ABSTRACT

TITLE:	Aesthetic Experiences in Outdoor Experiential Education: Possible Impacts on Leadership Development and Attitudes About Inclusivity.
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ABSTRACT: Part of the draw of expedition-based experiential education program are the absorbing, powerful moments participants may have in the wilderness. These moments in nature are often called "aesthetic experiences," characterized by total engagement in the present, awe, and conditions of beauty or sensory novelty. Widely described in the literature as experiences which emphasize unity and connectedness, aesthetic experiences may promote inclusive and socially just leadership attitudes in outdoor program participants. These experiences may be of value to educators, but are poorly understood within the field of experiential outdoor education. Studying eleven participants in a college-level Adventure Education semester emphasizing field expeditions, we tracked leadership beliefs and collected aesthetic experiences from participants over a two-month period. Both shifts in leadership beliefs and aesthetic experiences were found, revealing increased belief in socially just concepts of leadership. While a conclusive connection between leadership beliefs and aesthetic experiences was not found, data collected provides insight into program outcomes and has produced a groundwork for further research into aesthetic experience and outdoor education, along with recommendations for outdoor experiential educators interested in promoting aesthetic experiences in their programs.