

Chapter 10:

The Participants' Experience of the Stoneleigh Project Retreats

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the young people's experiences of the Stoneleigh Project retreat programme. In particular I focus on those aspects of the retreats that were thought to have an influence on the degree to which the young people were empowered to become agents of change in their lives. I consider whether the retreats supported them in the transformation of their identities and trajectories in their personal, social, and public lives.

Camas was the venue for the first retreats and so this chapter begins by examining the pedagogic approach of the centre. I start by exploring the backgrounds to the young people that were recruited to the Stoneleigh Project considering the ways in which they thought of themselves as marginalised and how this was perceived as influencing their pathways to adulthood.

A number of inter-related aspects of the retreat experience emerged as having a contribution to make towards the questions posed by this research. The remoteness of the venues was considered an important way of separating the participants from the social and environmental contexts that were, in some ways, holding them in the identities that they were attempting to reconstruct. The contrasting experience of power as it was experienced in the relationships of the community life of the retreats, and especially the approach to conflict resolution and the co-constructing of the programmes, is discussed for its contribution in helping the participants to develop new narratives of their identities. Outdoor activities are examined as a component of the programme that highlighted the way in which social dynamics helped or hindered the emergence of the voices of the young people. Reflective space was an especially important element of the retreats. Together with the routine of community life, the activities of the co-constructed programmes, and the various opportunities to discuss personal issues and possibilities, the reflective time supported a process of constructing and reconstructing personal narratives that I argue was

the critical aspect of the retreats' contribution to the transformation and empowerment of the young people.

The Retreat Programme

This section provides a picture of the retreat experience. The Stoneleigh Group's evaluation report [R-C05(6203)] suggests that the participants highlighted a number of key ingredients as critical to the quality of the retreat experience and that are discussed. These were reported as the remote setting, the simple lifestyle, the community living, and the authentic nature of the experience. In addition, several of the elements the participants claimed were significant aspects of the whole Stoneleigh Project were also key elements of the retreats. Those highlighted in the report were the mentoring and the mutual approach to relationships.

Camas was selected as the first venue for the Stoneleigh Project retreats as it was thought by the organisers to represent most of the elements that they were seeking from the experience. As a result the Camas approach underlay the Stoneleigh Project retreat format both at Camas and at subsequent venues.

Camas was an early outcome of the aims of the Iona Community. The partly abandoned fishing cottages were rented in 1947, refurbished by students from Rugby School, and opened as a 'youth camp' for schoolboys and university students. Ferguson (1998) comments that the biblical symbolism of fishing and that of salmon in particular, as it was the Celtic symbol of wisdom, were both adopted in these early days. It persists today in the form of the chapel of the nets. This is a room at Camas once used to store fishing gear and still full of old nets. It is now used for group discussions, and this was first instigated in the early stages when the fishing was still active and the building in shared use.

The centre soon became a retreat for 'delinquent youngsters from Borstals' who experienced fishing, outdoor activities, discussion, and optional worship. The project attracted charitable donations and inspired the establishment of youth centres in Glasgow. Ferguson suggests that the work at Camas was the most vital aspect of the Iona

Community during the 1950's and 1960's, coming closest to the radical action for social justice that was emerging as the core purpose of the Community. The practices of the Iona Community had led to the development of what I would argue is an integrated curriculum model (Bernstein, 1975, p. 26-28) at the Camas retreat centre. This enabled the community at Camas to create a pedagogic space to work with marginalised young people in a way that the Camas community claimed helped these young people to explore new understandings of themselves and their relationships with others. This experience they believed could help the young people who attended a retreat to find the power to transform their personal and social situations.

Throughout the development of the Iona Community, Camas continued to provide a retreat for young people variously from schools, youth groups, young offender programmes, and international exchange programmes. The central idea liberalised even further. Ferguson quotes Fisher, a youth worker and Community member, as writing in the early seventies:

... our place is fairly unique in that we have neither a statutory, educational or medical axe to grind, nor do we necessarily come into situations like most social workers, only after some sort of breakdown. This can be very important in the kind of relationships we can develop with people; simply human with no strings attached; and in the kind of role we can play in the community. It is surely central to the mission of the Church to affirm people's humanity.

(p. 115)

From the early days Camas claimed to value its distance from the social institutions of power and control. Relationship was seen as the central aspect of the Camas experience. The people who attended retreats were regarded as having as much worth as any other person and it is claimed that they were treated in this way. Within the context of simple living the retreats are described by the Iona Community as providing an experience of equity and mutuality. The setting disrupts the everyday power and control relations of people and the networks that support their identities. It also provides a social environment

of mutual and positive regard, creates an atmosphere. Arguably, this could be described as Bernstein's condition of *communitas* (Bernstein, 1996).

The practical ways in which Camas managed the potentially challenging nature of its approach to community life are partly described in its own literature (Iona Community, 2003a).

Camas offers a unique adventure to all. Many young people and adults have found their visits both memorable and meaningful through discovery and recreation, laughter and conversation, peace and activity coming together in this beautiful place. Based in old quarrymen's cottages in a remote bay on the Isle of Mull, twenty minute walk from the road end over moorland. Camas provides accommodation and hospitality for up to 26 with an emphasis on simple lifestyle and closeness to nature. At Camas, as part of the integration of worship and work that is at the heart of the Iona Community, reflections and daily chores are shared in by both guests and staff together.

An emphasis is placed on a work ethic and its association with worship. In this extract the facilitation style is more implied through the ideas of 'coming together', 'hospitality', 'discovery', 'activity', 'reflection', 'conversation', and 'sharing'. The nature of the experience is described as 'recreation', 'laughter' and 'peace'. The purpose of the retreat experience is unstated other than to refer to 'memorable and meaningful' visits. 'Remoteness', 'simplicity' and 'closeness to nature' are all offered as qualities that support the memorable and meaningful experiences.

The final report of my earlier evaluative study of Camas (Loynes, 2001) to their committee drew on notes made during my early visits. These were more explicit about the kind of facilitation being practised:

Camas is an intentional community of volunteers living simply in a remote location and welcoming visiting youth and community groups in order to support the spiritual development of both the volunteers and the guests. The programme offered is both active and reflective and emerges each week from the unfolding community life. The remote, simple and natural setting is understood as important elements in the experience. Issues of sustainability, peace and justice feature strongly, both in the choice of groups that are encouraged to visit and in the everyday life of the centre. This approach to working with young people is novel, perhaps unique in the UK.

(p. 3)

Life at Camas was busy, full of community chores as well as recreational possibilities. To the observer it was apparent that values were embedded in the way of life rather than in lessons or subjects (Loynes, 2001). In their literature (Iona Community, 2003a) the content of the retreat was described as:

Within this programme, there will be the possibility among other things of:

outdoor activities including camping, walking, sailing, canoeing and coastal exploration;

drama, writing, art and music;

free time for being as energetic or as lazy as is appropriate;

visits to places of local interest including Iona;

the necessary responsibilities of a shared lifestyle (everything from chopping wood to washing dishes and composting waste);

conversation, games, singing and ceilidhs;

spiritual reflection and exploration of personal journeys.

Within a busy programme arising from the physical and social skills of community and recreational life there was considerable emphasis placed on group building, shared responsibility, decision-making, and conflict management. The process of living at Camas for a week was described as complex. The co-ordinator, Heather, understood it to:

... involve the visitors coming to terms with the possibly contrasting values and lifestyle of the community in residence; realising and appreciating the way in which the visitors were, as she saw it, differently valued as equal members of the community; learning to exercise what she understood to be an enhancement of their power and creativity; working with the community to live together and develop a programme for each day, realising they had choice in what to do or in whether to do nothing and realising that their experiences were understood to be meaningful and were valued for the meaning they had for the individual rather than any particular course aim or adult view.

[FN-C05(0500)]

Heather describes how the challenges that life at Camas presents are taken head on through the gatherings at which conflicts between people were addressed and possibilities for each day explored. This, she thought, enabled participants to exercise power within a group and for a purpose. She placed the individuals at the centre of the process of making meaning of their experiences and of the process of deciding what to value. The values Heather understood to be those by which the community lived were thought by her to be good values to live by.

However, the key concept of the Camas approach as Heather understood it was not to promote an alternative set of values. Her intention was, by living overtly a contrasting set of values, to offer a way for visitors to see the values they already held. This then created an opportunity to explore the worth of these and other values and to suggest that they had choice in the values by which they lived.

This interpretation of the practice at Camas strengthens the argument that the curriculum was, by Bernstein's criteria, weakly framed and classified (Bernstein, 1975, p. 26-28). Participants were involved in the processes of applying a set of values to community life, developing a daily programme, and resolving conflicts as they emerged. Within the framework of the central values of the retreat community the participants held an equal voice to other community members. The discipline of the chores of living together plus the

attraction of the activities that were available combined to provide a reason to tackle the issues that might arise from new ways of understanding and relating to others. The politics of everyday life, within a strongly held framework of values, were explicit and the conflicts that arose within and between individuals were supported through carefully managed facilitation providing a site for the discourses to unfold between competing knowledge and meanings. The young people held, as Bernstein's criteria suggest, power in the construction of knowledge and the process of learning.

The Stoneleigh Group held their first four retreats at Camas between 2000 and 2002. From the beginning the Stoneleigh Project retreats were building on a curriculum and pedagogy constructed by the Camas community maintaining an approach that I argue would follow Bernstein's (1971) integrated code. The first Stoneleigh Project proposal adopted the Camas concept of retreat describing the approach as

... a week-long, retreat-style residential involving simple, remote, community living within an intentional community and a programme that emerges from the place and the people as they live together.

[CD-SG(0400)]

At first sight the claims made for the programme are identical to those made by Camas for its retreats and so were likely to be similar to them. However, the literature sent to the young people interested in attending added a purpose for the experience that Camas did not claim for their programmes. This was expressed in the following way.

You should be at a stage in your own personal journey of development to be interested and wondering about some of the big questions of who am I, where am I going and how will I get there?

[CD-SG(0400)]

Whilst the Stoneleigh Group intended to adopt the pedagogic practices of Camas, and so Bernstein's integrated code, it introduced the ideas of developing an explicit body of knowledge about the self as well as the overt intention of exploring personal values in relation to life choices. This was a new dimension for the Camas host community.

The Young Participants

As was intended by the organisers, many of the young people attracted to the Stoneleigh Project by the description of the retreat experience thought of themselves as different from 'successful' young people in transition to the adult world. They thought that this difference had marginalised them in various ways that were already the focus of youth work interventions by the Stoneleigh Group member organisations.

Table 4 summarises ten young participants that have been chosen to represent the diversity of young people from the 65 participants taking up the offer of a place on the Stoneleigh Project. The young people have been summarised in relation to how I interpreted their social networks, how they described their social capital in relation to family, education and social networks and how they described their identities.

Some of the young participants (Brad, Gordon, Trevor, Paul, Justin) can readily be recognised as young people in circumstances that lead them to be at risk from marginalisation; a combination of problematic family relationships, poor educational attainment and poor or dysfunctional social networks. Others do not so obviously fit this category (Sarah, Steve, Clive, Rose) although they identify themselves and are identified by the voluntary organisations of which they are members as so. These represent the young people who perceived themselves as marginalised because, despite their apparent social capital, they were unable to follow trajectories that would fulfil their aspirations. This sample has been chosen to represent the variety of entry and exit categories found within the whole sample and for whom I have a significant body of evidence concerning their experience of the Stoneleigh Project, its affect on their lives and their trajectories afterwards. In relation to their social networks I have clustered the young participants into

three groups at the entry point into the programme, those with strong, weak/chaotic and fluid networks respectively (see also Diagram 1, Chapter 12, p. 290). These three clusters have been chosen based on common themes in their trajectories that are identified by later analysis. Four of the selected young participants chosen from these three clusters are described in more detail below in a way that illustrates the wide range of issues that affected them in their public, social, and private lives. Later in this chapter I draw on the evidence of these and other young people from those selected for case study to discuss the experiences that the young people had of the Stoneleigh Project retreats. In Chapters 11 and 12 I will continue to draw on the data from this group to analyse and discuss the trajectories that young people followed and the way in which they perceived that the Stoneleigh Project influenced these.

Sarah was bright, successful, and on what might be perceived as a traditional pathway to an established career. Sarah had what she considered to be a successful and enjoyable time at school. She had gained some GCSEs and had then gone to college to take some further qualifications. She wanted to join the police service. When she completed her college education there was a long waiting list to enter the training for her chosen career. Her progress was further threatened by some poor results in her college work that put her at a disadvantage in the competition for places. She described herself as bored, losing self-confidence and prepared to give up on her chosen profession so that she could get some money and join in more fully with the social life of her friends. Further, she said how she was worried her results would not be good enough for her career plans. Her church group suggested she join Weston Spirit as a volunteer. This they suggested would look good on her CV, give her something to do that she enjoyed, and develop her interpersonal skills. Sarah followed this suggestion. At the suggestion of the youth worker supporting her she joined the Stoneleigh Project as a continuation venture to enhance her volunteering.

In Sarah's case she claimed that a lack of confidence had affected her progress and her plans. Her aims were in no way radical. Her background was a stable, professional family and her choice of career was conventional. Her father worked for the police service and this role in society cannot be considered one intended to challenge social norms. It can be

understood as a role in which Sarah can express her sense of wanting to do something to improve the social situation of her community.

Steve had a different story. Whilst successful at school he lacked confidence and also could not see a pathway through higher education and into the kind of work that he valued or that caught his imagination. S03 had gained a place at university but dropped out in his first year. As he put it he “couldn’t see the point of all this knowledge and it didn’t seem to lead anywhere”. He had been in trouble in school from time to time and had truanted a little. As a result he had become involved with Endeavour Training as a participant on a truancy prevention project. He liked the outdoor and sporting activities and had become a volunteer with the organisation teaching some of the skills to other young people. He was also learning IT skills through a project at Endeavour Training. He found this very rewarding. Endeavour Training had, according to his mentor, become his world as he had few friends outside this work. He only managed to hold down part-time and temporary jobs and lived alone. He had argued with his mother and stepfather during his studies and had left home.

In an interview Steve made a link between what he considered to be his difficult family circumstances and what he thought of as weak social networks and a perceived lack of confidence. Like Sarah he was successful in education. His family background was less stable and his university place was an educational departure from the norm for his family. However, what he believed marginalised him was a combination of his loss of confidence and his feeling that he would not find work that meant something to him. At the same time he was not clear what he considered to be meaningful. Marginalisation for Steve, then, included Sarah’s sense of low confidence and added the lack of what he perceived as a meaningful direction for his life.

Brad provides an example of the more extreme consequences of marginalisation that were understood by his mentor as largely created by structural factors in his private and social circumstances. Brad was just under 18 and so was young for the Stoneleigh Project. No one knew his real name and he rarely spoke. He had not been to school for many years and was intermittently homeless. His father, who lived alone, threw him out of the house

regularly because of the gang of friends he brought into the home and their drug using behaviours. Brad claimed he had been beaten when he was younger and sometimes had run away from home. He sometimes used drugs and sometimes sold them to schoolchildren. He became involved with Mobex through a 'diversion from crime' project involving conservation tasks. He loved the outdoors, especially the forest. His father had been a poacher and he knew a lot about wildlife and the woods near his home. When he joined a Stoneleigh Project programme it was at the suggestion of his mentor Ian, now a youth worker and an ex-forester. The programme was to be held in the forest Brad knew well.

Brad had rejected the public (educational) and private (family) worlds that failed to provide him with support. His social world consisted of a chaotic set of relationships with gangs of other youths. His defence against what I would claim is a good example of the violence, as Joas (2000) terms it, that society has shown to Brad was to choose to be nameless and voiceless. Youth work has provided intermittent support. His mentor claimed that, for Brad, natural history was a way to sustain a positive connection in his mind with his father at the same time as experiencing himself in a more positive way.

Gordon was a young person who participated in the first year of the Stoneleigh Project going to Camas early in the second year. He was a gay lap dancer who, when I first met him, aspired to becoming a partner in the club in which he performed and then opening his own sex shop. His identity was being formed within a sub-culture of the gay community on the edge of criminality. I think that he can be understood as dominated by his older partner who heavily controlled the pathway along which his identity was moving. Other pathways appeared to be concealed from him or he viewed them as out of reach.

Gordon's personal issues with his sexuality had marginalised him socially into a network that separated him from normal society. This sub-culture had provided him with a relationship, friends, and work that, initially, gave Gordon aspirations for a pathway within the sub-culture to a career. This was a strong network that he later came to think of as exploiting him. He was also becoming involved in criminal activity such as drug use and prostitution. The voluntary organisation with which he was in touch had led him to Camas.

For young people involved in the voluntary organisations of the Stoneleigh Group it was not only the public domains of education and work that had become more dynamic and fluid than in the past. I would claim that, in this extended period of youth, social and private lives are also subject to the same trends. If being at home, in work, or being in higher or further education, had not materialised or were not experienced as steady pathways by these participants then, in the extended period of youth, established social institutions were, in my view, largely unavailable. The evidence suggests that, as discussed in Chapter 4, youth culture could be supportive or it could further marginalise young people leaving them vulnerable to aspects of that culture that are considered unhealthy. From the narratives of Stoneleigh Group participants these could range from illegal activities such as substance misuse or theft, or activities that were thought to discourage young people from finding a healthy path to transition such as gang membership. These life stories also recognise that some young people were open to exploitation by unhealthy aspects of the adult world such as encouragement into substance misuse and sexual and criminal exploitation.

For the young people, then, the problems they thought that they were experiencing concerning their emerging adult identities involved aspects of their personal, social, and private lives. The social networks that these identities were embedded in were variously strong, weak, chaotic, and fluid. At this stage, the young people thought of weak peer group and strong family networks as, in part, problematic. Strong or chaotic peer group networks were, however, understood as potentially supportive of their identities. Despite this diversity, what unites this group of young people is that they have responded voluntarily to the opportunities provided by a voluntary organisation and have benefited from an older mentor. They have also responded, with that mentor, to the invitation to consider their directions in life through the Stoneleigh Project retreat experience.

The Retreat Experience

The data collected during the co-operative inquiry conducted by the participants between 2000 and 2002 for the evaluation of the Stoneleigh Project identified a number of elements of the retreat experience as significant. This data was re-examined in order to consider the questions posed by this research study. Additional data to support this research was also

collected from the later round of retreats between 2002 and 2004. From this data a number of themes emerge that can illuminate the ways in which the participants experienced the retreats. In particular I focus on the themes of the remoteness of the setting, the approach to conflict resolution, the community living, the co-constructed programme, the approach to outdoor activities, and the emphasis on reflection.

Remoteness

A feature of many participants' accounts of their experiences at Camas was the walk from the end of the road to the buildings in the bay on the north coast of the peninsular. After what was often an overnight journey followed by a ferry crossing there is an hour's drive through moorland and mountain landscapes followed by a coast road with a view of islands and headlands. There are few houses and no villages. The vehicles are parked in a gateway and from there everything that doesn't walk is carried or wheeled in a wheelbarrow to Camas. The ground is wet and flat showing the signs of peat digging for fuel that is carried out by the centre. The sea and the buildings are out of sight until the last few steps. The apparent barren landscape then gives way to a cluster of buildings, young trees, a garden, washing blowing on the line, and people working or relaxing. This extract from an interview with Ben, a young person and then a mentor at Camas, captures something of the feelings of the participants on arrival.

The Camas Centre is situated on the North West coastline of the island enjoying unforgettable views of Staffa from its own secluded bay. It is a row of remote ex-fishing cottages with no electricity, central heating or running hot water in fact... if I were to say an open fire and a cold tap you'd have a better understanding of Camas, oh yeah...almost forgot no flushing toilets! (I think you get the picture)

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The centre was remote in more than a geographical sense. It was also remote from many of the typical features of modern living. The participants commented on the lack of mobile phone reception and no electricity. The lifestyle was kept simple and involved a

considerable collective effort to feed and keep warm and well slept the combined group of up to 30 people.

The facilitators of the retreats understood the uniqueness and isolation of Camas in two ways. They thought of it as providing a separation from the events and relationships of everyday life that defined the young people in particular ways. At the same time they thought of the place, as the Camas community members did, as a contrast providing new perspectives and possibilities. This, they claimed, created what they termed a liminal space in which new ways of being could be experienced and rehearsed. In order to explain this idea to the young people the facilitators often used the liminal times of dusk and dawn and the inter-tidal zone as metaphors. The facilitators and mentors valued the walk across the bog as a symbol of this separation. In reality a pub and a shop were only two miles away but participants, when they mentioned them at all, reported that they felt they were beyond reach or of no relevance. The facilitators deliberately sought out places with similar qualities for the retreat venues in England and Wales. Cae Mabon also involved a walk and had composting toilets and no electricity. Gillerthwaite involved a walk and generated its own electricity by hydro-power. All the centres were set up to be meat-free and each one was populated with a community of volunteers living a simple and egalitarian lifestyle prior to the arrival of the young people.

The impact of this remoteness resulted in initial uncertainty and discomfort that often focussed around a central issue such as the meat-free diet or the composting toilets. At other times the visiting group resisted the routines of community life by non-attendance at the twice-daily community meetings, sometimes citing concern at the religious symbols and rituals they noticed. These early reactions brought to the fore a second characteristic of community life; the commitment to resolving conflicts peacefully and with equity.

Resolving Conflict

Each day at Camas traditionally began and ended with a community meeting in which participants were invited to reflect on the day before resolving any issues and making any plans. The reflection began with a time of silence and typically concluded with a celebration of the life shared together on the retreat. This, the Camas community claimed,

reflected ‘the Christian basis of the Iona Community, and in particular its commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation’ (Iona Community, 2003b). The Camas community believed that they were not exclusive and claimed to welcome those of other faith traditions or those with no faith. The underlying value they believed they operated by was of ‘the intrinsic worth of every person, and of the earth itself, based on our Christian commitment’ (Iona Community, 2003b). This structure and approach to each day was followed by the Stoneleigh Project retreats at Camas and it was maintained by the retreats held after Camas, but without the references to a Christian heritage. Ben provided a participant’s perspective on these events.

Regular features of the time at Camas were the twice-daily reflections. These were periods during which people provided an opportunity to focus their thoughts on the day and what spirituality meant for them. During reflections one member of the group would lead the 5-10 minute session with a poem or activity to stimulate the individuals’ thinking. Interestingly enough, a clear distinction became apparent between spirituality and religion (this was evident after the group objected to the first ever reflection, which included a Christian prayer).

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Whilst always voluntary, the reflections were well attended. Those attending would sit in a circle around a central sculpture of natural objects created by the visitors during the first reflection. As well as exploring the meaning of their experiences that day, participants would share creative work, propose plans for the next day, identify and resolve conflicts, tell each other more about themselves, and organise the chores. The host community members made a great deal of effort to role model an egalitarian approach to the gatherings. The visitors were actively encouraged to voice their experiences and discuss whatever was of concern to them. The quality of the listening was high and comments and questions tended to seek understanding rather than offer judgements. It was a space in which the style of the social relations of the community were established and maintained. As much as anything experienced on the retreats, the relationships in these meetings offered a contrast to the everyday experience for the young people. As a result of this

contrast and because of the emotional warmth of these gatherings, they became central in the life of the retreats.

However, the rituals and meanings that the visitors sometimes perceived as being attached to them provoked early conflicts on several occasions. The following incident was recounted by six participants in this research and concerned an experience they had had shortly after the visitors arrived at Camas in 2001. Three young people, a mentor (Shaun), the visiting facilitator (Lucy) and two of the host community members (Heather and Joanne) reported this event.

One of the rooms at Camas is known as the room of the nets. It contains several abandoned fishing nets that are used as seats. The room was used exclusively for the twice-daily community meetings and reflections. Earlier in the year a member of the host community had repainted the external door to this room and decorated it with a Celtic cross. The cross is one of the first things seen by a visitor arriving at Camas along the footpath from the road. The three young people reported how this had concerned them as they did not want to be preached at whilst they were away. When they learned that the first meeting was to be held in this room they chose not to attend. When no one seemed concerned by this they decided to ask a host community member what the cross was and what it meant. The background to Camas was explained to them and they were introduced to the person who had painted the cross. The next day and subsequently they attended the meetings, missing only one in what they described as a protest when the same host community member opened a meal with a Christian prayer.

On hearing this story several more young people claimed they had shared the same concerns about the cross and the prayer but had joined in the first meeting anyway. One of them recounted how the symbolism of the lighting of candles to open the evening meetings was explained by the co-ordinator and that the explanation had reassured them. They described how they understood the lighting of candles at Camas to be meaningful but in a way they experienced as different from situations such as church services that they had found alienating.

Further questioning confirmed that it was both the process of something being explained as well as the content of the explanation that reassured them. The three young people who had stayed away from the early meetings endorsed this. They described how it was the way in which their choice of action was unchallenged and their questions about the cross were taken seriously that had re-assured them. They described how they strongly disagreed with the beliefs of the person who had painted the cross but felt included and valued by the dialogue that followed. They reported that they were excited by their views being listened to and respected. The mentor, facilitator, and host community member, all described how this event had, they thought, been pivotal in establishing a way of relating to the young people throughout the week that was unusual and constructive for them. As the facilitator commented, 'it could so easily have gone a different way'.

R-S02(2301)

The Camas community had confounded the expectations of the visitors. What was thought to be familiar symbolism that the participants, young people, mentors, and facilitators found alienating because of the references they perceived to educational and religious hierarchical approaches, had been transformed into something quite different. Whilst Camas did not feel like school it could, by association, feel like church. The symbols and rituals compounded these early suspicions. This concern was made stronger by the Camas community members' reluctance to discuss their religious beliefs. The perceived Christian overtones were resisted by participants, churchgoers and atheists alike.

From the perspective of the participants, this incident highlights a number of themes. Firstly, it emphasised to them how important and how fragile trusting relationships with the young people were. Secondly, it illustrated how the Camas community, whilst claiming to hold certain values, did not always exhibit them. However, the participants did not hold this to be significant once it was realised that these values were aspirations and that processes were in place to support the community when it fell short of realising them. Thirdly, it highlighted the way in which the actions of the community and the values that underpinned them became the subject matter of the retreats.

The approach taken to managing the conflicts that arose from concerns like those in the incident recounted above created a space in which the values upheld by the members of the community could be explored overtly in practical action and in conversation. The participants experienced the Camas community approach to relationships as what they described as ‘authentic’ and this was understood as something that could be trusted even at times of disagreement. This created a pedagogic relationship between the host community and the visitors that encouraged a learner-centred approach to addressing the questions that were the purpose of the retreats. Within two days of the start of each retreat everyone attended meetings in the room of the nets or the equivalent at other venues. The facilitators understood this as a sign of growing trust and curiosity facilitated by the respect shown to the young people and the willingness to listen offered by the host community members and mentors.

There are no accounts of interpersonal conflicts of a personal nature between participants. Nor were any observed at a level that caused concern amongst the young people, mentors and facilitators sufficient to consider an intervention. Those that were observed were reported as resolved informally by those concerned. The reported and observed conflicts between young people and mentors and facilitators focussed on levels of participation in the routines of the retreats or the development of the programme for the day. Most were reported as defused by the voluntary nature of involvement, the constant option to talk things over with a wide variety of people intent on being ‘good listeners’ and the option to do a variety of activities during a day or to do nothing.

Conflicts that required a formal resolution were largely concerned with grievances held by young people or mentors that the respect or trust promised had been broken by a patronising style (as in the example below concerning an abseil) or challenging values such as the use of composting toilets or the serving of all vegetarian food (see chapter 11 for an example). These would arise amongst young people who, it was reported or observed, would discuss them with whoever they trusted. The serious approach taken by the listener together with the quality of the listening would often lead to no further action. The participants reported feeling able to work out a resolution for themselves. In a few cases these issues were brought to the circle meetings and discussed by all before a resolution

would be proposed and adopted. Perhaps one aspect of these situations that ensured that they any conflict was low key was that the mentors and facilitators understood these issues to be important experiences that were a part of the pedagogic work of the retreats. They were not thought of as distractions or interruptions to another curriculum content. They were welcomed as central aspects of what it meant to be on the retreats.

Community Living

From the perspective of Joas' views on the genesis of values discussed in Chapter 8, the experience of joining a community that was living in accordance with a defined set of values could be understood as living by 'right' values. By 'right' Joas means values that have been pre-determined and are extrinsic to the individual as part of the wider social order (Joas, 2000). Community living at Camas and the successive retreats was, however, 'right' living by a 'social order' deliberately chosen to be in contrast to the values of mainstream society to which the Iona Community is opposed. The experience of the participants was that of sampling a set of values in what the Camas community thought of as an authentic way and which the participants experienced through action and conversation. The challenges this approach provoked were the subject of conflicts that were resolved in a manner coherent with the contrasting values of the community and so were, as discussed above, a central aspect of the experience of being on retreat. Developing the skills of reflection, expression, discussion, and acting a different way of life, I would argue meant that the participants were able to explore their own sense of 'good' living in Joas' sense of a life lived authentically to an internal set of values. This process, I suggest, is central to Bernstein's idea of a society reproduced or transformed by the active choices of the next generation and in a way that is congruent with his core educational values discussed in Chapter 8.

The following account of bread making illustrates how the chores of living worked in a practical way to engage young people in the exploration of the values of the community. Bread making was described by participants at Camas as a 'defining' incident by all the mentors as well as the facilitator of the first retreats. When a follow up weekend was suggested the first criterion set by the young people was that it should be somewhere they

could bake bread again. Likewise, when the specifications for the new retreat venues were discussed the participants placed the capacity to bake bread high on their list of criteria.

Host community members took it in turns to bake bread each morning for breakfast; this involved getting up at 5am. Visitors were invited to join them and, on the first morning, two did. The smell and taste of fresh bread was the topic of conversation around the breakfast table. That evening the young people argued over who should be allowed to get up early and make bread the next day. This continued all week.

When the young people were asked what they liked about bread making they described the physical act of kneading the dough, the pleasure from seeing the baked bread, and the pleasure from serving the community with something everyone clearly appreciated. The adults commented on how it became symbolic of a set of community values and a way of expressing those values implicitly. For them it defined the spirit of the Camas approach to living. The young people laughed about how, at home, getting up before lunchtime would be unusual, yet at Camas, 5am wasn't a problem.

[FN-C05(0600)]

The young people most often explored the values of the community that they considered interesting through action such as this in the first instance. In this 'defining' event, joining in a community task, serving the community, creative production and, around the breakfast table, the giving and receiving of acknowledgement, were actions embedded in particular values that were all being explored experientially by the participants. The result was new knowledge about the self and what each person could do, how they could feel about certain kinds of work, how others might regard them, and how they could transform a task or a relationship through the meaning they attached to it. The use of time was also significant. By getting up so early I would suggest the young people were also exploring different rules by which to live and different ways of engaging with rules.

Ideas about work were of particular interest to the Stoneleigh Group with its focus on work as an important site for the construction of an adult identity. The worshipful attitude, as the

Camas community called it, to community chores was having a transformative effect on the young people's attitudes to the meaning and value of work. The meaning of work was also an important focus for the Camas community. The awareness of others, the act of giving service, and the delight in giving and receiving a response were pivotal to the way the participants thought the retreats worked. Whilst it is clear from the incident of the room of the nets that the religious interpretation of this particular work ethic was suspect for many if not all the young people they none the less responded readily to the practical experience. They can be thought of as rejecting the Camas host community's concept of sacrifice, for example, but readily discussed these tasks as meaningful in other terms such as giving service.

It also had a rejuvenating effect on the mentors' attitudes to what they thought of as their service ethic as youth workers. After a visit to the second retreat Phil, the director of one of the Stoneleigh Group partners, described this activity from the perspective of a youth worker. He acknowledged the importance of a low-key style of intervention and emphasised the benefits of confronting established patterns of identity in that, he claimed, it produced people who could be more flexible and feel good about it.

There are some things we do that we just ... do – because we have to or because we're familiar with them or because we enjoy them. But sometimes we find ourselves doing something that is outside our previous experience.

One member of the course spent an evening baking bread, something he had never done before. Another went fishing for the first time in his life and caught two fish. Both chose these activities entirely of their own accord. These apparently trivial incidents can in fact be extremely important in the lives of people, especially the young, because they may redefine the individual.

Someone who has previously thought of himself as a climbing instructor becomes redefined as a climbing instructor with domestic skills. Someone who has learnt to cope in an indoor, urban environment becomes redefined as a person with a range of

indoor and outdoor skills. Such redefinition gives people confidence, independence, resilience and a more positive outlook. It may change the course of their lives.

‘If I can bake bread, I can do anything!’ Sounds absurd? Yes, but it’s true, more or less.

Here’s where we depart from standard practice. Participants choose and follow their own developmental path, with minimal prompting or direction and with only as much feedback and interaction as they want.

[R-SG(1100)]

For Phil, I would argue that developing self-knowledge took the form of Bernstein’s (1996) idea of deep knowledge. By this term Bernstein meant that knowledge was understood by the pedagogues as mutable in that what knowledge was of importance and what it meant was negotiated with the young people rather than determined by an established curriculum imparted by the facilitators. The consequence of this approach was that young people were able to develop critical thinking skills and that this, coupled with an experiential way of engaging them with the knowledge, encouraged them to ‘think the impossible’ (Bernstein, 1996, p. 28-31) of themselves, as Phil claimed that they did.

Other aspects of community life that were reported by the young people as provocative included the cooking arrangements, communal eating, the composting toilets, the twice daily gatherings to make collective decisions, facing up to conflicts, positive regard and acceptance of others, making one’s own entertainment, no electricity, no hot water, and more. All of these were lived by the resident community as taken for granted and as meaningful ways to live life. They operated by social rules that were accepted but only locally known and, partly because of the contrast with the everyday lives of the visitors and partly because of the implicit nature of these rules in the life of the community, they were often experienced as a challenge to the visitors. Working openly with the visitors as they wrestled with these challenges provided the opportunity to question old knowledge and explore new knowledge about the values by which each participant lived.

The debates over values were not a one-way process of the retreat community challenging the visitors. The community life of the retreats also provided the opportunity for identifying and negotiating other values that were introduced by the young people and that were challenging to the host community. Another incident illustrates this well. Mac, a host community volunteer at the Gillerthwaite retreat and a vegetarian, described how, on the day dedicated to thinking about others, he decided to buy meat to barbecue for the meat-eaters. The course catering had been largely vegetarian.

I thought that, if I was doing this for them, then they should do something back to honour the life that was taken in order for them to eat meat. The lads asked to make bows so we worked on them all day. They also built a sculpture of a pig out of willow and when the time came to eat they fired flaming arrows into the sculpture which burst into flames to start the fire for the cooking.

[FG-Part(7104)]

The negotiation over the values behind food preferences acted as a means to work out a mutual and egalitarian approach to resolving differences of view. The values underlying the resolving of conflicts, and especially the power experienced by the young people in participating in their resolution, were as meaningful in this incident as the subject of the debate. Mac understood this as a recognition of and respect for the difference in values held by members of the community. He thought this was a big step for the young people concerned, taking them well beyond their normal experience of the distribution of power between young people and adults perceived by them as in authority. It provided them with new knowledge of themselves, of adults, and of ways of relating with adults that were discovered through experience and could then be enacted in the life of the retreat.

This two-way negotiation as a process on the retreat programme was enhanced by the development of the retreats at venues other than Camas. Lucy, a co-facilitator on this retreat, felt that this was because the host community understood more fully the purpose of the retreat in the context of the Stoneleigh Project, a view endorsed by Liz, the other co-facilitator.

Living by a contrasting set of values in a remote setting was initially described by the participants as uncomfortable. However, the early experiences of participants resulted in levels of trust and curiosity that allowed the young people to develop and explore their skills at engaging with relationships, values, and lifestyles in a new way. It can be argued that the retreats emerged as safe places for the young people to explore new possibilities for themselves. This experience resonates with Taniguchi, Freeman and LeGrand-Richards (2005) concept of the stage of fractional sublimation discussed in Chapter 3. As I have suggested above, the challenges in the lives of the young people can be thought of as having created levels of discomfort that, given new opportunities, had encouraged them to develop different identities. The separation from the everyday world enforced by the retreat can be thought of as providing the space to explore such new possibilities. Nevertheless responding to the lifestyle of the retreat communities was only a part of the process. The retreats also provided a space in which the participants could create their own programme and so develop a sense of agency in the construction of their identities.

The Co-constructed Programme

In the first two or three days the participants spent most of their time joining in with the pattern of community life and 'chilling out'. Later, once the young people had become familiar with the area and knew some of the resources available to them in the form of equipment and the skills of the host community and themselves, a programme of activities would be developed. The participants often described the retreats as having no programme. In practice what this meant was that there was no pre-determined programme and that, in the spirit of the community life on retreat, the programme was co-constructed by everyone. The only framework for this offered by the facilitators was that, whatever happened, should relate to the declared Stoneleigh Group purposes of the retreats, 'who am I, what do I believe in and where am I going?'

Ben, a young person at Camas in the first year, described in an interview the way the retreat programmes developed in the later stages of the visits. He highlighted that participation in the activities was optional and that this critically endorsed the emerging egalitarian style of relationships developed in the earlier stages.

Plans for the first couple of days, once the community chores had been completed, were largely aimed at exploring the coastline around the bay or simply relaxing outside even if this involved being fully dressed in warm clothes and waterproofs. Later in the week, once the skills of the host community became clear and the opportunities presented by the landscape emerged, more familiar outdoor activities were proposed.

There were several activities on offer which the group decided to include on the program on a 'drop in basis', giving individuals the freedom to engage in the group or not. The choice not to engage was not seen as a negative action but rather as a specific need of an individual to 'get their heads together'. The activities were aimed primarily to focus the group's thoughts on their own spirituality and included the use of music, discussion, art/sculpture, poetry and adventurous activities, many of which were unfamiliar activities to the group.

I-M01(8202)

Activities were provided by participants, visitors, and host community members and all were optional. Many were creative ways of supporting reflection time or ways of sharing people's thoughts and feelings about themselves and about the community and the place. Others were new ways to explore and experience a place; camping out, sailing and kayaking trips to nearby islands, and walks. Some were more conventional outdoor activities. The latter were often the focus of conflicts concerning power between those with skills and knowledge and those without. As such I suggest that they highlight the way in which power was valued in these relationships, as the following incident illustrates.

It involved an abseil. It illustrates how Heather's sense of how participation was intended to work was an ideal not always lived up to. This incident was recounted in the review of the retreat by one young person (Martin) and me.

Most of the visitors wanted to abseil in a quarry on the other side of the bay from the centre. Everyone decided to walk over and at least watch. Heather asked me to keep

an eye out for Martin. She felt he was vulnerable and that his fear of failure and ridicule might overcome his desire to join in and be seen by the group joining in. She asked me to keep chatting with him, suggesting that I pretend that I was also nervous of having a go and that we could support each other. Watching out for nervous young people in order to assess their needs in an activity like this was familiar to me. Pretending to be other than I was (I am a qualified climbing and abseiling instructor) was not and I felt less comfortable about this. It felt at odds with my own values as well the openness and equity of the community I had experienced up until now. I did as Heather asked talking with Martin at the top of the cliff while others abseiled. Finally, I said I was ready to have a go if he was and we agreed to do it. I went first, trying to act slow and clumsy. He then followed getting loud applause from everyone when he reached the bottom. He was grinning broadly. He took me aside and asked if he was right in thinking I could abseil well. I said I could and that I had been deceiving him. He replied that I was not very good at lying and that he knew all along but thanks anyway. He then added that, if I abseiled properly, he would do it again. We did and several others had a second go whilst two who had come to watch also joined in.

My notes describing what Martin said he felt provide his perspective on the incident and explore my concerns at the time. Martin said 'He was bullshitting me. It didn't matter because I wanted to have a go and it helped me make my mind up. When they clapped it didn't feel right. I told him to do it properly next time so I could too'.

[FN-C05(0600)]

This intervention, whilst apparently well meaning, seemed at odds with the values of equity and openness practised at Camas. It felt paternalistic and manipulative. This brought to light some of the qualities that I, and perhaps others in the group, felt were oppressing the development of these young people and that the Camas approach sought to counter. The strategy 'worked' in that the young person abseiled. However, placing a high value on participation was a conventional value of outdoor education that I had thought was countered by the Camas approach. The young person held the same view. His intervention acted to correct the balance as I abseiled 'honestly' for him and he felt happy about abseiling for his own reasons rather than to keep me happy. I notice that, despite

expressing unease with judging activities as successful by the level of 'participation', I still noted at the end of my story that others who had been watching chose to have a go!

What stands out in this incident is that, by later in the week, participants, including young people, were making interventions to maintain the set of rules concerning the right way to relate at Camas, as they understood it.

Conventional outdoor activities, whilst widely available at Camas, were either poorly taken up or ignored by the participants. Apart from this account of the abseil they were not mentioned in the daily round ups, they didn't feature in photographs, they were not described in interviews, and they were not mentioned in the follow up weekends. It is interesting to speculate whether the choices being made by the young people reflect structural aspects of outdoor activities such as kayaking and climbing. As has been suggested in Chapter 8, their nature requires, as Bernstein would describe it, a curriculum coding involving stronger classification and framing. Specialist skills and knowledge have to be imparted, tested and supervised by an expert. Without this skill acquisition would not be achieved within a framework of safety. In addition they are activities that can readily define some people by what they cannot or do not want to do setting them apart from a dominant social group of those that are 'successful'. According to Joas (2000) this could remind participants of the alienating educational and social frameworks from which Camas is supposed to be different.

The narrative above describes how a shift from a more trustworthy and mutual relationship focussed on the learner to one that was more goal oriented and focussed on the activity solicited a defensive and then challenging response. It indicates how the participants valued the egalitarian nature of relationships on the retreat and that they were capable of anticipating which activities might work against this approach. I would argue that they avoid them, or, if their fears were realised, confronted the shift in power. This in itself was an interesting indicator that young people had found the confidence to challenge conventional power arrangements once it was clear the adults present were prepared to listen and change. Once what can be understood as a weak framing (Bernstein, 1971) had

been introduced and found to be of value, when it was then threatened, it was defended and the young people were active in this defence.

Once the Stoneleigh Project retreats moved to other venues, and after consultation with young people and mentors, it was decided that no formal outdoor activities requiring expert tuition would be offered. They were also taken off the programme for the last retreat at Camas. Whilst walks, camps, fires, and solos continued, other activities were created from within the imagination of the group.

Outdoor Activities

Nevertheless, outdoor activities were significant to the young people as a means for exploring and expressing themselves. Ways of finding and exploring new knowledge of themselves was available to the young people on retreat in a wide variety of forms. In part this was developed in a physical or embodied way by providing new sensory experiences, new forms of movement, and new physical skills. These physical experiences provided ways to both explore and express identity in a way that complemented and interacted with the social context provided by the community. The continuing story of Brad illustrates this.

My notes concerning Brad describe a person who did not speak, did not make eye contact, and who did not join in throughout the first three days of the retreat. He was a 'hoody' wearing a parka jacket with its hood and fur lined collar up at all times making it hard to see his face at all. I did not see him after this but noted later that Liz and Lucy both described a moment in which they perceived Brad to change dramatically.

On the fourth day Brad joined a group for a hill walk. Liz described how it was hard to keep him with the rest as he surged ahead up the steep slope. On the top of the ridge Liz described how Brad threw back his hood, raised his arms in the air and shouted into the strong wind, and then ran into the wind and back several times. His descent was as fast as his ascent and Liz said he had the tea on for the others when they got back. Lucy described how his hood was off and how he made brief and then increasingly steady eye contact. That evening she described how he spoke for the

first time about how he felt on the hill and then, 'as if a dam had burst', went on to tell everyone of his problems with being kicked out by his Dad, being mixed up in drugs, and how he got his nickname.

Lucy described how one of the host community members had brought her young child with her. The mother noticed Brad paying attention to the child around the fire that evening. The next day she asked Brad to baby-sit for her for a while. For the rest of the retreat Lucy described how Brad spent all the time he could minding or playing with the child and making tea whenever he could persuade someone to ask for a cup.

His name seems pertinent to this story but, as no one knew him by any other name, I cannot use it here. Suffice it to say it implied silence and enigmatic looks.

I met him again at the follow up weekend. I sat in the corner of the hut by the wood-burning stove watching the group prepare a meal and catch up with each others' stories. Brad sat diagonally opposite me making no eye contact. I wondered what had become of the person in the accounts of Liz and Lucy although there was no hood. After a while he left the room, returning with fire lighting materials. As he knelt over the task he looked up at me and asked if I was still making notes about the week, to which I replied that I was. He replied that he would like me to note that he was trusted to light the fire and look after Mary. At that point Mary wandered in and up to the fire and Brad spent time talking to her about the fire and how pretty and how dangerous it was. When Mary wandered outside Brad offered to make me tea. In the conversation that I led that evening in which I asked the group about the retreat, their memories of it, and the consequences to their lives as they understood them, Brad wrote and talked. He described how the mountains were a new passion for him and he had been out with the voluntary organisation on several trips. He wanted to spend as much time as he could in the forests and hills. He described how his friends now called him a tree hugger and how he did like hugging trees on the conservation projects he'd joined. He added that he was proud to be called a tree hugger by his friends and, because they thought he was tough, they wouldn't give him any hassle over it. He also described how he was now back at home with his Dad again and had promised not to let his mates do drugs in the house.

[FN-C05(4502-03)]

For Brad, rather like Gordon, a need to get away involved a big physical effort followed by a physical cleansing and the removal of a mask, in this case the wind and not the sea and a hood and not make up. I would argue that values were being acted out through the body and the senses were immersed in a stimulating element as a form of symbolic transformation. The changes continued to be embodied in the actions he took on behalf of others such as tea making and child minding. Eye contact and other more positive body images eventually led to social interaction that included revealing his story, joining in and, later, initiating conversations.

This example highlights the role of the outdoors in providing a context for new knowledge of the self. For Brad there was a link between the new physical self, ‘the mountains are where I feel myself’, and his opening up to the possibility of new knowledge of himself in a social context, ‘I feel like somebody at Gillerthwaite’ and ‘this is what I want to be like’ [FN-C05(4903-04)]. The meaning the mountains came to have for Brad was as a source of new knowledge of himself that he could sustain by revisiting them.

It is interesting to note that, whilst Brad benefited from recontextualised knowledge of himself, the experience is not directly mediated by a pedagogue. Even if a facilitator had told Brad that the feel of the wind was good, which in this case no one had, the evidence of the experience affected him of itself. It is possible to speculate that the unmediated experience was an important first step in Brad considering new knowledge of himself. It was a positive experience that he and his mentor claimed led him to open up to other possibilities within the social environment of the retreat.

The knowledge involved in this account was self-knowledge; an awareness of what made him feel good, feel valued, and feel liked or loved, as well as an implicit critical assessment of what he did not like. It was also the knowledge that he was respected, listened to, trusted to take responsibility, and that there were places and people who could make him feel like that.

The idea of the outdoors as a liminal space as discussed above was also understood in a metaphorical sense. The retreat landscapes were described by the facilitators as providing a landscape that was not defined by others on behalf of the visitors. Events unfolded such as swimming, beach games, rock pooling, rock hopping, meals, fire lighting, singing and, above all talking, especially around the fire. Little activity, however, was ever planned. The place provided a novel and undefined context onto which a new story could be written.

In some ways I would suggest that this extends Hall, Coffey and Williamson (1999) idea of a 'place to go' (p. 506) to the outdoor residential and intergenerational context. They state that 'youth is an expansive moment, and young people moving towards social majority invariably feel the need for room to nurture and explore their emergent sense of themselves ...' (p. 506). I suggest that the adult free nature of the places Hall *et al.* describe, bedrooms, bus shelters and street corners, is maintained, partially at least, by the freedom to be alone, the diversity of adult relations and the egalitarian and student-centred principles of the pedagogic practice. Hall *et al.* focus on the significance of space as not only a 'room of one's own' but also 'room to move'. They understand this as '... a place to go - space in which to meet and be with others, space which young people can enter on their own terms and on their own initiative, unaccompanied and unsupervised by adults' (p. 506). For young people 18 plus 'trapped as teenagers' (Williamson, 1997, p. 184) such a space would be vitally important. However, I suggest that a space in which to meet adults on different terms is also important. It could be understood as a space that replaces the work place. The retreats and their outdoor and intergenerational setting together with their facilitation style offered both kinds of spaces almost at need.

The facilitators sometimes described this liminal quality of the retreat spaces as neutral, meaning that the cultural history of the locations did not define the young people who engaged with them. However, it was also their decisions, however implicit, not to provide a construction for these places that allowed the retreat spaces to be liberating in this way. The socio-historical aspect of these places such as the history of Camas as a quarry and later a fishing station, or the background to Iona as a religious centre, whilst always available to the visiting participants, were never apparent as an influence on the actions or

accounts of participants. The irony of Camas providing experiences that were thought of as liberating through a simple, land-based work regime building on the runrigs of what was probably an oppressive, hard, and tedious crofting lifestyle, was lost on the participants.

There was another dimension to the liminal role of the outdoors on the retreats. Some participants slept outside by the fire or in tents. The firelight and the candles added another aspect to the experience that was sometimes referred to by the facilitators as 'elemental'. The tent walls provided a more interactive relationship with the wind, sand, temperature, and rain than a building would. These qualities that were a part of being at Camas were explicitly sought-after as qualities of the places chosen for the other retreats. They were thought to support the possibility of change for the young people by demonstrating the dynamics of relationships and providing what were considered to be rich metaphors for human life experience. This aspect of the outdoors was particularly relevant to both the formal and informal reflective time discussed next.

Reflective Space

The outdoors was a space for reflection as well as action. It was common to see participants sitting alone or in small groups in silence looking at the view or following a stream or the strand line. Lucy wrote in her first report as facilitator of the retreats

During the course of the residential I had many private conversations and observed or was told about others that occurred. The content of these conversations was about the individuals' lives and what they were doing with them, difficulties they faced or had to face and what was worthwhile for them. I also saw people taking the opportunity to wander off and find a quiet space for themselves or sitting outside in the moonlight, marvelling that they had never seen the moon without streetlights, volunteering to do communal jobs or just doing them anyway. All of this is evidence about the value of the programme.

R-S02(0700)

Participants also described some of the rhythmic chores such as kneading the dough or raking the lawn as important reflective times. Rose, a young participant, described the quality of the feelings she felt from relationships with place that she experienced on the retreats. The sense of joy and happiness was described as irrepressible and expressed through laughter.

The first morning at Cae Mabon I woke up with an overwhelming sense of joy. I could hear the stream in the background, the natural noises from outside and the daylight flooding in on me and I felt so happy to be there.

[FG-Part(5403)]

Rose reflected on what these feelings meant to her. She described how the physical experiences in particular were moving and how this sense of movement inspired her to act. These actions for her were not only joyful expressions of her delight. She also used this inspiration to tackle difficult issues in her private life. She was claiming that this feeling could evoke a sense of agency or power expressed physically and socially. She also believed that this supported her in transforming herself by motivating her to address the issues that prevented her from progressing on the path she wanted to follow – ‘just to live!’

Someone once said to me that all teachers need to give their students inspiration. But what is inspiration? My dictionary defines it as ‘a divine influence or action upon the lives of certain persons that is believed to qualify them to receive and communicate sacred revelation or the act or power of moving the intellect or emotions’. I believe that all you need to be inspired is just to live and being at Cae Mabon certainly taught me that.

[E-M-R03(7604)]

Rose identifies several factors that helped her to take the time to relax and reflect.

At Cae Mabon I found myself with a lot of time to relax and to think and reflect on what direction my life is going in and to put it all back into perspective. Whilst sitting with a mind empty of thoughts, desires and emotions I realised that some of the answers were staring me right in the face and I just hadn't had the courage to look at them. On my solo in the woods I attained a stillness of the mind and I became more aware of my own thoughts. I could no longer block my thoughts out because I had no pressures or demands being thrown at me so I had nothing else to think about.

[E-M-R03(7604)]

The place contributed to Rose's settling down and appreciating time on her own without pressure or judgement. Jack, a volunteer host community member, describes the same experience in his comments.

One thing that encouraged me so much over the week is how a group of people from widely differing backgrounds can work so closely together and be so relaxed, honest and form a community in such a short space of time. For total strangers to become a special part of your life whom you can implicitly trust so soon gives me great encouragement in the inherent goodness of the human spirit in all of us if we can only release it from the prisons that ourselves and modern society create ...

I hope that I will somehow be able to help others to 'escape' and experience the same joy, peace and freedom.

[FG-Part(5403)]

Like Rose, Jack valued the chance to 'escape' from 'modern society' in order to gain a state of mind and a perspective that, for him, allowed new values to emerge. Rose was clear that it was the remoteness of the place and the simple lifestyle that provided this sense of isolation in which modern life is less visible. Rose continued:

At the beginning of the week I felt as though my mind was a big waterfall with thoughts tumbling down like rushing water. By mid-week it had begun to settle down and become a quiet river and then by the end of the week it was like a peaceful ocean without waves.

[FG-Part(5403)]

The participants, then, attributed remote, simple, and unusual places with the capacity to provide a reflective space. The natural setting was described as comfortable, safe and joyous. In this space young people contemplated themselves in relation to a non-human 'other', as Joas (2000) puts it, and found what they described as the peace and courage to think through their narratives of their personal lives up to these points. Time for solitary or collective reflections out of doors were offered as a part of the possible programme by the facilitators of the retreats, usually later in the week. The young people also took considerable amounts of solo time informally and frequently throughout the retreats. Meaningful solo time offers a very weak framing as the mentors and facilitators have little influence over the content or the processes involved. They do create the opportunities by raising expectations, encouraging young people to use their time in this way and by programming the time in some cases. They also provide support, notably by offering a vigil for overnight solos so that everyone knows there is a lighted place to return to at any time of night at which someone will be awake and ready to listen. Being ready to listen to any experiences of solitude provided a social context in which the stories of the experiences young people had could be told.

I discussed in Chapter 3 the emphasis that Sibthorp (2003) and Taniguchi *et al.* (2005) place on reflection time in the latter stages of an outdoor experience. They understand this as a time for reconstructing an identity based on the new knowledge acquired from the outdoor experiences. I would add to this that the young people also developed a level of skill and confidence that allowed them to take time for an inner dialogue. Much of the thinking that the participants described as occurring during reflection times was the reconstruction of historical narratives. In many cases the new narrative re-valued the young person within the story and placed them in a position that gave them more agency for what

could happen next. Rose illustrated this well. This enhanced sense of agency was also present in their increased readiness to contemplate future life paths.

It was important to the participants to recount the thoughts they had had during reflections to the other participants. Telling their stories to each other and being heard were valued times. These conversations occurred in formal meetings or through creative activities as well as in informal groups or, sometimes, a one to one conversation with a mentor or facilitator. Many of the participants noted how firelight, movement, sharing a view or watching the waves helped with these occasions.

Conclusion

A retreat is an unusual approach to informal education out of doors that is not widely discussed in the literature. The Camas community were wary of the term. One member commented that ‘it’s more of an advance than a retreat!’ [FN-C05(0600)]. I understand this to mean that some community members thought of the retreats held by the Iona Community as engaged with the social world rather than removed from it. I have suggested that the Stoneleigh Group, with the help of the Camas community, took the reflective and student led aspects of outdoor education practice and emphasised them within the framework of a pedagogical relationship that was highly critical of the traditional power relations within society and within education. This approach was applied to young people who had already experienced significant challenge and discomfort and so, I would claim, were already living in conditions that encouraged a reworking of identity in their personal, social and public lives. In my view it was these elements of the Stoneleigh Project retreats that were important to the participants rather than the retreat community’s particular ways of relating to the outdoors.

Separation, I have argued, was important. It is frequently mentioned as significant in many forms of outdoor practice. In this case it can be understood as the removal of the social and spatial references defining the young people in their everyday worlds that were considered to initiate the exploration of new possibilities for an adult identity. The effect of the retreats was both real and symbolic. It was real in the sense that the young people could think, believe, and act differently. It was a symbolic event in that it was also a benchmark

for a potential turning point that could be attributed as the cause of future developments in their life stories.

A contrasting social as well as environmental setting was a significant aid in the task of exploring the Stoneleigh Project's questions of 'who am I, what do I believe in and where am I going?' Strong values, upheld by the host communities, emphasised individual responsibility, collective endeavour, and challenged social norms and the conventional distribution of power in the social world. The retreats took a different approach to the distribution of power between people and within society. This supported both the experiential and social learning processes on the retreats and emphasised the voices of the young people.

An important aspect of the experiential learning was the outdoor opportunities that provided a novel context in which to explore identity in an embodied way. New knowledge of a physical and emotional self enhanced the potential for the re-constructing of identity.

An approach to learning that was experiential and social, and was explored in action and conversation, I argue involved the participants in a deeper understanding of the aims of the retreats. The participants saw themselves as if in a mirror, encountered others who were different to them and were themselves regarded differently. These were all opportunities to see themselves in a new light. Critically, the participants developed the confidence and skills for intra- and inter-personal dialogues about their changing perceptions of themselves. The retreats then provided a space in which changing identities were explored in action and conversation. These creative opportunities were significant. The landscape added to these possibilities by providing a context for what were felt to be authentic experiences of the self. As well as a rich source of metaphors and a stimulating context for reflection time, in which old narratives of the past were rewritten and new narratives for the future considered, it provided a stimulating and 'neutral' setting to explore new identities.

Narrative emerged from the retreats as what I argue is the central and critical aspect of the retreat process. Learning to take an interest in the stories of others, 're-reading' their own stories, 'writing' their own as well as a collective story, and constructing stories with new meanings all played a part in the reworking of the identities of the participants, especially the young people but also the mentors. Recounting narratives was a social process that benefited from the community in two ways; as a source of new ideas and as an audience that listened. Each story was individually unique but each needed a social setting in which it was heard, acknowledged, and accepted. Importantly, without the social context of people from other walks of life and other generations the pedagogical process of learning to tell, critique, and create a personal narrative, and to have the skill as well as the courage to create, would have been less well developed. Likewise I would argue that the equitable distribution of power was also critical to the quality of the narrative experience.

According to the participants then, the weak framing, as Bernstein (1971) would have termed it, of the outdoors on the Stoneleigh Project retreats created a programme with which the participants can be understood to have explored themselves experientially in action and socially in conversation together. This was combined with reflection time in which participants reported that they were able to reconsider their histories and imagine their futures. Within this the role of narrative, both understood as action and conversation, was central and critical to the process. I discuss this in the next chapter. In Chapter 12 I will examine in what way the narratives of the young people unfolded in the follow on to the retreats.