientiously-delivered objections, outlining the implications of cultural appropriation for the ostensible purpose of “school spirit,” were dismissed out of hand. Finding no purchase with, nor backing from, her supervisors, she saw further such school-level advocacy to be futile. She was left with “being inspired to do this type of work, and not being able to actually implement it in my own classroom. It’s a terrible feeling.”

While these larger-scale projects were unsuccessful, with her small groups she created an environment where students are “discovering other things about themselves” where “there is no power dynamic at all.” This gave youth opportunities to rehearse self-advocacy in “their own voices,” because they “have all these experiences and stories, and yet we’re not using [these] to have them learn from it and grow from it” in school. Conversely, “[a]t CAAP, we are using it, so that they can learn from it and then set a goal to be more successful next time.” Recalling the efficacy of her weekly Mentor phone calls to Crusaders, Marney elected to break Rockland protocols when communicating with families. Because of her emphasis on student voice, she would communicate her concerns to students directly, rather than simply “emailing the parents” as her colleagues did. This gesture of recognition to student autonomy was one reason “why they trust me.” To Marney, educators “need to hear [youth] voices and let them know they are heard.” Validating and amplifying student voice “really makes kids feel smart... We do that at CAAP.”

Before becoming a Mentor, Melissa was “quiet and just like, ‘I’ll do whatever you want me to do, no questions asked.’” She struggled with self-concept and would internally berate herself when she felt “it’s right there, I should have understood it, and I didn’t.” This led to “fear,” impeding her ability to “find my own way... figure out what was gonna work best for me.” Sydney, her Program Coordinator, helped Melissa overcome her shyness and fear of public speaking by insisting she led a large-group game. When the time came to deliver instructions, she could barely speak due to “thinking so negatively.” While she claimed the result was “horrible,” she came to see it in terms of “‘alright, I already did it once. There’s no reason I can’t do it again.’” With Sydney’s initial push and continued encouragement, “I just became more comfortable finding my voice and finding who I was in that area. So, with time, it got better.” As her confidence grew, so did her willingness to take risks, eventually becoming self-motivated towards personal and professional development. She eventually came to see her doubts and fears were “all in my head,” a recognition that “comes with change.”

Melissa’s response to professional feedback changed dramatically through her time as a Mentor. At first, she responded to constructive criticism “like, ‘I don’t need this,’” seeing it as an ego threat and impediment to her “ability to do what I want.” Her response evolved into “‘alright, I accept it, I’m not going to make any changes, but I hear you.’” As she came to trust her colleagues, she ultimately arrived “at that place where, ‘okay, you’re giving me feedback, you’re helping me grow. I’m going to take whatever you’re telling me, I’m gonna try it.’” She found a parallel in providing feedback to Crusaders, that “in order to be successful as a Mentor, you need to be willing to give and take with the kids and listen to them.” Her own experience with dispositional change helped her to foster it in others.

Sydney analyzed her initial leadership approach as “not setting the expectations for the Crusaders to figure it out” themselves.” She needed to temper her impulse to “chime in” on their problem-solving, as it “wasn't giving [Crusaders] an opportunity to explore.” Recognizing the leadership style which had served her well as an Advisor was in fact detrimental to her work as a Mentor, she was able to revise her role, “allow[ing] me to take a step back and let the team shine.” This new disposition profoundly impacted her subsequent work as the Program Coordinator, where she no longer attempted “micromanagement” or over-involvement in program decision-making. Not a “cookie-cutter” manager, she came to honor others’ experiences and perspectives, and facilitate her teammates’ empowerment. This in turn helped her “to think about things in different ways... and have different levels of approach.” She was able to problem-solve with colleagues from a place of professional compassion, mentoring and guiding rather than directing --- or simply doing it herself. On a personal level, she came to understand “not expecting ‘me’ from other people” was a liberating alternative to shouldering all responsibilities on her own.

A corollary to an individual’s ability to change is the capacity to create change. To address teachers’ perpetuating outmoded transmission-based pedagogy, Lynn believed they should be “required” to experience ABL. Referencing the ‘apprenticeship of observation’ (Lortie, 1975), she has seen colleagues “who fall back on what is easiest and what their teachers did,” such as lectures, which privilege a limited array of learning modalities. Her metaphor was that teachers “default” to traditional pedagogy, which operates “in only two dimensions,” length and width. ABL brings with it a third: depth. Effective teachers focus on “getting the kids to think about *why*, rather than just the *what*.” As participants in ABL experiences, she believes

they would come to understand a more inclusive pedagogy focused on “different learning styles and cooperation and questioning.”

Robin shared Carlos’ appreciation that there was no “written script” at CAAP, and that staff (and, by extension, Crusaders) had to “roll with the punches.” The lack of structure fit with his work style but increased his level of responsibility for program success. At Washington, Robin was proud to “do my own thing the way I do, my own style.” He reported CAAP gave him the “confidence” and preparation to approach his practice creatively, in the same way the program looked “to empower young people to think outside the box... [to] help them progress.” As a result, his colleagues “kinda looked at me like I was crazy at first.” His counseling is in public view in the stairwells and hallways of Washington, not segregated away in his office. He uses physical movement to facilitate focus and relaxation, teaching students concrete techniques they could use in the future. Most importantly, he practices these strategies alongside his students. This is a threat to teachers “with the ‘old school’ mentality [of] ‘you’re the child, I’m the adult,’” who depend on authoritative distance to maintain their status in relationships with youth. It exposes an alternative student-centered pedagogy of teaching *with*, rather than simply teaching *to*. Despite their skepticism, however, his colleagues cannot argue with the success of his approach. When they ask where he learned such strategies, he “definitely give[s] CAAP a lot of credit for teaching those types of skills.”

Without change, learning does not occur. For participants, the changes they experienced through CAAP demonstrated their own orientation *towards* change. Building on increases in professional capacities and dispositions, they became more comfortable with less structure. Their dispositions impacted how they understood reflection and actualized feedback. Furthermore,

participants' increased understanding of change undergirded their revised conceptions of the same capacities in youth.

How are participants more reflective?

Mezirow defines reflection as a “process of critically assessing the content, process, and premise of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience” (1991, p. 192). It is “of fundamental importance in order to address the challenges, responsibilities, and complexities associated with adult life... [and] is considered essential for reaching decisions on complex issues... [and] makes adult learning more profound” (Kreber, 2012, p. 323). According to Kreber, “some go so far as to contend that without [critical reflection] not only our learning and professional practice but also our life opportunities would be constrained and diminished” (p. 323).

In pedagogical terms, reflection is not mere contemplation but a cultivated practice of analysis. It is “a process of reconsidering experience through reason and reinterpreting and generalizing the experience to form mental structures” (Cranton, 2016, p. 26, citing Mezirow 2003). By evaluating experiences in retrospect --- in content, process, and premise (Cranton, 2016) --- individuals become better equipped to integrate new learning, comprehend relevance, construct meaning, and make informed decisions. It is a unique, individual, affective, and active process of understanding, thus having far greater relevance and impact than passive reception of information.

CAAP helped Chris better understand his own secondary and post-secondary learning experiences. In high school and college, he struggled with self-concept, not understanding the difference between his strengths and the grades he received. Humanities classes “were very difficult, no matter how hard I worked, no matter what I did... and just remembering those

feelings...” A personal relationship with an encouraging teacher was key to his success in English class and informed his perspective on the intersection of interpersonal connections and academic confidence. In his own classroom, he advocated personalization affectively and academically, in line with his drive to “meet kids where they’re at,” and seeking to “meet needs” creatively. This entails not only differentiation of instruction, but also outcomes; the goal is not necessarily a common level of achievement, but the engineering of experiences where “every single kid gets the chance to grow.” For youth, the lasting impact of feeling successful and understanding one’s strengths align better with “the real world.”

Having been Mentors themselves, participants in supervisory roles were able to draw from their experiences to understand and coach newer staff. Chris came to distinguish between Mentors who would take creative initiative, versus those who “just wanna go by the book” and follow his instructions. He saw the necessity of adaptation based on the unique needs of each group. Like Carlos, he was critical of his Mentor colleagues who prioritized enjoyment (either Crusaders’ or their own) over learning. He also echoed Aaron’s sentiment that weaker educators conflate immediate comprehension with depth of eventual understanding. When he became a Facilitator, he would instruct his staff to “identify what your group needs to work on the most,” and adjust their work accordingly.

Chris has seen CAAP do “wonderful things” for both Crusaders and staff. He echoed the sentiment that Mentors “had to go through the same thing” as Crusaders. On the interpersonal level, program experiences were deliberately structured “to get us working better as a team, to then help the kids work better as a team.” With “a lot of differing personalities and opinions” within the staff, building an effective team was “a big challenge,” especially for a “very ‘type A’” personality. He framed a parallel in the transitional stages of both middle school and college

students, both of whom “needed to navigate those conversations” of CAAP themes, such as responsibility and communication. Both groups tend to think “we know it all,” but often face the realization “like, ‘oh crap, maybe I got a long way to go.’” Thus, Mentors “were going through exactly what the kids were going through” as critical to many Mentors’ entry to the “real world” of adulthood and “the professional workforce.”

CAAP encourages reflection through regular opportunities for staff to discuss their practice. For Sydney, this came to mean taking responsibility for the success of learning activities. Her example portrayed giving instructions for a challenge, then realizing Crusaders did not understand what to do. Rather than ascribe this to their lack of attentiveness or readiness, she considered that “it could be that I talked too fast. It could be I didn't allow for Crusaders to ask questions; it could be that I didn't give them an opportunity to strategize, it could be that I stumbled in my own words, that I lacked my own preparation.” Thus, she “learned from kids... how to improve in my own style of reviewing directions, in how to ask the right questions.” As a result, she “learned about myself as a Mentor, to be able to improve, to reframe my own thinking.”

As a leader, Sydney came to understand Mentors’ roles and responsibilities through analysis of the patterns she saw in their growth. She came to see CAAP as a place for college-student Mentors to grow in ways that can support their entry into the classroom or workforce. They had opportunities to build relationships, understand differences, and “facilitate conversations.” As employees, they learned the value of “being on time for your job, putting in your hours on time to make sure that you get paid... What it really means to work on a large team, but also how to communicate... How to share responsibility.” As “we expect Crusaders to learn things at CAAP and then implement them in their community, in their school, in their

families, we should practice that too.” This entails the responsibility to “take and share what I’m learning into new places.” Unfortunately, the program had no concrete mechanism by which to measure this transfer.

Meaningful reflection requires a degree of critical distance. For Carlos, this came with time. By his account, he was initially quite critical of the program and his colleagues, and ruefully admitted that “being a smarty” and “a bit of an asshole” made him “hard to work with.” He recognized this, at least in part, stemmed from his youth and inexperience, as he had not yet developed the interpersonal skills to negotiate effective professional relationships. As he thought through his process, he moved from the bravado of limited experience to an “educator’s perspective.”

Carlos described NEISP and CAAP operating outside the contemporary “paradigm” of outcomes-driven design, focusing instead on adapting to Crusaders’ needs organically and in real time. This in part informs his resistance to current educational structures, as this focus on outcomes reifies structures of ability and access defined by narrow, authority-driven measures of success. In retrospect, he has reframed his criticisms into advocacy, focusing less on what individual adults do and more on the systems in which they operate. He has chosen to fight *for*, rather than fight *against*.

The program’s focus on “individual wellness... taking care of yourself” was a vehicle through which Carlos “evolved.” He recognized the connections between individual and collective responsibility; just as Crusaders were encouraged to care for themselves and each other, he was “responsible for this group, but I’m also responsible for myself.” Regular metacognitive “check in’s” helped him understand himself, and his Crusaders, in addressing identity issues such as “toxic masculinity” he regularly sees in youth “from similar backgrounds”

to his own. He could recognize his own experience in his Crusaders' and capitalized on opportunities to learn with them. Ultimately, these opportunities helped him to become "comfortable with your own voice... That's resonated with me" as means for youth to "apply [their learning] to their lives and their world." This led him to believe in the primacy of youth empowerment and leadership.

Reflection requires an awareness of the potential ramifications of thoughts and actions that, with critical analysis, can unearth complexities and challenge individuals and groups to develop more effective modes of interacting with the world. Jonas described tempering his own emotional reaction to student resistance as "one of the toughest things... I've had to make peace with" over the course of his career. He noted it in NEISP, Scouts, and his classroom practice. To separate one student's "bad day" from "100 kids' praise" requires a vigilant attendance to his own reactions, and the subsequent ways in which he makes sense of and manages his reactions. This entails a critical distance, separating the logical from the emotive, and self-managing accordingly.

After leaving his career in business, Jonas approached education as "customer service." Serving as a Mentor helped him to see the interaction of client satisfaction and the quality of a product (in this case, learning experiences) as personally meaningful. The affective and aspirational, he recognized, are tempered by the reality that not all "clients" will be pleased with the outcome; however, the system should be designed to maximize both efficacy and satisfaction. While he remained cynical of the business world, through critical reflection he was able to salvage aspects of an ideology which shaped his pedagogical practice.

According to Cranton (2016), "transformative learning leads to a changed self-perception. When people revise their habits of mind, they are reinterpreting their sense of self in

relation to the world” (p. 7). While some may be more readily inclined, “people have the choice of being critically self-reflective or not” (Cranton, 2016, p. 6). Enforcing reflection would become “something like brainwashing or indoctrination” (Cranton, 2016, p. 6). When educators reflect, they do so for the purpose of improving their practice, including their relationships with students, their pedagogy, and their own sense of efficacy and satisfaction. It is the most available, and often the most effective, form of professional development, as it is volitional, self-directed, and grounded in the realia of the classroom. Fostering a disposition towards critical reflection endorses the notion that personal views and experiences are valid, and that there are always avenues to sharpen, refine, and improve.

In fostering critical reflection, CAAP helped participants look inward. They came to reassess their own educational trajectories, personalities, and positionalities to become better educators. Reflection enabled them to recognize patterns in their colleagues’ performance, leading to more precise professional evaluation. By thinking critically about their impact on youth, they also came to grapple with reimagining systems of [mis]education. However, reflection alone is not sufficient, as “it is the revision of a habit of mind that makes the experience transformative” (Cranton, 2016, p. 75).

How have participants' beliefs changed?

What individuals value about themselves, how they understand their moral responsibilities, and what they take to be true inform and guide their actions. Without a well-developed belief system, an individual would flounder to make sense of their world. Similarly, without a cogent mental framework for effective pedagogy to drive instructional action, an educator may be ineffective, negligent, or unemployable.

Fostering transformative learning “is first and foremost about educating from a particular educational philosophy, with its own assumptions about the purpose of education, the role of the educator, and the nature of knowledge” (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 14). It involves both process and product, yet its “outcomes cannot be specified in advance of the education experience” (Cranton & Hoggan, 2012, p. 522). The individual is “the central actor in the drama of personal meaning-making” (Fenwick, 2000, p. 248). As participants iterated, ABL ideologies and practices align to place learners at the heart of all educative endeavors. According to Weimer (2012), “[e]xposure to learner-centered teaching approaches is transformative in that it regularly changes beliefs about teaching and learning” (p. 442).

Lynn has come to recognize the importance of affect in learning, especially in lowering anxieties and promoting prosocial connections. She believes schools should support holistic development of “a well-rounded human being,” which cannot occur when “kids hate school.” CAAP helped her “become a more compassionate teacher” by understanding ways in which youths’ emotions and circumstances impact their classroom experiences. There are “so many layers to students... it’s just really important to know why students do what they do.” Thus, she takes an inquiry stance which “makes me a better teacher,” recognizing that her professional efficacy requires “knowing the students in front of me, knowing how to know them, and knowing that there’s reasons behind things that they do.” At CAAP, the staff would “take a step back and look at the whole picture, the whole person” before reaching conclusions about Crusaders. Lynn learned that understanding the underlying causes of students’ actions and recognizing behaviors, positive or negative, are a result of trying to meet needs, and that students need access to more effective ways to meet those same needs. This has led to a certain cynicism towards her fellow teachers who default to a punitive mindset based on unidimensional

explanations of student decisions. Often, said teachers are not able to recognize the role their own egos and emotions play in their disconnection from students. She now challenges her colleagues to probe deeper, to “find out why” individual students perform in the ways that they do.

Emma’s ideas about herself changed significantly through her work at CAAP. The program helped her come to “believe in myself,” manage anxiety, and improve her “mental health in general.” She came to see “that it’s okay to fail. I shouldn’t beat myself up,” because “teachers learn from their mistakes.” Moving away from self-talk of “‘I’m failing, I’m doing bad,’” she instead had the “voice in the back of my head” of a colleague “who never made me doubt myself at a job.” As such, “the program should not necessarily just be for kids... I’m an adult, and I didn’t have the right processing skills and communication skills that I needed in every situation. I worked for CAAP for a year and a half, and here I am. I know how to do it.” She described herself as able to “take a step back now” when “frustrated” or “fighting with someone.” She had “even done a couple of the journal prompts myself.” In her youth, “you just get mad. You get mad and you leave.” At CAAP, she “grew out of what I grew up with.” Focusing instead on solutions “made me definitely a better person to communicate with.” As a result, she is “taking my own advice a little more.”

Before becoming a Mentor, Melissa “didn’t really see how games could be played with a point... I always thought, ‘we’re playing a game, to play a game. To have fun... There’s no messages.’ I never even thought of playing games to teach lessons.” She came to see not only that purposeful play can support rich learning, but that she and her Crusaders found the cerebral aspects of the program to be the most enjoyable. This entailed challenging “this idea of ‘the teacher has all the power. You need to listen.’” Compared to traditional instruction, where

“you’re just being told... it’s just a teacher teaching and the students are listening,” games “where you’re actually doing the skills that you’re trying to teach them is much more effective.” Once she gained more teaching experience, she looked to “figure out how I can turn this math lesson into an activity that you’re still gonna learn the content, but in a much more fun way, that you can apply.” “Let’s do this to learn it,” she stated, “is always more effective” than transmission-based pedagogy.

Aaron traced his understanding of urban schools through his AmeriCorps experiences to CAAP, then to Dallas. His first placement was “toxic... it was awful,” particularly the levels of student disrespect and violence. As opposed to novices, veteran teachers were “very strict, very authoritarian,” which Aaron came to see as necessary for maintaining basic order and safety. While he found his second placement a significant improvement, he still held “all these ideas of what teaching looks like... ‘the teacher maintains the order and they are the authority and they are the source of knowledge, and [students are] supposed to listen and do my best and I’ll learn.’” Middle school students in particular needed to “be held accountable, they really needed a firm teacher, a firm authoritarian teacher in their life.” What he experienced at CAAP “really did help inform my understanding of what teaching could be.” He came to recognize “not just the potential, but the effect” the program had on Crusaders. It “really spoke volumes to me about the importance of letting students explore what it means to work together, and think through something, and try, and fail, and try again, and know that that’s all part of the learning process.” The program “definitely taught me to let students explore more,” develop intellectual independence, and learn collaboratively.

Having seen an alternative, Aaron now believes the “brainwashing” practices of traditional pedagogy engender “detrimental” dispositions which value passivity, obedience and

compliance in “‘good’ students.” This reinforces the role of the teacher as arbiter of value who alone can determine students’ intelligence and worth. Aaron viewed such teachers as “actively oppressing students” by fostering the beliefs that capacity is evidenced through the appearance of grasping material quickly and the behavior of asking few questions. The result is a lack of student ownership and agency, limiting “their growth until that shell is broken.”

Aaron revised his view on teaching to see the “true value” of learning not as the replication or regurgitation of knowledge, but its proper use. This reflects a focus on discernment (when, where, and how to use knowledge and skills effectively) premised on metacognitive understanding of what an individual knows, and the context in which to apply it. Opposing traditional views that the “teacher is the central figure, teacher is the authority, teacher is the driving force of learning,” he described an effective educator as a “catalyst” who can “ignite the discussion,” set the parameters for learning experiences, and empower students to “figure out the rest.” CAAP taught him to view himself, and present himself to youth, as “not the person who holds all the answers” and “not commanding silence all the time.”

Robin stated that “CAAP gives you that way of thinking... to just sit back, take a deep breath and ‘let’s try to figure this out, let’s try to put your point of view in check,’ empathize with everyone in a situation.” He found it validating to see his own learning preferences privileged in ABL, legitimizing alternatives to “deep-into-the-books” learning, thus expanding definitions of school processes and outcomes. Empathy and perspective-taking, fostered by an orientation towards resolution over ego, characterize his conceptions of his students’ experiences. He gave the example of a teacher-student conflict in which he encouraged a student not to simply obey, but to imagine the teacher’s context and emotions. Careful to note some teachers make “bad decisions... by overreacting,” he encouraged the student to see the conflict in terms of mutual

emotion-driven decisions, and how simple actions on the student's part can make a large impact on their classroom relationships.

As a college student, Carlos was on track for a lucrative career in sound engineering. After graduating, this work was tempered by his insistence on meeting his CAAP commitments. Not only did the program impact his prior "kids are kids" mindset, but it also impacted his values. He decided to change career paths and re-centered his professional goals around educational reform through youth empowerment. He came to value leadership opportunities for youth, to the point his "whole career is based on that." His highest professional priority was student ownership, which he drew "straight out of" youth leadership opportunities in NEISP and CAAP, as opposed to other programs which seek to contain and control youth in "a holding cell."

Ownership facilitated transformative "'a-ha' moments" which revealed new options and opportunities to youth in practicing different ways of being and doing. Carlos saw this as key to engagement and is now one of his primary concerns in joining "other adventures" in his career. This stemmed from his own learning experiences, wherein his belief in the value of an endeavor, and the worth of his individual contributions, governed his participation and "buy in." As such, personal affect and eventual satisfaction impact motivation, to the point where being "really into it" is a far better metric of career success than financial gain. Thus, his worldview expanded, becoming more others-centered and cognizant of the systemic ways in which formalized education can disenfranchise and oppress. Furthermore, this change in priorities necessitated a change in how he viewed himself as an ally to the youth in his care, rather than their "savior mentality" champion. He richly detailed the Crusaders' needs for opportunities --- to "shine," to

“vent,” to “fight” --- as a major source of his dedication to the program, and a source of his personal satisfaction therein.

A challenge for Jonas, and by extension for many educators in fostering this change, was that it required one to “set aside your ego a little bit,” which, paradoxically, requires confidence in one’s abilities, and trust in one’s students, to accomplish. This conception of student ownership and leadership has become one of the “core tenets” of his pedagogy, and an important criterion by which he judges the success of his teaching.

Working as a CAAP Mentor impacted participants’ beliefs about themselves, their students, and learning. A reconfigured sense of efficacy and confidence could change habitual negative self-talk or reduce egotism in the classroom. Seeing each student as a “whole person” with legitimate needs reinforced the importance of empathy and the value of play in effective pedagogy. A more thorough and nuanced understanding of the experiences of urban youth led to questions about authority and privilege in traditional schools.

How have participants' actions changed?

For a transformative learning experience, “the outcome must be action” (Cranton, 2016, p. 7). Thus, the preceding seven criteria can be seen as necessary prerequisites for this result: presumptions must be unearthed and reflected upon to guard against bias through a process of discrimination; changes in beliefs are predicated on openness and the ability to change. As changes in action impact others, ethical action entails consideration of their needs and experiences achieved by others discovered through dialogue. These refinements allow an individual to reconstitute what they know, what they think, and what they do in the world.

CAAP taught Lynn the value of scaffolding and sequencing learning experiences to developmentally foster communication, collaboration, and trust. In her classroom practice, this

meant establishing and maintaining relationships with and among her students. She aimed for transparency, but not predetermination; while her students were informed of the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of a particular lesson, her interactions with them were not scripted, her questions “not a ‘gotcha.’” In CAAP staff trainings, leaders would process activities around the question “‘how would you use this’” with youth; with Crusaders, Mentors would ask “‘how does this [challenge] relate to something outside of the situation?’” Lynn stated this not only enhanced transfer through an explicit focus on cross-domain connections but instilled a disposition towards advancing such thinking in her classroom. Her work foregrounded pragmatic skill development in environments that “simulate possible ‘real world’ situations without being ‘in the real world’ practice.” The success of this rehearsal depended on students’ capacity to build meaningful analogies, through cognitive and affective connections, between low-stakes classroom experiences and those that “really ‘count’ for any life-altering negative-ness if you do it wrong.”

To be effective, both teachers and Mentors must be proficient communicators, both in public speaking and facilitating dialogue. At CAAP, Lynn was surprised to discover “that there were techniques to communicate effectively... without being threatening or bossy.” As she was “never really taught how to have a conversation with somebody previously,” the expectations of a Mentor were initially challenging. Key to her development was “seeing it done” by fellow staff members, processing their performances afterwards, and taking the risk to practice leading games and challenges. With the support of her colleagues, she came to believe “it’s okay to try something out and possibly fail.” Instructing Crusaders in specific, named strategies required her to model and practice them herself, which impelled her to reflect further on her own techniques. Being a Mentor “taught [me] how to process activities, asking questions to get the kids to think,” building her capacity to interact with youth in ways different than her own upbringing, where “it

didn't matter what I thought." Centering her communication on "mutually respectful" conversations wherein youth can "come to the realization on their own" became an integral part of her teaching.

The power of ABL challenges lies in their function as metaphors and analogies through which "we can connect with real world examples." At CAAP, Marney "learned that... a metaphor heightens the understanding of the meaning" of activities, and that "it's up to the Mentors to craft that message in a way that their Crusaders can understand." Echoing many other participants, she stated "it's not just a game, it's not just for fun. There's a message that one can take away from the activity." She also noted that processing metaphors "just ties it together in a way that even if students don't have a specific real-world connection, they can still understand the message."

Marney saw her role as a teacher extending beyond the confines of the math curriculum. She "love[s] to have dialogue with my students," discussing "'persevering [in] doing math problems, 'cause that's a key skill, to be able to persevere into a challenge you might see as unattainable and being able to use the right tools or resources.'" While this deviates from Rockland's rigid curriculum, she prioritized "hav[ing] the skills to think about" problems in math and the "real world" in "a different way." She described that "part of it is engagement; part of it's motivation; but I think there also comes some skill building with the collaborative work that might go beyond just math class. Hopefully you can make some real-world connections, [there] can be some job preparedness...It's very unusual for somebody to be working solo these days."

A young female teacher of color at Rockland, Marney felt a tangible difference between herself and her colleagues. She joined the school in a liminal 'push-in' capacity and brought a set of pedagogical ideas and skills outside traditional norms. Her 'intervention' students were

alienated as well, those who “need more help” and “get frustrated,” leading them to “lose confidence” and “just giving up” without more personalized adult attention and guidance. They “wanna do it themselves. Nobody really knows them.” She regularly and repeatedly attempted to incorporate what she knew from CAAP to be effective practices; and, with her smaller groups, found successes. Collaborative work, game structures, role structures, meaningful conversations, and pro-social routines helped these students engage with academic content and defend against the stigma of deficit associated with extra classroom support. Marney wanted her students to “realize that they’re not alone, that they have a support system” in the group. Her approach provided “an incentive,” “a lot of excitement, a lot of hype” missing from their other instruction. This “energy... is what made them become more comfortable, that excitement, that enthusiasm that they could have with learning math.” Through collaboration, “we were able to connect more,” and she took pride in “the fact that they’re able to actually get to know each other, collaborate and take risks and actually get engaged with the task itself.” It made noticeable differences, enabling “the same amount of growth as... in those 10 weeks [of CAAP].”

Melissa saw her relationships with Crusaders grounded in strong communication, and “a big part of communication is listening... I never really realized that until working with CAAP.” Prior to her work as a Mentor, she would disregard others’ talk “if it has no connection to me.” When she did engage, she saw the conversation as a contest, arguing until “you agree with me” because she “couldn’t get past someone ‘beating’ me in my head.” She came to see a distinction between “listening for what [Crusaders are] saying, not ‘the’ answer” when she recognized “‘whoa, I’m always seeking the answer in my head...’ [Now] I don’t really care for ‘the’ answer, more for the processing.” She “learned to listen, even if I disagree” by abandoning the “mindset that I’m always right” and understanding herself as a role model for youth. This led to the

recognition that, despite her desire for structure and predictability, she “couldn’t get mad if something didn’t go my way.” Her role required a revised interpretation of herself as “the authority,” not as someone to control and “micromanage everything,” but who would “let [Crusaders] do what they’re doing.” Melissa came to see “learning to dive... deeper into just not the surface” meant “accept[ing] that things are done differently.” Listening to others made her “able to find my voice.” Valuing divergent perspectives, she declared, was part of “just finding out who you are” and “learning to be patient.”

At CAAP, Melissa was “learning how to maneuver through life,” both personally and professionally, and “had the greatest impact on my teaching.” It helped Melissa understand how “adapting” activity parameters could increase engagement and inclusion. Whether some Crusaders were “too cool” or “just don’t feel like it,” their active participation was necessary for team success. Thus, “you have to find a way to incorporate them, because they are still part of the team,” an attitude she brought to her Community Falls classroom. She claimed “[e]verything I’m doing with these [Crusaders], I can apply to my third graders; I just have to change the language of it.” By adapting the linguistic demands of ABL challenges, she was “blown away” at what her young students were cognitively able to accomplish.

In approaching ABL challenges, she would determine the central theme, then consider it first from her personal perspective. Analyzing her own reactions and interpretations allowed her to “ask the questions” which brought Crusaders to “that place of understanding” the initiative’s relevance to their own lives. Thus, the “better conversations,” where Mentors and Crusaders would “build on” each other’s ideas, were neither predetermined nor predictable. To Melissa, Crusaders’ construction of their own ubiquitous understandings was worth the ensuing loss of consistency in outcomes. In leading processing from this perspective, she “learned to be more

comfortable and just go with the flow of it... think quick on my feet and just keep it moving... that's what I learned most from CAAP. I take that into my teaching life... Definitely CAAP taught me how to think on my feet, be a teacher, be a leader and adapt."

Of the traditional disciplines in secondary schools, math may be the most challenging for an ABL approach. The field is seen as cerebral and solitary, trapping students in the narrow dichotomy of "'are you good at math? Yes, or no?'" For Chris, "CAAP really helped me think outside of the box, on the transferable skills as the most important... Okay, maybe I'm using geometry as a vessel, but my goal is to make [it] way more broad than the Pythagorean theorem." He directly compared CAAP and his classroom, in that "it does not matter what this activity is, it's what we gained from doing [it] together... hopefully they will remember that process and conversation." Ultimately, "[t]hese are all skills that you just need, no matter what the context is, and that's just like in CAAP. Like, 'okay, we just do this activity,' but it's not just a game. 'What are all of these things that we incorporated, that you didn't even realize you were doing?'"

By "work[ing] around the content," mathematics became a vehicle for learning, not the end goal. Like ABL challenges, Chris' math lessons provided students opportunities to practice as problem solvers and thinkers. They served as microcosms of "the real world," wherein skills and strategies take precedence over concrete knowledge. He wanted his students to approach challenges creatively; "figure it out. Ask someone, look it up, try it on for size, give it a go." Eventually, his students realized "it wasn't about the right or wrong answers, it was 'could you budget your time? Could you put it in your agenda, remember when it was due, and actually put in the effort to turn in a good quality piece of work to the best of your ability?'" As "some kids barely ever feel successful," building self-confidence and self-efficacy have "been pretty much

my main priority in the past two years.” He saw himself “providing not just content education but life education,” to the point where the final exam in his geometry class “is gonna have zero math on it.”

Carlos noted the first question he asks of a program is whether the youth have control of the endeavor; if not, he asks “well, how can we give it to them?” He made “no secret” about NEISP and CAAP “having a major influence” on his subsequent work. The programs “really changed my life, and [are] a big part of STEM Gen and the programs that I’m running today.” In addition to the guiding principle of youth empowerment, he has constituted a staff based in distributed leadership. He assesses his colleagues not on what they know, but what they can facilitate for youth, the ability to “[f]ollow their lead.” Similarly, he does not judge success by tangible outcomes, but the degree to which youth were engaged in a particular project. He described failure, in this regard, as “part of the process” of learning, and his staff’s job to “maximize” youths’ “passion in a project.” This is achieved through a “very CAAP-like” structure of rituals, roles, and goals. This positions STEM Gen in opposition to much of public education, which he feels stresses “pass/fail” over authentic learning. In describing his own maturing perspective as he moved through the ranks of Crusade programs, it is clear he has conceptualized his challenges in a similar way, as useful inasmuch as they inform learning outside static measures or deliverable products. What he wants for his students he yearns for himself, that despite the “challenges,” they “dream big.” STEM Gen project, like ABL initiatives, are not ends in themselves, but vehicles for the critical reflection which makes learning --- from successes and failures --- relevant, meaningful, and lasting.

Part of Aaron’s reconceptualization of teacher identity through CAAP involved being “lighthearted,” “goofy,” and “funny” to “give [youth] permission” to do the same. As a Mentor,

he acted deliberately “overboard, acting silly and making kids laugh.” On the surface, this furthered learners’ “involvement” and fostered a playful culture. More importantly, it recognized the affective impact of classroom culture, helping students focus less on themselves by interacting with adults who were “comfortable in [their] own skin... not fazed by everything... [who] seem warm and understanding.” Aaron sees youth “being so image-focused” as a form of manipulation, intended to make peers “admire or even covet” what an individual puts forth. Being “constantly worried” about appearances entailed “valuing yourself more than... other people,” which he saw at the root of social cliques, stereotypes, and hierarchies. Ultimately, youths’ hyper-focus on image leads to myopia and unhappiness. If they take the risk to “let their ego die a little bit,” youth and adults can present themselves in an authentic manner, collaborate more effectively, deconstruct social stereotypes, and “bond with each other” more readily. Aaron reported this orientation “taught me to be more patient, and to bring a sense of humor to things,” as a means toward improving relationships with youth.

As an Education Counselor at LRU, Aaron noted parallels between Crusaders and his undergraduate students. He described both as overly dependent on authority figures to make decisions, and quick to ascribe their lack of success to the whims of others in positions of power. CAAP showed him how to “become more welcoming of a lot of behaviors” without resorting to overly simplistic explanations thereof. This led him to “hon[e] in on” a holistic, individualized approach to andragogy. For his college students, Aaron’s response to their lack of “ownership” was to personalize conferences through dialogue, as he had learned to do as a Mentor. Rather than immediately discussing academics, he asked students to unpack their current situation, looking to “really try to be empathetic and speak into their personal experience.” This mitigated their impulse to make hasty, perhaps ill-informed decisions about their course of study. From

these conversations, Aaron was able to “learn quite a bit” about students’ contexts and frames of mind, which served as a transition point into meeting their academic needs. In return, his students came to see him not just as a university worker, but someone who was “looking out for us.”

Personally, CAAP gave Robin “the tools to move on, navigate through college into the professional world.” It “molded” him into “a better leader” through seeking consensus. Several times during our interviews, he juxtaposed his practice with colleagues “just standing up there and tell[ing] the students what to do.” Physically and intellectually, he involves his students in the processes of resolution, from Brain Gym activities to youth-led mediation. He referred to his current work as a “cocktail” of influences, but “a lot of this stuff comes from CAAP. A lot.” He continued to seek new ways of interacting with students, with his latest venture being a “men’s group” for Washington students. This project combines traditional athletics with “initiatives that I actually got from CAAP.” The purpose was to build camaraderie through shared experiences, and to be a vehicle for reconsideration of identity. What he has learned of processing drives “everything that we do.” However, the program faces obstacles, as ABL experiences require “a very long time,” during which students would otherwise be in class.

Robin stated that “always the thing about CAAP [was] you gotta process what we do.” This led him to believe youth often needed to “just talk it out.” These conversations were not idle chat, but purposefully driven to “solve whatever issue you have going on.” By combining strategies of several Facilitators, he was able to “make my own style” of processing which furthers conflict resolution and builds relationships with youth, who, as a result, “know that it was worth reaching out to me.” Students have come to see him as invested in their welfare, not just their challenges. Discussions based on questioning is a “different way of thinking...

allowing kids or students to come up with answers on their own.” He views youth as capable of making sound decisions for themselves, and his role is facilitative. While he “could tell them all day what I think they're doing wrong, and how they need to fix it... unless it comes from them and they have some ownership with it, it is really not effective.” This approach has led him to “trust the process of processing.”

As did many other participants, Jonas faces a “huge curriculum I gotta cover” which has limited his opportunities to incorporate many of the kinesthetic challenges he learned in NEISP. He sees the implementation of a standardized curriculum as prohibitive, keeping teachers from taking the risks that can lead to both enhanced learning and potential misunderstandings. However, “I can do a lot of the debriefing,” which he has extended beyond processing experiencing—analyzing literature, academic concepts, and learner dispositions—as forms of metacognition. He framed this as a means of differentiation, as processing provides both teachers and learners “several different modes of engaging” with texts, the course, and each other. At NEISP, this “was my job,” and continues to be “my job as a teacher.”

Being a Mentor changed how participants act in their classrooms. They sought transfer, fostered dialogue, and built metaphors. They made transfer of learning an explicit goal, utilized processing strategies to build dialogue, and created meaningful metaphors. They advocated for marginalized students and created opportunities for empowerment and leadership. As a result, their classrooms became more interactive, dialogic, democratic, and meaningful places in which academics were a vehicle for holistic youth development.

Conclusion

It is impossible to objectively determine whether a learning experience qualifies as transformative or not (Cranton, 2016); however, the changes participants identified as *impacts* of

their ABL work present a compelling case for transformative learning considering Mezirow's criteria. For Carlos, his shift in views on youth, power, and agency led to a radical change in career trajectory. Jonas discovered alternatives to traditional education, and now runs his classroom accordingly. Lynn gained the confidence to speak up for herself, and the strategies to do so effectively, as well as shifted her pedagogy towards experiential learning. Chris' perspectives on himself and his leadership led to transformations of both, and Robin was able to transfer ABL to his work in counseling. Aaron came to see traditional schools as authority-driven spaces of oppression, and now grounds his professional work in relationships. Sydney learned to have fun at work and came to recognize the dysfunctions in her university department by contrast. For Marley, CAAP strategies afforded her vehicles to approach social justice in her teaching and build relationships with marginalized students. Melissa came to a more mature sense of herself, and significantly enhanced her abilities to communicate and accept professional feedback. Emma's transformation was part of a journey out of person trauma which profoundly changed her internal monologue.

Most importantly, CAAP served as a space in which to change—to rehearse and develop skills, explore new pedagogy, nurture personal growth, and frame a standard of quality through which to evaluate other educational endeavors. Participants' perspectives broadened, their understandings of themselves evolved, and their actions changed. While participants will continue to evolve and refine these perspectives throughout their lives, they show no indications of returning to their former ways of viewing themselves, their worlds, and their responsibility to work for change in both.

Chapter VI: Adventure-Informed Pedagogy

Is This Not What You Expected to See?

There can be no adventure-based practices (learning activities) without concurrent philosophies (beliefs about learning) and processes (mechanisms of learning) which connect the two. However, can those philosophies and processes be effectively implemented without standard ABL practices?

In *Adventure in the Classroom* (1996), Henton outlines four criteria for ABL in a school context: significance, support, stimulation, and satisfaction. She portrays a nurturing classroom rich with movement and lively discourse, wherein both students and teachers “*play hard, play safe, play fair*” (p. 73, emphasis in original) outside traditional academic disciplinary boundaries. There, adventure-based learning practices are plentiful, integrated, and immediately recognizable.

Not so in the classrooms of most research participants. Compared to Henton’s portrayal, these are not readily identifiable as ABL spaces. In fact, at first glance, many would appear to be participating in the very school tradition participants decry. As a researcher, this impelled me to reconfigure my own frames of reference to accommodate the idea that participants could have extensive opportunities to experience ABL, and that it had great impact on them and their teaching, but did not necessarily need to manifest in their classrooms in ways traditionally expected in the field. My solution was to develop a new conceptual framework I have termed “adventure-informed pedagogy (AIP).” This chapter presents an alternative reconsideration of research questions one and two through the lens of AIP.

Towards an Adventure Informed Pedagogy

An initial premise of this research was that ABL experiences would be transformative for participants personally and their classrooms instrumentally, with teachers *adopting and adapting the practices* of ABL challenges to serve academic purposes. Most participants, though convinced of their efficacy, reported little use of ABL initiatives in their classrooms. Their reasoning was multifold—the precariousness of achieving tenure, the ‘hidden curriculum’ of teacher traditions, the risks (real or perceived) of coordinating movement, energy, spontaneity, and safety are legitimate threats to their livelihoods. Some felt they’d be misjudged as unable to manage a classroom, or otherwise have their practice misconstrued by colleagues or supervisors; others cite the immense pressures of curricular ‘coverage’ which leave little room for anything else. Thus, their professional contexts largely prohibited the inclusion of standard ABL challenges in the classroom. However, adventure is, in Carlos’ words, in their educator “DNA.” It manifests not in tag games or elaborate physical stunts, but in deep structures and ideologies which demand a different definition of what ABL means for teachers. For participants, it was the *ideas behind* ABL which impelled shifts in perspective more transformative than any particular initiative they learned or skill they built at CAAP.

Thus, the role of adventure in the classroom need not be limited to challenges, or only the learning which results; adventure can be an overarching mentality which fundamentally *informs* curricular and instructional decisions. *Adventure-informed pedagogy* (AIP) combines community, challenge, risk, conversation, and metacognition to inform and structure academic work ‘behind the scenes,’ abandoning the fanciful trappings and fantastical premises of a challenge like Stepping Stones in favor of more subtle, insidious, and ultimately effective means of educational reform.

AIP is a shift in perspective which results in shifts in processes that challenge institutionalized notions of success and failure, moral character, authority, and relevance. With ‘challenge by choice’ as a central tenet, it would be inconsistent to in any way mandate adventure experiences in the curriculum. Through non-school leadership opportunities like CAAP, it can be a form of guerilla school reform (Lindsay & Ewert, 1999). Thus, it is a more meaningful, comprehensive, and immediate way for ABL to infiltrate classrooms; not as ‘one-off’ edutainment events, physical challenges, or the blanket of ‘social-emotional learning,’ but a way of looking at learning and teaching as opportunities for mutual transformation by application of ABL philosophies to traditional (and traditionally static) pedagogy. It is an amorphous philosophy from, in, and of action that can be widely instantiated without becoming institutionalized. AIP does not come through formal training nor ABL participation alone, but through the process of active facilitation based in the former.

Qualitative case study finds its strength in portraying the unique experiences of individuals, and each participant related distinct and personal ways ABL impacted their life. While the outcome of transformative learning always involves a deep and lasting shift in perspectives and actions, “the ways of getting there can differ depending on the person or people and the context or situation” (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 3).

However, iterative analysis of interviews surfaced several commonalities among participants’ experiences, beliefs, and practices as a result of their involvement with CAAP. With notable consistency, they discussed the unique structure, content, and processes of the program formed *frames of reference* through which to view other professional endeavors, their growth in professional and reflective skills, and the [r]evolution of their pedagogical philosophies. Participants’ interview responses were replete with the sentiment that, through facilitating ABL

experiences, they were “also learning from the kids. You learn about yourself through them,” and the skills they were teaching to Crusaders were “skills that I was reteaching myself at the same time.”

The central skills and philosophies which ground ABL provide critical resources for youth. Through adventure, they develop capacities in creative and critical thinking, self-advocacy, building relationships, communicating effectively, taking healthy risks, and persevering through challenges. While these qualities are not exclusive to the adventure field, they are necessary for success in most home, school, work, and community settings; they are also distinguishing features of effective pedagogy. In both cases, these skills are presumed, regardless of whether they were taught.

Participants identified parallel processes between what they led as ABL facilitators, and what they learned therethrough. Overall, the seven themes that emerged constitute an initial definition of AIP: communication and relationships, confidence, and identity, “real world” transfer, critical and creative decision making, risk and empowerment, and alternative pedagogies. These align with the analogical premise of ABL, highlights neglected areas of teacher development, and deepens the connections between transformative learning and ABL.

Broad descriptions of learning are not intended to represent each individual participant in each category; however, a theme was only deemed significant if identifiable in at least three cases. Relevant graphs from the Table Completion exercise (Table 4.2) are included as supplemental evidence.

Communication and Relationships

In ABL, relationships are viewed not as nouns but verbs; they are built, maintained, and concluded. Successful ones depend on the ways individuals interact with each other, particularly through words.

Processing and debriefing (the former primarily exploratory, the latter predominantly summative) provided a model of dialogue participants took into their professional classrooms. It required them to be present, active listeners who could flexibly respond to the unexpected without losing sight of the overall ‘arc’ of a conversation. Thus, it served as a balance of process and product, though with a stronger emphasis on the former. When internalized, this particular method of analysis changed participants’ interpersonal communications, and their own inner dialogue.

In the classroom, this promotes authentic dialogic learning, as opposed to the thinly veiled “‘question-answer discussion’ that is some version of recitation.” (Nystrand et al., 2003, p. 178) typical of traditional classrooms. As teachers, participants became co-constructors of a classroom engaged in authentic talk. They looked to build, not transmit, knowledge in ways that welcomed all learners, validated their life experiences, and centered their voices. Yet these conversations were a manifestation of a larger project, that of building positive, supportive, trusting relationships with and among students. These take time and depend on individuals’ willingness to be open and vulnerable --- as much a risk, sometimes, for teachers as for students. Participants sought to establish a “collinear role with their students... [in] a comfortable and safe atmosphere” (Cranton, 2016, p. 4). Profound relationships between educators and learners entail a relaxation of formal boundaries between the two roles, and a concern for each individual and their welfare as whole human beings, not just intellects; less as coworkers, more as family.

Participants described how mutual cohesion, cooperation, support, and quest for understanding undergirded processes of learning, often supported by the linguistic, geographic, racial, ethnic, and cultural positioning of Mentors. In addition, the relationship to knowledge fundamentally changed from that of an arbitrary commodity provided by the instructor, to a co-construction of understandings.

Confidence and Identity

By altering their conceptions of what experiences mean, transformative learners are necessarily changing their perceptions of themselves as knowers and actors, “reinterpreting their sense of self in relation to the world” (Cranton, 2016, p. 7). Confidence and self-concept depend on an individual’s way of thinking about such relationships. As such, teachers are not simply academic instructors, and students not necessarily constrained by their developmental topography. While participants often found it difficult not to “give away the answer,” confidence in students’ abilities informed meaningful collaboration which posited teacher as facilitator. This is somewhat paradoxical; rarely is there ‘one’ way to successfully navigate an ABL challenge; and in processing, there absolutely is no single preferred answer. This seems to intersect with what beginning teachers think about themselves as information-givers, rather than learning facilitators. Forced to restrain this impulse (despite the good intention of helping Crusaders feel successful and alleviate frustration) forced a reconsideration of the instructor’s role. This also forces Mentors to analyze themselves and their relationship to their own schooling / upbringing.

As Cranton (2016) notes, while Kolb saw reflection on experience as necessary for learning, this may be “driven by critical *self*-reflection, exploration, and intuition with no further reference to the world outside of the self” (p. 7). Reflection in transformative learning must be grounded in real world experiences, both as fodder for and target of subsequent improvements.

For participants, development of their self-confidence and self-concept bled from the professional into the personal. Confidence in their own abilities to teach transformed their views on students' abilities to learn, constructing their own knowledge through inquiry and perseverance rather than absorption.

In the classroom, participants defined their professional identity and teacher-selves in terms of decreased reliance on positional authority (status as teacher), and increased credibility with students. Often, this was accomplished through questioning. By focusing on authentic dialogue, they also found themselves in a different relationship with expertise, remaining open to the idea that they may not have all the answers, and that those answers they do have may not be of sufficient import to students to be meaningful.

For example, participants became Mentors for optimistic reasons, or to earn extra income. The initial training was confusing and insufficient for the job, and they began learning primarily from a more experienced Mentor partner. Each grew in their confidence and took on more leadership. They began to collaborate with broader circles of staff, then taking on apprentice Mentors themselves. From here, many went on into leadership positions.

“Real World” Transfer

‘Real life’ plays an integral role in transformative learning, with the deficit-based “assumption that adults have immediate problems to solve and that they wish to apply their learning directly to their workplaces or to their personal lives” (Cranton, 2016, p. 3). In ABL, the crux of processing is the ability to identify explicit points of connection between a small-scale group challenge and larger endeavors in their homes, schools, and communities. For preservice teachers, this involves contextualizing their entire history as students. As Mentors, many participants shared their successes and challenges in order to relate to youth and encourage their

academic success; as educators, they activated a critical perspective which helped them improve their practice.

Both transformative- and adventure-based learning place intense value on the metacognitive processes of learning as means to a worthwhile, examined life. However, the ultimate measure of each is the degree to which learners can apply their learning to new and novel circumstances. The most effective learning is that which is relevant in the widest array of circumstances, from strict analogies to wildly disparate situations. Thus, the ultimate gauge is the degree of utility of the learning experience.

One of the aspects which distinguishes ABL from other learning approaches is that, through processing, learners explicitly engage in discussion of analogies. ‘That’s like when...’ is a critical component of the ownership and transferability of ABL experiences. This facilitates a more readily available set of resources for novel circumstances and fosters a habit of mind seeking connections and disjunctions between previous, current, and future circumstances.

Participants, once out in schools, often found a disturbing lack of applicability in the academic content they were asked to teach. They traced the impact of this lack of relevance to their students’ engagement and their own job satisfaction. This was the most-often cited disconnect between being a Mentor and teacher and one which participants strove to improve. NEISP and CAAP, despite their age and entrenchment, have always been, if not prescient, adapting to the needs of staff and students. As former participants now cycle back into staff roles, they can speak directly to the power of the program. Its worth as professional and personal development speaks to systemic gaps in interpersonal skills, self-concept and confidence, and inclusive views of learning that young teachers are not gaining through their own life experiences or professional development.

Critical & Creative Problem-Solving

ABL challenges transport those participating into an unusual mix of the strange and familiar. The equipment is nothing novel; a few orange cones, a length of rope, maybe a few balloons. The pretext is absurd; stealing gold from a dragon, hijacking an abandoned robot, or preventing the great beast Frunobulax from escaping his interdimensional prison. The tasks themselves, however, usually entail a different kind of thinking. The obvious answers are rarely successful. While initiative is valued, most initiatives cannot be completed by one person alone.

ABL educators see value both in transitional failure (i.e., that which is a stage in development, rather than a final pronouncement) and eustress, the productive anxiety which impels action. There is value in the struggle.

Both ABL and transformative learning challenge individuals to question assumptions and reconfigure their belief systems to better incorporate new learning. For some participants, this involved considering their own childhood experiences; for others, a reconsideration of schools, schooling, and their role as teachers.

Participants described themselves as better equipped to address problems of practice in their pedagogy. In working with challenging students, they stressed empathetic relationships, solutions-focused interventions, and allowing youth to ‘save face’ in front of their peers. When confronting unjust or ineffective school practices, they found creative ‘work-arounds’ to both best serve youth and remain employed.

Risk & Empowerment

Taking risks, by definition, entails risk of failure or loss. At CAAP, Crusaders are encouraged (though never compelled) to take risks, socially and intellectually, to empower them to do the same outside the program. These risks are not reckless and carry limited consequences.

However, they build tolerance of the uncertainty and discomfort of experimenting with the new, thinking independently, and self-advocacy. In the words of one participant, it is essential that Crusaders “make the decision for themselves.”

As with any employment, there are ways to fail as a Mentor. Chronic absence or tardiness, substance use, or neglect of job responsibilities will lead to disciplinary intervention or termination. Yet there are other ways to ‘fail’ in the program without evaluation or loss of face, both for CAAP staff and Crusaders; in fact, ‘failure’ is often seen as a prerequisite for learning. Thus, responsible experimentation and exploration are encouraged, noted, and praised, from the overly ambitious to the downright ridiculous, as legitimate means of professional development. This practice ensures that the program continues to grow and adapt; it also entails that not every experiment will work, and some aspects of the program simply fall flat. Yet participants felt empowered to do just that.

In part, this is simply the humanistic ethos embedded in ABL in general, an enacted belief that everyone can learn and grow. Much of this, stems from the parallel processes embedded in the staff culture. Staff processes, and staff learning, are intentionally modeled on the processes Mentors facilitate with Crusaders. The environment offers lower stress, and lower stakes, than formal EPP lessons, providing preservice educators an opportunity to rehearse in an environment of high expectations wherein failure is expected; due to the inherently unpredictable nature of ABL, even the most seasoned practitioner cannot guarantee the success of their efforts. Incubation and rehearsal; the chance to ‘try on’ a new professional identity in a low-stakes environment (as ABL challenges afford the same to participants).

There is no presumed ‘right answer,’ for youth or facilitators. This relates to the nature of the supervision they experience, and the uniquely egalitarian, democratic relationships

maintained between ‘supervisor’ and ‘worker.’ Observations, debriefs, and evaluations are not treated as punitive, or even exceptional, as they are part of a regular feedback loop which, through metacognitive debrief, become not just opportunities to improve practice but to build analogies to future scenarios. Facilitators and Site Managers, in a Vygotskian sense, serve as guides and co-learners, abandoning the static and arbitrary nature of traditional professional hierarchies.

The crux is intentionality, with a strong distinction between actions taken with or without purpose. Furthermore, while CAAP provides Mentors a curriculum, it is neither prescriptive nor inflexible.

Alternative Pedagogies

Young people have several legitimate complaints about the institution that is contemporary schooling. While they receive consistent messages about its importance, they often find it uninteresting, outmoded, even irrelevant. Their relationships with peers and adults can be stilted and artificial as they are compelled to do certain things in specific places at designated times. At CAAP, Crusaders regularly surface these very concerns, and discuss their options and alternatives.

It is in no way surprising to find research participants critical, if not cynical, about the context of their work. There is a tension between the playful joy and rigorous cognitive work inherent in ABL initiatives and challenges which blurs the distinction between education and recreation. In one sense, the ‘revelation’ of learning which surfaces during processing is part of its power; however, authenticity demands that participants not be ‘tricked’ into something not of their own design.

Participants came to reflect critically on their own educational experiences and came to see the ‘apprenticeship of observation’ (Lortie, 1975) as it impacted their entry to the profession. The bureaucracy and top-down management of typical schools stood in contrast to the consensus-based decision-making they found at CAAP. They bemoaned explicit curricula that were overly prescriptive, stressing coverage over comprehension, and “hidden curriculum”

(<https://www.edglossary.org/hidden-curriculum/>) which stressed quantitative assessment (i.e., grades) and praised rote learning, obedience and conformity. They found lecture-based pedagogy insufficient, as “telling is not teaching.” Often, concepts such as “social emotional learning” and “active learning” were buzzwords, not practice.

In contrast, ABL subverts traditional power structures and values in school. Order and obedience hold lower status, if they are emphasized at all, in favor of creativity and student ownership. ABL provides a clear and adaptable framework through which Mentors gained concrete experience with a type of learning which is not measured by objective outcomes or goals, but by the sense made of experience --- the end goal of transformative learning as well. This gave Mentors confidence in the efficacy of their teaching, justifying their critiques of traditional schools and equipping them with the language to deconstruct it. Their ABL knowledge became the framework against which they juxtaposed their new experiences as classroom teachers. Each put the other into clearer perspective and allowed them to act more purposefully and in ways more emphasized in ABL than their teacher preparation.

Skepticism towards traditional education is not uncommon, nor necessarily unhealthy, for idealistic and reform-minded teachers entering the profession, though the ‘crab bucket’ inertia of many schools’ faculties can blunt this into cynicism. Wanting to make change is insufficient; developing the tools to do so is imperative. As participants implied, the complexities of teaching

are not adequately (or at least fully) addressed in contemporary educator development programs. In part, this is a matter of time and experience with the pragmatics of the relationships and tactics of successful instructors. In part, it is a lack of visible or viable alternatives.

Conclusion

To understand the vision of adventure-informed pedagogy put forth herein, it is imperative to recognize the purposeful designation of ABL leaders as facilitators. The role is premised on the constructivist notion that regardless of what may be transmitted by an instructor, it is the individual learner who can choose to make meaning from their experiences. In the words of Lord Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts, “give to the boy [*sic*] the ambition and desire to learn for himself by suggesting to him activities which attract him, and which he pursues till he, by experience, does them aright” (Boy Scouts of America, 1980, p. 127). Participants’ facilitative role is highly reminiscent of Vygotsky’s (1978) views on the ‘more knowledgeable other,’ as through a facilitator’s modeling and guidance, the individual can reach higher levels of achievement than they could solo. This is particularly evident in the reflective processing aspect of ABL experiences; yet less explored is the role of learning for the ‘more knowledgeable other’ by virtue of this relationship. Through guiding Crusaders in exploring themes like creative problem solving, building healthy relationships, and fostering critical reflection, Mentors increased their capacities in those skills as well.

Put simply, the philosophy and values which underlie adventure-based learning are distinguishing characteristics of effective educators which can be learned through teaching, not just being taught. Witnessing the efficacy of that teaching in context and real time accelerates the process by which preservice teachers learn these essential skills and dispositions, providing them more resources and better preparation for entry into the job market and teaching workforce. AIP

is unique in that it develops from practice to theory, which then reciprocally informs practice of a different kind. Facilitation challenges adult leaders to take a step back from authority and ensure that the power --- to make decisions, to discuss concepts, to transfer learning—is squarely in participants’ hands as they generate their own meaning[s] in collaboration with others. It promotes an openness to others and their ideas, and actively combats what Carlos dubbed the “savior mentality” of many beginning teachers in highly diverse schools. It is the culmination of participants’ transformations as learners and educators, as through rigorous reflection on their own experiences, they have been able to reconceptualize adventure and for use in their future pedagogy.

Chapter VII: Implications and Next Steps

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief reflection on problematic areas of ABL, and the implications of this research for educator preparation programs (EPP's) and future research.

The Dark Side of CAAP

ABL appeals to the nonconformist, the free spirit, the creative, and the boundary-pusher (Warren, 2012). As a field, it takes pride in its 'outsider' status in relation to traditional schools and schooling. The prevailing sentiment among teachers appears to be that established ABL experiences, for themselves or their students, are impediments to the 'real business' of teaching and learning. While all research participants declared NEISP/CAAP had prepared them to be more effective educators, it may have paradoxically left them at a deficit on the job market.

Participants' positive recollections of their CAAP experiences paint a rosy picture; yet for many, what they learned was a double-edged sword when it came time to enter the teaching profession. Most described an incomplete 'fit' between their adventure-informed pedagogy and school's expectations, sometimes putting them at odds with their colleagues. CAAP had no strict curriculum to follow, no specific outcomes for staff to achieve, and only a bare minimum of advanced preparation required. Most teachers do not have six hours at a time working with a small group of youth and an adult partner, especially with "fun" as an explicit objective. Relationships are more challenging to build and maintain in 45-minute increments with groups of 30 students, and the pressure of academic imperatives often frustratingly preclude what former Mentors know to be successful. CAAP stressed equilateral relationships and trusted Mentors' initiative; schools remain largely authority-driven. Contemporary curricula are not founded on self-discovery and exploratory learning, but tightly scripted and prescriptive pedagogy. In

constructing idealistic circumstances for interacting with diverse youth and staff, CAAP set a standard that many participants found incongruous with their daily teaching contexts.

CAAP inspired study participants, providing a model of relationships, skill-building, and metacognition to which they aspired in their classrooms and workplaces. Yet few schools or workplaces function with such an explicit emphasis on relationships, shared leadership, communication, and collaboration. Participants' idealism must be tempered by the real parameters of teaching, especially in the challenging schools where most have chosen to teach. A disturbing pattern emerged of participants finding teaching positions overly constrictive, leading them to change schools, or in some cases, leave the profession entirely.

Many participants shared a maverick attitude, and while some relished their nonconformist reputation, it caused friction for others. Those who became ABL "true believers" exhibited exceptional dedication to ideals of youth agency, intellectual capacity, and relational necessities. The CAAP staff culture and practices reinforced these beliefs, seemingly uncritically. As a result, Mentors became siloed in an idealistic belief system which seemingly dismisses wholesale traditional teaching processes and practices as "sell[ing] out," an 'all or nothing' approach which can alienate them from colleagues, create friction with administrators and curricula, and result in their own dissatisfaction with their classroom experiences. While they agree ABL concepts and practices should have a greater presence in schools, they do not see their instantiation.

CAAP may also instill a false sense of competence and efficacy in ABL's focus on the personal, interpersonal, and subjective construction of meaning which cannot always be applied to academic requirements. Some participants described themselves, or their fellow Mentors, as overconfident, egotistical, unsafe, even aggressive in attempts to "provoke" certain actions.

Coupled with ABL's emphasis on novel situations and fantastical premises, this can lead to hyperbole and an increased centrality of the leader/facilitator/educator in constructing and 'selling' the premises of challenges and initiatives.

Institutionalizing Adventure

This research demonstrates powerful learning experiences for pre-service teachers who have facilitated ABL experiences. While some participants were reluctant to contrast their EPP's with CAAP, those who did, found the former better prepared them for their classroom teaching.

Generally, 'more is better' when it comes to preservice educators' experience working with youth. In addition to coursework and clinical field experiences through their university, CAAP provided research participants 70 hours of contact with Crusaders, and another 20+ collaborating with staff, each ten-week session. However, it is more than just 'more experience,' as the particular structures, dispositions, and philosophy of the program highlight some of the more challenging issues in preservice teacher development. Ironically, in leading an educational experience which is explicitly *not* school, research participants ended up better prepared to teach in schools.

Pre-service experience with ABL proved to be of great benefit to the educators in this study. In itself, this is no grand revelation; many EPP's offer coursework, even degree programs, which prepare educators to use ABL tools and techniques in fields like therapeutic recreation, counseling, or physical education. Such coursework combines the experience of adventure learning as a participant and helps plan for implementing ABL in classrooms. What it does not address is teaching *after* ABL, as research participants here have done (Sutherland & Legge, 2016; Dillon, Tannehill, & O'Sullivan, 2010). Thus, the place of ABL in EPP's should be reconsidered.

Important to reiterate here is the volitional nature of ABL, as expressed in “challenge by choice.” Making any ABL experience mandatory for teacher candidates would defeat its purpose, and potentially water down a field already misrepresented in the public eye. Furthermore, as “[i]t is unethical to engage in transformative learning if we are not willing to support learners as they go through it” (Cranton, 2016, p. 52) as coercion is antithetical to the entire endeavor. Attempts to enforce such dispositions would be “something like brainwashing or indoctrination” (Cranton, 2016, p. 6).

ABL still remains outside the mainstream of traditional schools and EPP’s, and in part for some good reasons. It is time-intensive, unpredictable, and ultimately, if not unmeasurable, at least ungradable. Teachers, students, and administrators find it initially uncomfortable, often seeing more the potential for chaos than for learning. A more effective integration would involve a wholesale reimagining of the purposes and processes of school to focus on transferable skills over discrete knowledge. Put simply, most EPP’s, like most traditional schools, are not yet ready for that radical a change.

EPP’s are by necessity limited in the amount of sufficient training they can include. Teaching is, and should be, a highly personal endeavor. While it is standard practice among EPP’s and in teacher evaluation systems to stress interpersonal relationships with students, what is rarely discussed is the personal growth of the professional. In this research, many participants outline how their confidence grew, both in working with youth and colleagues. Several, in taking risks, discovered new talents and new ways of looking at themselves. For some, this was retroactive, making greater sense of their own formative experiences. For others, it was the basis for future progress.

Replicating an extended ABL program like CAAP as part of an EPP would take significant resources and creativity. While portrayed here as representing the core values and practices of the ABL field, there is much which makes CAAP unique. Especially for a nonprofit organization, the Crusade invests significant time and resources into training and supporting its staff. In youth work and education, two hours of paid staff time (plus lunch) for six hours of program delivery is rare. The program runs for ten consecutive sessions, affording both Crusaders and Mentors time to develop relationships, set habits, celebrate growth, and integrate transfer. By employing college-age Mentors from similar backgrounds as Crusaders, CAAP expands the traditional boundaries of ABL both in race / ethnicity and socioeconomic class, as according to Emma, youth “relate with someone who looks like them,” and potentially shares a similar background. All the leadership staff began as Mentors, and many have stayed with the program years beyond college. The curriculum has been vetted and revised for over 20 years.

CAAP is a significant opportunity for novice and pre-service teachers to build skills outside the traditional classroom, clocking in at just under 100 staff hours per session. In terms of seven contact hours with youth per week, CAAP represents more sustained and intense work, for a far smaller cadre of youth, than a typical ‘student-teaching’ experience. For beginning teachers, it is an opportunity to practice the skills of teaching divorced from the academic content --- part ‘lab’ environment in which to experiment, part rehearsal space for interactions, part model of professional and collective collaboration, part teacher development without academic grades attached.

While optional coursework in ABL is in no way detrimental to preservice teachers, attempting to recreate such an extensive experience as CAAP does not seem feasible for EPP’s. Perhaps ABL course work in formalized teacher development could be reconstructed through the

lens of Adventure-Informed Pedagogy; perhaps ABL functions best when not institutionalized in educator preparation programs at all. Rather than expose traditional teacher candidates to ABL, it is EPP's which need to enroll more ABL educators and expose them to classroom teaching.

Study Limitations

As a field, ABL maintains an “anti-intellectual” (Warren, 2012, p. 123) stance in its resistance to empirical research. While this has resulted in a paucity of research from which to draw, it served as an important rationale for this study.

Being a qualitative case study, this research relied on the *qualia* of participants' retrospective self-reporting. The study was not longitudinal and utilized no comparison group. Triangulation of data was limited and did not include any direct observation to corroborate participants' statements. As a result, the results are not generalizable and cannot substantiate conclusions of causality.

This study relied on nonprobability sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), as neither Crusade employment records nor online outreach through the Association for Experiential Education bore fruits in securing other research participants. While self-selected, study participants were diverse in many demographic factors, the pool was limited to those who had remained in contact with other CAAP staff and entailed a layer of distance from the learning experience itself; not only was it remembered and retold, but potentially reconstituted not only through cognitive distortions, but the potential revision of the narrative itself based on its current significance to the participant.

As noted in Chapter I, the researcher had a longstanding relationship with the program studied herein. While this provided an “insider perspective” (Mirriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 16) and increased access to participants, it was accompanied by a significant positive bias.

The small sample size resulted in a lack of statistical power in the data from the Table Completion exercise. While five items did reach statistical significance, a larger sample size may have surfaced more. The enterprise itself was awkward, in that it asked participants to rate the presence of themes in their ABL and EPP experiences, not the importance or impact thereof. There are missing data where participants may have been unfamiliar with the terminology, accidentally skipped questions, or did not feel the category relevant to either EPP or ABL. It was not initially stated that participants were expected to answer every question, nor to use only whole numbers to do so (One participant rated some items as "3.5" or "4.5," but clarified when asked to revise.). In most cases, participants completed this exercise two to three weeks in advance of their interviews, raising the question of potential priming.

Adventures in Further Research

Traditionally, research into the impact of ABL experiences has been limited to satisfaction surveys and other short-term, self-reported affective outcomes for participants. Research on transformative learning has scant address of preservice teacher development, and only one publication (D'Amato & Krasny, 2011) explored its relationship to ABL.

This research explored the impact of facilitating ABL experiences through extended case studies. In interviews and narratives, participants explored the long-term impact of ABL on themselves and their teaching and elucidated the processes by which such changes occurred and endured. Paired with transformative learning theory, which typically operates in a qualitative, case study model, the emphasis was on impact --- not just *how* individuals changed as a result of their ABL involvement, but what they have gone on to *do* as a result. The conjoining of ABL and transformative learning theory made for a powerful approach to research and offers intriguing opportunities for continued exploration.

Cranton (2006) notes “not all learning is transformative, and it does not occur separately for other kinds of learning.” (p. 14) based on constructivist principles and reflective practices (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 10) which leads to fundamental change. According to Cranton & Hoggan (2012), “in the literature we have paid virtually no explicit and direct attention to the process of evaluating transformative learning” (p. 531). One area for additional inquiry is the practical parallel structures and pragmatic processes present in both ABL and transformative learning. Both are cyclical, experiential, and primarily self-directed. Thus, they require a great deal of independence and initiative from an individual “identifying their needs, setting their own goals, choosing how to learn, gathering materials, finding resources, and judging their progress” (Cranton 2016, p. 3).

For Mezirow (2000), transformative learning for adults is exemplified in the graduate seminar, as opposed to the undergraduate classroom. Students and instructors are of relatively equal status, with the former leading their own explorations under the guidance of the latter. This is facilitated by the level of maturity and life experiences typical of graduate students, as well as the challenge and support of those “sitting in a circle, working in groups, and interacting with others” (Cranton, 2016, p. 4). In this model, ABL facilitators fulfill a similar role in leading processing. As the graduate seminar instructor, they have pedagogical goals governed by what learners bring ‘to the table,’ and are readily adaptable based on avenues they choose to explore. In both models, it is the explicit connection of prior and present experience which informs improved future understandings and decisions.

In both transformative learning and ABL, “instrumental and communicative learning leads us to question our previously held views about ourselves and the world around us” (Cranton, 2016, p. 14). In the broader philosophical sense, reflection and exploration should be

part of any teacher's toolkit. Building community, utilizing roles, engagement and active learning are regular topics in educator preparation programs (though perhaps not the central tenets). Challenge by choice is perhaps the exception, as American school is compulsory; but even then, respect for students' autonomy, and the ultimate recognition that they may be forced to attend but cannot be forced to learn, could be the connection. However, the role of critical reflection, changes in concept, and transformed action, all defining characteristics of transformative learning, set ABL apart from traditional, and even some progressive, pedagogies.

Adults engage in learning activities which "lead them to acquire new knowledge, skills, or values; elaborate on existing knowledge, skills, or values; revise their basic beliefs and assumptions; or change the way they see some aspect of themselves or the world around them" (Canton, 2016, p. 2). In this view, learning is not limited to acquisition, but to change—potentially as much on the personal level as the professional. Purists in transformative learning insist it is a uniquely adult process, as it relies on a quantifiable degree of life experiences, resources, and complexity of reflective cognition. Yet Mezirow's format fits with Kolb's (1984) and serves as the lynchpin for the parallel processes at the heart of Mentors' learning, and the learning they promote with Crusaders. By teaching a transformative learning model of experience, reflection, and application, they guide themselves on a similar journey. Thus, the case can be made for the application of transformative learning theory beyond adult education.

The traditional view hinges on cognitive maturity and life experience. For middle-level learners in CAAP, these are distinctions of degree, but not of kind. CAAP does not necessarily draw on explicit academic skills or experiences, because initiatives and challenges find their basis in Crusaders' lived experiences, reflections upon which bring about new insights and new avenues to explore in their homes, schools, and communities. Broad conclusions about the

cognitive maturity of youth and their lack of meaningful life experiences both imply a deficit model which is incongruous with what participants reported herein. Thus, it may be possible to avail younger learners of the benefits of transformative learning, provided the circumstances in which such could flourish.

This research revealed several themes participants found essential to their growth as effective educators, including increased confidence and public speaking skills, focus on positive relationships, building critical and reflective dialogue, de-centering the teacher in the learning process, and challenging traditional notions of school and schooling. While none of these alone are new to the discourse of teacher preparation, they are commonly considered only as by-products of other endeavors, corollaries to time spent teaching, or simply beneficial afterthoughts. In ABL, they are unique in their primacy and combination. Paired with the view of ABL skill-building as teacher development apart from academic content, further consideration could help develop a more nuanced and pragmatic approach to centering such professional dispositions. It may also be fruitful to study distinctions between those preservice teachers who participate in ABL experiences, as opposed to those who lead them.

This research presumed that much of the impact ABL had on teachers would be instrumental, providing them concrete learning structures to adopt or adapt for academic purposes. However, participants reported ABL has more influence conceptually, in part due to the regretful infeasibility of direct application of strategies due to time, curricular, and physical limitations. Thus, more research is necessary to determine how instrumental ABL challenges and initiatives can be incorporated into otherwise traditional learning, and the degree to which these changes in practice may result in changes in philosophy. Of particular interest is how this may

inspire veteran teachers, often portrayed as plateauing in professional development, moving from practice to theory.

While the impact of ABL has been studied herein for pre-service educators, the same could certainly be extended to participants. While the therapeutic branch of adventure education has made bold stride in inclusion, from 1988's *Islands of Healing* to 2021's *Adventure Therapy: Theory, Research, and Practice (2nd ed.)*, there remains a dearth of programming, and research on programming, for diverse populations—in particular, the poor and non-white. While some research participants commented on racial or ethnic areas of their own development, further inquiry is needed to understand how ABL impacts marginalized populations. Inquiry in areas of community, empowerment, and achievement may have particular relevance.

Traditional pedagogical practices self-perpetuate due to their preponderance in teachers' own formative experiences as students. Part of breaking this cycle of inertia are opportunities for teachers to learn in different ways and then practice teaching in new modalities. Thus, the educator who seeks to provide transformative learning experiences for their students must become both teacher and learner. This research has concluded that, to a greater or lesser degree, most study participants experienced transformative learning as a result of their time with CAAP. What remains for investigation is how these experiences informed their facilitation of transformative learning experiences for their students.

Conclusion

For beginning teachers, experience in ABL can have drawbacks, including a false sense of competency, ideological silos, and a wholesale dismissal of traditional teaching practices. While an endeavor like CAAP can have tremendous impact on future educators, it is unlikely replicable in an EPP, and, as a constitutively volitional endeavor, should not be institutionalized

in such curricula. However, the connections between ABL and transformative learning, and resulting adventure-informed pedagogy, are well worth further research.

Research participants discovered they still had much to learn in interacting with youth, colleagues, and themselves. What they learned as Mentors, they learned in concert with Crusaders. Their learning, by Mezirow's definitions, transformative in nature, stemmed from a unique position of facilitator-turned-teacher. Their experiences illustrate that it is no longer sufficient to presume that developing educators necessarily possess or develop as byproducts, critical dispositions and skills for teaching—communication, building relationships, fostering joy—without explicit opportunities to rehearse outside academic content instruction. Similarly, experiencing ABL as both learner and facilitator builds the critical apparatus to center students' knowledge construction over the traditional transmission pedagogy too many young people still experience. Similarly, definitions and boundaries of adventure-based learning demand broader examination as not just practices, but philosophies.

ABL is not value-neutral, but embraces and celebrates collaboration, connection, and compassion. It is eminently reasonable that individuals enter the teaching profession based on their own educational experiences. For better or worse, study participants grew up in traditional public schools. Working at CAAP provided each a different frame of reference, a different lens through which to critically examine school and schooling. For some, it confirmed the applicability of theory they were learning in their educator preparation program. ABL served as 'armor' for participants to defend their pedagogical choices, a lens through which to recognize outdated and exclusionary practices, and a 'habit of mind' oriented towards openness and continual self-improvement across the professional lifespan.

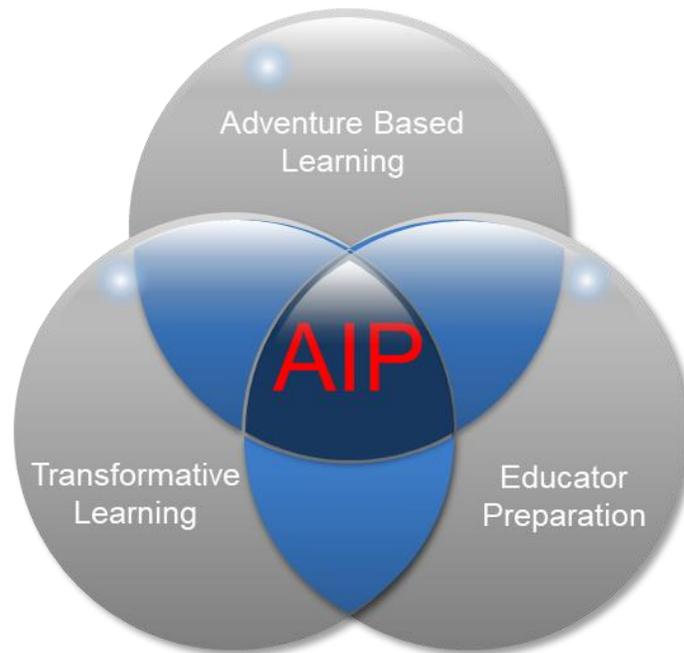
Most of the themes discussed above are contiguous with teacher development programs, as their overlap on the Table Completion exercise demonstrated. Ideas of empowering young people in the classroom, building relationships and setting a positive culture, and collaboration with colleagues are in no way the unique province of ABL. Similarly, the disconnect between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ in teacher education and the most effective balance between the two is a longstanding criticism. CAAP provided participants with opportunities to confront and integrate these dichotomies into their belief systems in a warm, supportive, enjoyable, and engaging environment. They were able to wrestle with the realia of teaching in ways that EPP’s do not allow. As collaborative experimentation and adaptation were encouraged, a sense of ownership developed, continuing into participants’ more isolated work in classrooms. This in fact may be one of the most important findings, that participants entered the teaching profession as active learners themselves, with the skills and confidence to ‘make it new,’ active, and engaging for their students. They entered believing that youth can make significant changes, and an appreciation for their role in facilitating change. CAAP set expectations for a collaborative workspace and supportive collegial relationships. It exposed participants to the challenges of working with urban youth and helped them establish a framework for viewing constructivism and growth beyond the easily quantifiable.

According to Mezirow, “educators go about making a difference in the world by helping learners learn how to make a difference in the world” (Cranton, 2016, p. 35). This holds import in that it represents conceptual, rather than instrumental, professional development. Changes in pedagogical beliefs, while fundamentally informing pedagogical practices, represent a deeper and richer degree of learning. Transformation of beliefs is the transformation of frames of

reference, and when these views result in richer, more inclusive, more meaningful classroom experiences for students, they have the power to change worlds.

For those who chose careers in education, being a CAAP Mentor was much more than a job. It became a collective endeavor, a personal challenge, a set of beliefs, a conspiracy, a professional training, an ethos. It was a form of social action, an opportunity, a family, a philosophy, a set of tools, an ideal, an impediment, an identity, and a transformation.

Appendix 7.1: Adventure-Informed Pedagogy Venn Diagram



Appendix 7.2: Adventure-Informed Pedagogy Infographic

Adventure-Informed Pedagogy

Classroom Integration of ABL Philosophies and Processes Without Practices



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