



**THE VOICES OF OUTDOOR ADVENTURE: AN EXAMINATION OF THE LONG-
TERM MEANINGS AND IMPACTS OF ADVENTURE EXPERIENCES FOR NEW
ZEALAND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how past participants of a New Zealand-based university outdoor adventure programme have perceived the meanings and impacts of former adventure experiences over time. This study employed a phenomenological case-study design which used in-depth, semi-structured interviews with former participants of a New-Zealand university outdoor adventure programme called the Mountains-to-Sea expedition. Six participants, former physical education students who had gone on the expedition between four and five years ago, were chosen to gain retrospective insight.

The results from this study generated detailed narratives which revealed that the perceived meanings and impacts of participants' experiences were generally positive but there were subtleties and nuances to these perceptions which changed over time. Individuals made meaning in finely distinctive ways and impacts tended to dissipate in perceived intensity over time, though there were some exceptions. The participants embodied a very unique culture which impacted their understanding of outdoor adventure education philosophy. These findings have far-reaching implications on the future of outdoor learning and warrant greater attention from practitioners and researchers. The results bolster an argument for more qualitative research into the long-term meaning and impact of adventure experiences, particularly for the New Zealand context.

Keywords: outdoor adventure education, Mountains-to-Sea expedition, phenomenology, qualitative research, case-study, meanings, impacts

SECTION I - INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

It is becoming increasingly accepted that outdoor adventure education (OAE) is highly effective at promoting student learning (Cason & Gillis, 1994; Hattie et al., 1997, Neill, 2002). Professionals in the field often feel that they facilitate profound impacts and hope that important outcomes in personal and interpersonal development continue to influence their students' lives long after participation in programmes has ended (Luo et al., 2002). They often presume that they are changing the world, one expedition at a time. Such an assumption seems quite valid since, "The buzz from effort, excitement, having achieved something together, mastering a skill or overcoming a challenge is hard to beat, especially if it is in a place of stunning beauty" (Campbell-Price, 2008, p.11).

There is little research evidence, however, which confirms such lasting effects from participation in outdoor adventure. The literature on OAE generally shows wide support for the positive outcomes that programmes generate (Goldenberg & Pronsolino, 2008; Hattie et al., 1997; Marsh, Richards & Barnes, 1986). This body of research has, however, some limitations. The research has predominantly used quantitative designs and has focused largely on short-term measurements. The subtleties of adventure experiences are often overlooked and there is a need for more qualitative based research which can capture the nuances in students' perspectives about how they make meaning and how they perceive the impacts from their experiences in the longer-term. These are two issues of which little is presently known.

This is particularly true for the New Zealand context. In a country where outdoor education is becoming an ever-growing part of schooling (Boyes, 2000), in-depth qualitative

investigations into the nature of outdoor adventure experience are needed to help understand and refine educational processes. The need for valid understanding is especially pertinent to the training of outdoor leaders who will one day take the helm of OAE in New Zealand. How does outdoor leadership training steer the direction of OAE? How might the experiences of future outdoor leaders affect the learning of future generations? The implications of these questions warrant reflexivity and critical, in-depth research and highlight the purpose of this study.

The research purpose just outlined drove three key research questions: 1. What meanings to past participants ascribe to former outdoor adventure programme experiences?; 2. How do they perceive the impacts of those experiences?; and 3. How have their feelings about meanings and impacts changed over time? The qualitative case-study design was chosen specifically to gain a deeper insight into the long-term meanings and impacts of one New Zealand-based OAE programme – the MTSE.

The Mountains-to-Sea expedition (MTSE), offered as outdoor leadership training for physical education students, was an ideal context for addressing these questions. It allowed for a deep exploration of participants' retrospective perceptions about the meaning and impact of former adventure experiences, and how these perceptions have changed over time. In light of the research shortcomings and potential implications identified above, a case-study methodology using the MTSE was chosen to investigate the long-term meaning and impact of adventure programme experiences for New Zealand university students.

Six former participants who had completed the MTSE between four and five years ago were chosen for in-depth interviews. These interviews generated very detailed narratives which showed that participants' experiences were quite positive on the surface. The same was true of the impacts that they perceived had occurred from their experiences. Deeper analysis,

however, revealed that the participants made meaning and perceived impacts in finely distinctive ways which changed over time. The initial meanings attributed to the MTSE tended to dissipated over time. While long-term impacts were generally considered to be relatively weak, there were some exceptions. These results are both consistent with and contradictory to the literature and they bear important implications for New Zealand OAE practice and for future OAE research.

CHAPTER 2: Historical Background & the MTSE Case

Philosophical Roots

OAE is inherently linked to the broader field of experiential education and shares deep roots with experiential education that go as far back as Plato. In claiming that the most effective learning is one by discovery and that education has a primary role, not in imparting skills, but in fostering healthy moral and social development (Barrow, 1976), Plato set the foundations of experiential education. During the early 20th century John Dewey enhanced this philosophy and began what could be considered a revolution in education, and as a result he is often given credit for the formation of experiential education theory (Hettler & Johnston, 2009). Dewey brought attention to the learner as an individual and championed a need for learning-by-doing. He claimed that “every experience influences in some degree the objective conditions under which further experiences are had” (Dewey, 1938, p.30). For Dewey, the educator’s role is to be aware of the conditions that shape experiences and to create surroundings that are conducive to having experiences that lead to positive personal and social growth. Experience alone is not sufficient to instigate learning. The experience requires

reflection in order to make it meaningful and determinate – the point at which learning occurs (Crosby, 1995).

Other theorists have further expanded on these ideas. Paulo Freire reiterated the need in education to bring attention to the learner as an active agent. He argued that students are not receptacles for knowledge but create and construct knowledge through experience. This knowledge leads to growth through a process of critical consciousness, whereby students' experiences lead to inner tension from contrasting and conflicting pieces of information. The student's attempt to resolve this tension leads to the production and assimilation of knowledge, which is then applied to life and actions (Freire, 1973).

These philosophical underpinnings are the cornerstone of experiential education, and OAE adopts the same fundamental philosophy of "integrat[ing] behaviour and cognition to create a holistic approach to the educational process" (Martin, 2001, p.2). Although there is some lack of clarity and consensus about the definition of the term OAE, there is common agreement that its major goal is fostering personal and interpersonal growth (Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993). What separates OAE from other forms of experiential education is its use of unfamiliar environments and risk-taking activities as the medium in which to achieve personal and social developmental outcomes (Hattie et. al., 1997; Martin 2001, Martin & Legg, 2002; Wang, Liu & Kahlid, 2006).

Historical Underpinnings

The historical origins of adventure programmes can be traced to the development of outing clubs at universities in the United States. These programmes were believed to have important benefits regarding the welfare and academic growth of university students, and as a

result, their popularity increased. These goals of these OAE programmes included providing recreational enjoyment, education and skill development, moral growth, enhancing curricular education or adding to the quality of life for the student, the school, the community or society, and fostering environmental and sustainable ethics (Attarian, 2002).

The contemporary model of adventure programming can be traced to Kurt Hahn, who founded the first Outward Bound school in Wales in 1941 (Hahn, 1957). Outward Bound and similar programmes may vary in structure, but the key element of Hahn's philosophy remains an integral part of adventure programming – that it is possible to inspire personal growth in people's lives in a short amount of time by compelling them to overcome adversity, reflect on their insecurities and inspire them to show others compassion with inner strength (James, 1995). Hahn's philosophy struck a strong chord in education and Outward Bound (OB) became a model for outdoor adventure programming (Hattie et. al, 1997; Martin, 2001; Martin & Legg, 2002).

Although Outward Bound may be a leader in OAE, the field includes a wide variety of programmes that use adventure activities as an educational medium. They operate in a variety of outdoor settings and have diverse adventure elements. Students range in age from young children to older adults. Many are intra- or extra-curricular university programmes (Bell et al, 2008; Bobilya & Akey, 2002; Bobilya, Akey & Mitchell Jr., 2009; Eys et al, 2008; Gass, Garvey & Sugerman, 2003; Luo et al, 2002; Wright & Tolan, 2009). OAE programmes can have a recreational, educational, developmental or therapeutic focus. While acknowledging that there is such diversity, OAE programmes still share the common element of using adventure experiences to foster learning in individuals or groups which can then be transferred to positive change in societies or communities (Priest, 1999).

OAE Pedagogy

As Outward Bound and similar programs became increasingly recognized as effective educational interventions, research proliferated that looked to develop pedagogical models on which to base practice (McKenzie, 2003). Walsh & Golins (1976) proposed a model for the process of learning which began with a learner being placed into certain physical and social environments where they had to complete problem-solving tasks with the intent of creating a state of adaptive dissonance. This dissonance would motivate the learner to master tasks and through that mastery the learner would re-interpret the meaning of that and future experiences (McKenzie, 2003). This model is supported by psychological theory which indicates that success in educational tasks adds to the learner's feeling of self-worth and confidence which then increases their motivation to engage in similar and more challenging tasks (Bandura, 1977). Using an OAE programme intended for training future outdoor education leaders, Propst & Koesler (1998) illustrated that through a process mediated by mentoring, feedback and goal attainment, students of outdoor adventure gained a heightened sense of self-efficacy in both the short- and long-term, which they predicted would lead to continued involvement in OAE leadership.

Outdoor adventure programmes characteristically operate in wilderness or backcountry settings, are conducted in small groups, have varying levels of risk, involve mentally or physically challenging tasks, are led by an instructor and have programme lengths ranging from a few days to a few months (Hattie et. al, 1997). The study of outdoor adventure can be complex because the way that it is implemented varies across different programme structures, cultures and socio-historical contexts.

The Wilderness Setting

The wilderness or backcountry setting is a very significant element that differentiates OAE from other forms of education. The concept or idea of “wilderness” or “backcountry” also differs across cultures and given that this is a case study of a New Zealand-based OAE programme, it is important to understand local definitions of wilderness.

The early days of wilderness preservation in New Zealand had an intended purpose of protecting natural resources for use in industry. Gradually, certain areas including forest and geothermal reserves, received greater protection for new preservationist purposes. This change in view of wilderness was largely inspired by a similar change in the United States with the formation of the National Park System. As Shultis (2001a) showed, it was the visit of Olaus Murie, then president of The Wilderness Society in the United States, that provided a critical motivation to establish designated wilderness areas in New Zealand.

The NZ environmental movement, changes in New Zealand’s identity and the influence of the American concept of wilderness all helped to form a ‘political’ definition of wilderness in New Zealand. The efforts of lobbying groups, such as the Federated Mountain Clubs (FMC), led to the development of the 1985 Wilderness Policy. This policy deemed wilderness to be areas that were maintained in their natural state with minimal signs of human intrusion. In New Zealand, this political concept was interpreted more strictly as areas that “will not have developments such as huts, tracks, bridges, signs or mechanised access” (Shultis, 2001a, p. 6).

There is a large gap, however, between this political definition and the more personal meanings people give to the idea of wilderness (Heintzman, 2003). For instance, in a study by Lutz et al. (1999), rural and urban residents were shown images of natural scenes that had varying degrees of human influence. The same images were rated differently by the two

groups indicating that they have distinct conceptions of wilderness. For most individuals in New Zealand today, wilderness is often seen as an isolated place of natural beauty that lacks technological development. Such a location is often the choice for OAE programmes as it is for the MTSE.

The Case: The Mountains-to-Sea Expedition

The MTSE was organized at a New Zealand university between 2005 and 2008. It is an intra-curricular part of a physical education course entitled Psychophysical Foundations of Physical Education. For more information about this course, please refer to Appendix A. Because this course was a pre-requisite to completing a physical education degree during the years of 2005 and 2008, participation in the MTSE was mandatory for those enrolled. The major goal of the MTSE was to model OAE practice so that students would feel competent to incorporate outdoor learning in their future careers as physical education teachers. There were other less explicit goals which ranged from reflection to personal and social development. Learning objectives included students being able to demonstrate competence across a range of outdoor education activities, critically reflecting on OAE as a context for learning and critically reflecting on the relationship between OAE and Hauora (Maori concept of health/wellbeing).

The expedition lasted for 5 days and started at Mt. Ruapehu in the central North Island of New Zealand. Through a mix of tramping, kayaking and mountain biking, the students travelled to Castle Cliff Beach in Wanganui, covering a distance of about 500km. The trip was conducted in March of the students' 3rd year at the university. During previous years, the students went on shorter tramping trips as a way of preparing them for the MTSE. The course instructor arranged some activity-specific training programmes, logistical services

and permits. However, because the expedition was intended largely as outdoor leadership training, the students organized many aspects of the expedition themselves. These included first-aid, food, equipment and training regimens. Appendix B includes a trip itinerary, a map for the kayak leg down the Whanganui River, organizational models/groups and course readings provided by the instructor.

CHAPTER 3: Literature Review

Research literature on the field of outdoor adventure programming has proliferated over the past several decades (Ewert, 1987; McKenzie, 2000). A critical review of this body of literature identified important shortcomings which helped establish the research purpose, define the research questions and informed the research design used in this study. There was firstly, a predominance of purely quantitative studies and a corresponding lack of designs incorporating qualitative methods (Haluza-DeLay, 1999). Most studies were omnibus outcome measures (Hattie, et al., 1997; McKenzie, 2000; Neill, 2002) which meant that the lived experience of adventure programming was largely missing. Some have described this research gap as an “educational black box; we know something works but we don’t know why or how” (Ewert, 1983, p. 27). Secondly, studies had been conducted primarily for North American and European contexts with less attention paid to New Zealand-based programmes. This was particularly the case when looking at research using a qualitative lens. Thirdly, few studies, especially in the New Zealand context, garnered participants’ retrospective descriptions of former experiences long after participation. As one stated intention of OAE is to generate long-term change, this lack of research suggested a need to explore the long-term meaning and impact of adventure programmes from the perspectives of past participants. Fourthly, past research has tended to provide a more positive slant to the study of OAE, often

in an attempt to demonstrate its effectiveness. This critique is made evident by “the number of research papers that read more like program advertisements than research (Hattie et al., 1997, p. 45).

These gaps identified in previous research informed the three key research questions: 1. What meanings to past participants ascribe to former outdoor adventure programme experiences?; 2. How do they perceive the impacts of those experiences?; and 3. How have their feelings about meanings and impacts changed over time? The qualitative case-study design was chosen specifically to gain a deeper insight into the long-term meanings and impacts of one New Zealand-based OAE programme – the MTSE.

Quantitative Designs: Outcome Measure Studies

A major theme in the research literature around OAE is a focus on testing the effectiveness of programmes by measuring the immediate and long-term outcomes achieved from participation. Some studies examined only a single or a few outcomes, such as global and domain-specific self esteem (Grocott & Hunter, 2009), self-efficacy (Propst & Koesler, 1998), social skill development (Shirilla, 2009) or spiritual development (Marsh, 2008). Many others have examined multiple outcomes (Bobilya, Akey & Mitchell Jr., 2009; Bruyere, 2002; Cummings, 2009; Ewert & Heywood, 1991; Ewert, Place & Sibthorp, 2005; Fischer & Attah, 2001; Hanna, 1995; Martin, 2001; Martin & Legg, 2002; Moote & Wodarski, 1997; Scott & Hall, 2003; Wang, Liu & Kahlid, 2006). A limited number of in-depth meta-analyses, which had strong quantitative designs that combined the results from a very large number of studies, have also been published (Cason & Gillis, 1994; Hattie et al., 1997, Neill, 2002).

The study by Hattie et al. (1997) was the most oft-cited in the literature and proved to be very comprehensive. Their meta-analysis was exceptionally strong considering over 1,700 effect sizes taken from 151 unique samples across 96 different studies. Unlike previous research assessing OAE outcomes, this meta-analysis examined numerous independent variables, used a very large sample size and made comparisons across variables. The authors found immediate gains in the effect sizes for 40 different outcomes across a range of categories. Substantial gains were maintained during follow-up assessments, particularly for interpersonal dimensions. They also found that effect sizes, though all positive, varied considerably according to the programme type and the outcome measured. Effect sizes improved with an increase in the length of the programme and age of the participants. The research team noted that these changes, “are unlike most educational programmes where effect-sizes are typically negative, negligible and fleeting” (Hattie et. al., 1997, p. 57). Although this study provides strong support for the effectiveness of OAE programmes in achieving outcomes, it omitted comment on any qualitative descriptions of participant meanings which may have been included in some of the 96 studies the research team analyzed. The absence of this type of data makes it difficult to understand how participants internalize the measured outcomes and how they feel those outcomes evolve over time. If supplemented with comment on the research using mixed or qualitative designs, this study may have provided more detailed and informative data which could more accurately describe the experience of a particular group.

Transference of Outcomes

Investigating transference of learning in educational research is crucial because educational experiences are only truly worthwhile when students can apply their experience

to future learning (Dewey, 1938). It is for this reason that a significant portion of the literature has given attention to transference of learning. Examining transfer is critical for OAE programmes in order to establish if they are effective at remediating problem behaviours, teaching desired skills, or achieving recreational and developmental outcomes. Gass (1999) looked at the *process* of transference in adventure programmes and delineates three theories for this mechanism – specific transfer, non-specific transfer and metaphoric transfer. He argued that many adventure programmes have failed to adequately plan for transference when designing learning activities and teaching methods. A great deal of the literature shares this sentiment and has focused research attention on the transference of learning in OAE as a result (Gass, 1987; Haluza-Delay, 2001; Russell, 2000; Sibthorp, 2003a).

Grocott & Hunter (2009) examined the long-term impacts of a sea-based intervention for at-risk youth in New Zealand and showed that successfully completing challenging tasks in the outdoors lead to increased global- and domain-specific self-esteem in the long-term, which helped in outcomes, such as reducing aggression and psychological disorders. Though the authors seem to claim that these findings can be generalized for similar sea-based interventions, external validity is compromised given that the nature of the programme, a Spirit of New Zealand developmental sea voyage, and its participants are fairly unique and only informal control measures were used.

Other studies have suggested that OAE programmes foster long-term transference of outcomes related to a reduction in tendencies toward violence (Fischer & Attah, 2001), lower recidivism to problem behaviours and improved academic achievement (Shirilla, 2009), improved self-concept and more positive peer and familial relationships (Gass, Garvey & Sugerman, 2003), a greater internal locus of control and reduced sense of alienation (Cross,

2002), and co-existence and reconciliation in deeply divided communities (Stidder & Haasner, 2007). While these studies offer an indication of how OAE might impact student lives long after participation in a programme, they do not describe how participants make meaning from their experience and lack narrative descriptions of the perceptions of these impacts.

Qualitative Designs

While the predominant approach in the literature has been of quantitative outcome measures, there have been a smaller number of studies that have used qualitative means to capture participant meanings of OAE experiences. Bobilya, Akey and Mitchell (2009) conducted a qualitative analysis of student essays from a wilderness orientation course to grasp perceptions of the meanings students attribute to their experience. They found that students attribute 4 major categories as important: a) community, b) developing competence, c) stewardship and d) spiritual development. Gass, Garvey and Sugerman's (2003) mixed study using interviews indicated that changes were perceived by participants of a wilderness orientation programme 17 years after participation. These were in the categories of a) challenging assumptions of self and others, b) strong effects on positive peer relationships and, c) long-term positive effects on undergraduate education. The qualitative data collected in this study emphasized the importance of allowing participants to recall past experiences and share their current understandings (House, 1991). Although it is a reasonable limitation, both of these studies only apply to the particular groups that were under investigation because both examined university orientation programmes operating in United States wilderness areas. Also, though both studies examine the long-term impact of adventure experiences, they still failed to accurately describe the nuances and subtleties of the personalized meanings participants gave to their experiences in the long term.

Another study by Wright and Tolan (2009) used textual analysis of students' reflective essays written during or after an adventure activity. The researchers were able to gain very rich narrative descriptions of participant experiences. Their textual analysis revealed students' perceptions of how they felt their experiences impacted their lives. The study demonstrated that participants in a multicultural education university course felt that the wilderness trip component of their course was most memorable. The authors interpret this as reflecting positive impact even though participants did not specify that a memorable experience was necessarily positive. The students did indicate that they perceived positive impacts related to personal identity, group experience, diversity awareness and prejudice reduction which also transferred into non-classroom contexts. A strength of this research design was that it focused on transference of learning and provided rich insight into the life-worlds of the participants of an OAE programme. A weakness was that by using textual analysis and not direct participant interviews, it may not have been able to gain insight into nuanced levels of meaning that the students may have given to their experiences. It also lacked a longer-term, retrospective component which would help to establish the latency of transference.

Haluza-Delay (1999) used in-depth observations and interviews to investigate the developing relationship that participants had with the wilderness and how that transferred into environmental concern both during trips and in students' home lives. The results showed that students' experiences were moderated by pre-existing social constructions of what wilderness and nature meant. It was noted that and these ideas were reconstructed as the trips progressed. The students perceived the wilderness to be more about challenge and social bonding and less about connecting with or directly experiencing the wilderness itself. These findings shed some light on the subtleties of experiences, but, during the investigation, the researcher acted

as a participant observer. This raises the question that if students' experiences are shaped by reconstructions of meaning, as the author claims, the presence of the researcher or the questions asked may have influenced students' understandings by exaggerating or understating student responses and even shaping their constructions of meaning. Nonetheless, the respondents almost universally indicated, long after participation, that connection to and appreciation for nature was a major outcome which they retained.

Geo-Socio-Historical Context

If the conception of wilderness is socially constructed as Haluza-Delay (1999) suggests, then wilderness experiences may have different impacts on peoples' lives depending on geography and culture. As a result, the meanings past participants give to experiences of OAE programmes in New Zealand may be different from those in other cultural and geographical contexts. Given New Zealand's renown for its vast wilderness areas, its plethora of open spaces and its attraction in tourism for its natural beauty, it is possible that OAE students here interpret their experiences differently than their international counterparts. Moreover, if perceptions about meanings and impacts are socially constructed these may differ for participants of NZ programmes as well. Although some research has examined New Zealand-based OAE institutions, such as Outward Bound New Zealand, these studies have focused on quantitative measures of outcomes from these programs (Martin, 2001) and lack an investigation of the subjective meanings given to those experiences.

Objectivity

It is worth noting that although nearly all of the studies reviewed above suggest positive effects, some studies have demonstrated insignificant and even negative effects from participation in OAE (Shirilla, 2009). Haluza-Delay (2001) showed that while students claimed to gain a deeper connection to nature and cultivated a desire for wilderness preservation during their programmes, these attitudes did not transfer into civic actions at home because wilderness and nature was considered to be something outside their suburban and urban communities. Other scholars have found that adventure programming can propagate a more negative mentality of “conquering” nature and that the wilderness is a place to “test one self”, paralleling societal patterns that contribute to environmental domination and degradation (Haluza-Delay, 1999, p. 130). Gordon & Dodunski (1999), who investigated the impact of a two-day outdoor education experience on peers’ perceptions of each other, found that failure to complete tasks common to OAE programmes can even be morally devastating or traumatic to participants. These studies stray from the norm in the literature and reflect a need for OAE research to be open to the possibility of negative effects and to avoid inaccurately painting an overly positive image of the effects of outdoor adventure.

The literature thus reviewed highlights two key gaps in past research on outdoor adventure education. Firstly, research is lacking that utilizes qualitative methods to examine and describe the personal meanings participants give to outdoor adventure experiences and how they feel those interpretations have influenced their lives. Secondly, research has been conducted primarily for North American or European contexts with far fewer examples from programmes elsewhere. This study attempts to address these gaps by using a case study design which can garner rich data through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants from a specific New Zealand-based OAE programme.

SECTION II: METHODS

CHAPTER 4: Methodology

Overview

The shortcomings identified in the literature in the previous section informed the research questions and defined the research purpose of this study. These research questions guided the decision on which research methodology would help provide the most valid information. Because these questions are exploratory, it was decided that a case-study design of one New-Zealand based adventure programme would best help acquire insight into participants' descriptions of their experiences. The MTSE was an ideal choice which fit the scope of this project.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The theoretical framework that guides this research is rooted in phenomenology, which can richly describe participant life-worlds and acutely depict how people make meaning out of their experiences in their lives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Phenomenology lets, "the experience of phenomena speak to us at first hand" (Crotty, 1998, p. 79). The phenomenon under investigation in this study was the experiences of former participants of the MTSE. The research questions warranted a methodological approach that could capture in detail participants' retrospective perceptions of the meanings and impacts of their experiences. The case-study design was chosen because it allowed for the collection of very rich information on a small and manageable number of individuals. The level of detail in the findings can be a springboard for future research into OAE in New Zealand and may be an important step in understanding how students make meaning out of outdoor adventure.

From a theoretical standpoint, phenomenology is an interpretivist research orientation (Merriam, 1998) which looks to place people's experiences within a socio-historical context. It has a fundamental distinction from an older worldview of positivism which sought to find underlying truths which could be generalized (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). Interpretivism and phenomenology, rather, bring attention to the experience of the individual. They seek to understand behaviour from the frame of reference of the person interacting with their environment. Hence, they are well-suited to exploring the meaning created and re-created from adventure experiences which are essentially experiential.

Arguably, the theoretical underpinnings of the methodology chosen for this study bridge interpretivism and constructionism. A constructionist worldview believes that "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Because this study is primarily focused on exploring the meaning that former participants of outdoor adventure make from their experiences and how that meaning has changed over time, it is very possible that these meanings are also socially constructed. Hence, this study shares an underpinning rooted in both constructivism and interpretivist phenomenology.

Ethics

This study used in-depth interviews with human subjects. Therefore, in order to protect the integrity of the research participants, ethical approval was sought and granted by the Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Education Human Ethics Committee. Participants were provided with an information sheet (Appendix C) which provided a

synopsis of the study's aims, purpose, implications and were informed of how the report would be disseminated. After reading the information sheet participants were required to give informed consent by signing a consent form (Appendix C).

Participants

The participants were selected from a cohort of former physical education students who had participated in the MTSE in two separate year-groups between 2006 and 2007. This allowed for an adequate amount of time to have passed since participation to be able to highlight the long-term and retrospective nature of the descriptions which would be gathered during interviews. The lecturer who had coordinated this programme was contacted to sequester a detailed description of the programme and any other pertinent documents given to the students, such as hand outs or required readings. The course outline and supporting documents can be viewed at the end of this report in Appendix A. In consideration of the scope of this project and the time limitations placed on the researcher, participants were sampled using convenience sampling (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). A few known alumni from the MTSE were solicited and they provided the contact information for other alumni. All participants were reassured that they were under no obligation to participate and that their involvement was strictly voluntary. It was decided that six participants would be adequate to collect detailed data which would be representative of the MTSE and which could accommodate the researcher's time constraints.

Six MTSE alumni, two males and four females, agreed to participate. All participants were in their third year at the university and were all in their early 20s at the time of the expedition. All had also grown up in relatively rural areas of the southern region of the North

Island of New Zealand and currently teach physical education at schools and colleges in the Wellington and Wairarapa regions of New Zealand. This demographic information helped to show that the participants not only shared the MTSE experience, but also other socio-cultural similarities.

Instrumentation

This study employed semi-structured interviews using the interview guide approach (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) which allowed participants to focus on the meanings they attached to their former wilderness experiences and on the ways in which they felt those experiences have influenced their current behaviours and lives. The research questions strongly informed the interview protocol. This protocol included various related probes which helped to examine the core questions in greater detail:

Question 1: Please describe your overall experience with the outdoor adventure program you participated in [X] years ago.

Possible probes:

- Would you describe any of your experiences as particularly meaningful?
- Can you expand on your response?
- Have your feelings about your experiences changed over time since you first participated in the programme?

- Can you tell me more?
- What was your impression of being in a wilderness and adventurous setting?

Question 2: Do you feel your past experiences on the programme have influenced your life today?

Possible probes:

- Can you expand on your answer?
- If no, why do you feel that way?
- If yes, in what ways has your life been impacted?
- Were there any particular aspects of the programme that you feel had a greater influence?
- Did the programme have any negative impacts?
- Are there any changes to aspects of your current life that you would attribute to your participation in this course?

Question 3: Is there anything else you can tell me about your experiences of outdoor adventure?

Note that these questions have a loose structure and the progress of each interview dictated the order, wording and the direction that each interview took. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour.

Procedure

The interviews were administered in-person in quiet classrooms at schools where the participants currently teach. Each interview was video-recorded to more accurately preserve the dialogue and body language. During each interview and upon completion, “member-checking” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) was used to ensure that the participants had expressed themselves in ways that they had intended and so that the researcher could clarify and confirm the record of their comments. The researcher would repeat statements after they were made by the participant, and would ask for clarification if needed. At the end of each interview, the researcher reviewed the major points to the participant and then asked if they wish to clarify, amend or add to any comments. This process was used to help ensure the validity and reliability of the data. The participants were also given the option of receiving a copy of the transcriptions and final report in order to uphold a high ethical standard.

In order to remain as transparent and objective as possible, the researcher first described to each participant his motivations for undertaking this research and his background in the field. The researcher’s years of professional experience in outdoor adventure were invaluable in establishing a positive rapport with participants and helped to facilitate more effective comprehension of their descriptions. However, the researcher was fully aware of the potential for his prior experiences to influence his interpretations of the

data and this awareness helped to minimize researcher bias. Intensive data analysis was delayed until all interviews were completed in order to streamline the interview process.

Data Analysis

Throughout the data analysis process, “memoing” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008), a process whereby reflective notes or memos are taken to record emergent ideas and points for further inspection, was used. The video and/or audio recordings were transcribed directly by the researcher for deeper immersion in the data and to facilitate added insights into the coding process. These transcriptions underwent intensive, line-by-line analysis. They were first segmented by underlining relevant text and the segments were coded according to emergent themes relevant to the research questions outlined earlier (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). These codes were placed into a master list. Given the number of interviews, all memoing, segmenting and coding was conducted by hand. To help ensure consistency in data analysis, each interview was cursorily reviewed immediately after collection and memos were taken in order to help highlight ideas and themes which could emerge during subsequent interviews. The coding process took place after all the interviews were conducted so that all data was available, allowing a more complete and holistic analysis. This procedure is common to phenomenological methodology involving interviews where a major aim is to describe the phenomenon for the entire group (Glaser, 1965; Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Data Reporting

A major purpose of qualitative content analysis is to mark parts of interest in data and transform that material into a structure which is presentable. The presentation of data in

educational research is not simply a matter of giving shape to undeveloped matter, but involves, “an intense observer’s scrupulous recording of naturally-occurring social interactions from which patterns are inferred and interpreted” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 20). After a thorough initial content analysis, it became apparent that the voices of the participants needed to be captured in greater detail. As a result, the style of presentation became a significant consideration and it was decided that creating profiles for each participant would allow the participants ‘voice’ to be better heard. Profiling is a method of presenting qualitative research which, “allows us to present the participant in context, to clarify his or her intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time, all central components of qualitative analysis” (Seidman, 2006, p. 119). Findings are presented as a first-person narrative crafted from the interview dialogue. In telling a story, humans are able to make meaning and sense of themselves and the social world around them (Mishler, 1991). This helped the researcher share what he had learned and interpreted from the interview data. Furthermore, some scholars have argued that nascent researchers often become so wrapped up with the conceptual framework of their study that they become highly divorced from empirical data (Merriam, 1998). Profiling helped the researcher remain immersed in the data and allowed the data to ‘speak’ for itself.

In qualitative research, the techniques for presenting findings are held to fewer dogmatic and conventionalized modes for presenting findings than other research paradigms (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982). Given this flexibility, profiling served several functions. Firstly, each participant’s experience of the MTSE is distinct. The retrospective descriptions of their experiences share some similarities, but nuances and subtleties of that experience can be more personalized in a profile. Secondly, because the aims, objectives and research questions for this study centre around the long-term, retrospective meaning of the Mountains-to-Sea

expedition, a detailed profile can capture those meanings more accurately and in greater detail. Thirdly, profiling allows inherent themes to stand out to the reader because it highlights the narratives that show the most significance to the researcher. It should be noted that the utmost care and consideration was taken to respect the dignity of each participant and to ensure that the integrity of their statements was maintained.

Each profile is presented separately and is followed by a brief interpretive discussion of the themes that emerged from each interview. Section IV includes a discussion and conclusion which draw together the broader themes that emerged from analysis and interpretation of the profiles. Together, the profiles, interpretations and conclusions provide a holistic picture of the experiences of the participants in this case study.

Trustworthiness (Reliability and Validity)

In any research study it is paramount to ensure that the data is as reliable and valid as possible. Reliability and validity, also referred to as trustworthiness in qualitative research, refer to the consistency and stability of data (Golafshani, 2003). Research validity is broken down into internal and external validity and is defined by the level of trustworthiness of the data and results. Internal validity can be described as the credibility of the data and external validity as the extent to which the study can be generalized out to other populations or contexts (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

In this study, measures were taken to maximize reliability and validity. Firstly, the reliability of the data was enhanced because the researcher conducted data analysis only after all interviews were completed. In this way, the approach used in each interview was consistent and interpretations were made using the entire data set. Secondly, the case-study

methodology chosen for this research did not allow for a generalizing of results to other contexts and, therefore external validity became a moot issue. Although the discussion and conclusion will show that the findings presented have potential implications for OAE, the researcher acknowledges that they cannot be generalized. Thirdly, in order to ensure the internal validity, or credibility, of the data, member-checking and participant feedback (Kirk & Miller, 1986) were used after each interview to confirm that the researcher's notes and the participants' comments accurately depicted their intended responses. Participants were offered the opportunity to review their profile and the associated interpretive commentary so that they could ensure their statements were represented in an acceptable manner. Only two participants responded with feedback which was then incorporated into the report. Furthermore, the researcher's lack of personal involvement directly in coordinating or participating in the programme helped to minimize researcher bias and allowed for more objective analysis.

Limitations

There were some limitations in this research. The options available for selecting the OAE programme were restricted by the need for the programme to be information-accessible and one which had operated several years ago to match the retrospective and long-term components of the research purpose. Participants needed to be accessible to the researcher within reasonable transportation times in order to conduct interviews efficiently. Ideally, participants needed to have also gone through the same programme in order to make accurate comparisons across interviews.

Although the findings and discussion have revealed important implications on professional practice in OAE, it is acknowledged that the methodology chosen means that no attempt can be made to generalise the findings to other contexts.

SECTION III – RESULTS

CHAPTER 5: Participant Profiles

Overview

The following chapter presents the ‘voices of outdoor adventure’. As previously mentioned, profiling was chosen as the preferred method of reporting the findings in order to more accurately capture and convey the participants’ voices. To emphasize, these profiles are not simply summaries of interview transcripts, but are the product of the analysis of the interviews by the researcher. Although the participants’ direct quotations and narratives constitute each profile, these vignettes depict the researcher’s extraction of the most meaningful data. Therefore, it is crucial that the researcher is able to place himself into the research context so that the reader can be clear of the lens which has shaped all interpretations of the data.

As former OAE educator with several years of professional experience in a wide variety of contexts, the researcher is very aware that his interpretations of these profiles come from a very subjective lens. These experiences have been useful in elucidating important themes and subtleties. They have also helped frame many of the critiques offered in the discussion and conclusion. Concurrently, this awareness is tempered with an effort to present results as objectively as possible. The profiles were created using the participants’ own words and the participants have had the opportunity to comment on both their profile and the researcher’s commentary. This process will help ensure the validity of the data presented (Kvale, 1995).

Profile 1: Katie

I thoroughly enjoyed Mountains-to-Sea. It was one of the most challenging things I had done at the time. It has been more than three years now since I went on that trip. Growing up, I had gone on some outdoor trips with school where we did little tramps and they were fun, but you didn't have to push yourself. But, because Mountains-to-Sea was so challenging and you had to push yourself for an entire week, you got more reward out of it. You got a really good feeling of accomplishment after the week, and after each leg as well. Once I made it through each section I got this amazing feeling of satisfaction and pride and would let out a huge sigh of relief saying, "Yeah!"

It was that feeling of pride and achievement which has stayed with me the most, even to today. Every time I think about the trip those feelings come up and I get motivated to do more outdoors things. The first thing I think about when reflecting on Mountains-to-Sea is one particular instance on one of the bike legs. There was a huge hill which went on for quite a while. At the top, there was a beautiful view and we waited for everyone to arrive. Everyone was up there cheering. We were all really "high" from that and so proud of each other. It was quite emotional. Looking back on it now, I still feel so proud. I look at the photos and think, "That was so cool."

The other time that really stands out in my memory was when we biked into Wanganui and arrived at the beach. Everyone got off their bikes and ran to the shore and hopped in the sea. It was a culmination to the trip and it showed me how close we had actually gotten to each other and how much we had bonded. It really solidified that feeling of achievement. Now, because of that feeling, I have a strong desire to get out and do some

outdoors things. I go on little bush walks and do that sort of thing now. In fact, recently, I took a trip out to the Abel Tasman with some friends and felt so confident organizing that trip because I had this experience. I wish I would do more outdoor activities, especially something like Mountains-to-Sea, but it's really hard with all the responsibilities of my life. I have a huge interest in doing more, but when it comes to actually doing them, life just gets in the way. I suppose, though, you have to make it happen if you really want it.

The challenge of the trip and of the different activities that we did, and successfully completing them is what gave me that sense of accomplishment and pride. And, that challenge was created by the environment we were in. You could challenge yourself in the gym or by doing a triathlon, but the wilderness adds another layer to the challenge. The weather affects it as well. I remember on the kayaking leg, it started raining. I was already nervous to begin with and was already struggling but the rain added an extra element of challenge to overcome. That was probably my worst point on the trip. It's probably why I found the kayaking so much harder but that just gave me an even greater sense of pride from completing it.

At the same time, I also remember how beautiful the river was. I remember going down the river and there were tall cliffs and we were right in the middle of it. It was awesome! I kept thinking, "This is so beautiful," and it took my attention away from the challenge. It helped motivate me to get through it and made the time on the river more interesting.

In New Zealand, because it is such a beautiful country and we are accustomed to that, we often take such things for granted. Now, I can see the value in the wilderness. It gives you a sense of belonging. Because the trip was in New Zealand, there was an added benefit too. I felt, "this is my country. It's so cool that I'm out exploring it." So, the wilderness creates the elements that lead to you being nervous; being physically and mentally challenged. Those

challenges lead you to feeling pride and achievement which then leads you to want to have those experiences and feelings again.

I also gained a lot of confidence from Mountains-to-Sea. That's why I want to do more outdoor education with my students if I get the opportunity. For instance, I was in charge of organizing food for the trip. I had a budget and got to choose the menu. I got so into that responsibility that I would help set out the food supplies each night, even though I wasn't on the roster for cooking, just to be more supportive. That experience was helpful because if I do a trip in the future with students, I'll be the one doing all of the organization and, now, I know I can do that. It enriched my teaching career.

We kept a diary during the trip, which I think could be useful too, but, for me, actually getting out there and doing it and having experience from it is what would determine whether or not I would include it in a school where I was teaching. I've experienced the benefits of this kind of trip and want to share that with my students. I think they can get a lot more out of a couple of days in the wilderness than they can in the classroom. That environment gives you so many lessons about your own capabilities, how you can challenge yourself, and how you work with other people, which is great for education.

There were some times when I remember that feeling frustrated; like when I organized food and helped at night when we got back to the camp after a long day. Often, other people in the group wouldn't really help out and, sometimes, that would put a damper on the mood in the group. I felt frustrated and possibly a bit angry that people weren't pulling their weight. It never manifested with me but it did start a few small arguments and tiffs with others.

We were a group of about 30 and we all knew each other quite well because we had spent 3 years at university together in the same course. We were all really into sports and were all competitive. I got caught up in the competition as well, and, looking back, I might have been a bit selfish on the bike leg. I hate being at the back of the group and I think some people that were stronger cyclists held themselves back to help others. I wanted to be supportive but, at the same time, I didn't want to be the one everyone had to help.

Our competitiveness might have been what maintained the smaller cliques at the beginning of the trip which had carried over from university classes. But, by the end of the trip, it was like all those barriers had gone down. On the last night a couple of guys biked about 20km into town and bought us some beers. We sat around the campfire and shared some reflection about what people's favourite thing was and what the hardest thing was. It was really cool and that's when it felt like everyone was getting along. It felt like we really bonded and we became like a little family. Though I sometimes recalled the arguments and the feeling that people weren't pulling their weight as a negative at the time, it's actually had a positive result now. I realize that people were just out of their comfort zones and were tired and not coping as well. I'm a lot more understanding of other people.

The closeness of the group remained for a little while after the trip. It started to dissipate a few months later when we were all going to finish university. People are busy in school and work and then they move to different parts of New Zealand. Life gets in the way and it is really hard to maintain the group's closeness. The same is true for my desire to teach outdoor education. I'd love to do it but there are restrictions. I'm only a new teacher at the school and they don't offer many trips here. But, if the opportunity arose, I would definitely take it. It was a lot easier for us because we didn't really have a choice. When there's no one

organizing it and telling you that you have to do it because it's part of your course, it's hard to find the time even though you might want to do more.

In the long run, Mountains-to-Sea showed me the value of getting away from civilization. Our lecturer who organized the trip is probably the responsible for giving us that feeling. He was so passionate about outdoor education and because he loved it so much it brushed off on me. He would always talk about all the value of taking away the restraints from the concrete jungle, getting away and challenging yourself. Because of that, I feel that it's really good for your health to get away from the city every now and then.

I remember feeling a lot of different emotions on Mountains-to-Sea. Those few times when I felt frustrated with others in the group or at myself for struggling so much in an activity were probably the only real negatives that I can think of for that trip, but as I mentioned earlier, I only felt they negatives at the time. I think about those experiences and the emotions associated with them in a positive way now.

Most of the emotions I felt, even then, were positive. I remember setting out from Palmerston North and feeling a type of nervous excitement. I was really looking forward to Mountains-to-Sea. The first day we got up really early and set out to climb the mountain. It was still dark and it felt surreal. I felt strange but excited. I felt nervous most nights not knowing exactly what was ahead the next day; not knowing exactly how difficult the kayaking or biking would be. But, those feelings of nervousness were a good thing. They added to the excitement. If it was something I knew I could do and wasn't nervous, I don't think the trip would have been as rewarding as it was.

I still think of Mountains-to-Sea as one of the coolest things I've done. I wish I could do it again. The major thing that I've taken away from it is a desire to get into the outdoors

more and to incorporate it into my teaching. Unfortunately, it remains only an interest. It's so hard to actually do any of it because of life's constraints. I guess, it's really up to me to make it happen, but I still have that interest and if someone else were to organize something, I would jump at the opportunity. I still love the feelings I get when I flip through my diary or look at old photos. That sense of pride and achievement comes back to me almost like I felt it just last week and that's why Mountains-to-Sea was so special.

Interpretive Commentary – Profile 1

The most obvious and predominant theme inherent in much of Katie's profile is that the Mountains-to-Sea expedition provided her with an intense sense of pride and achievement which has lived on to today, more than three years later. These feelings have added to her confidence level and her feeling of competence in outdoor activities. It has added to her interest in engaging with the outdoors more frequently. The two examples of the bike up a hill and running into the sea at the end emphasize the intensity of those experiences and detail how Katie made meaning from those experiences. They instil in her a lasting appeal for the outdoors. Yet, other than the constraints that her life places, Katie provides few reasons why she does not act on her interest. She feels like she would love to incorporate more outdoor education in her teaching but the school's lack of an outdoor programme and the fact that she is a new, budding teacher at the school do not permit transference of that interest.

Katie describes quite acutely her view on the process of how success in challenges translated to increased confidence and pride. She indicated that the wilderness environment played a role in fostering a sense of pride and accomplishment. The environment presented conditions and elements that formed the nature of the challenge. The impact of completing

that challenge was greater for her than for other non-wilderness physical challenges, such as a triathlon or going to the gym. She explains how the weather added to her struggle on the kayak and enhanced the challenge, making it more meaningful and heightening the sense of pride. In such a way, Katie elaborates on a possible mechanism for outdoor learning.

Overcoming physical challenge was obviously very meaningful to Katie. The meaning she makes from this aspect of the trip is marked by very key moments. These occurred when a specific challenge element was completed, such as making it to the top of a hill or entering the sea at the end of the trip. Retrospectively, they are the first things that she is reminded of when reflecting on the Mountains-to-Sea expedition. The difficulty of the bike ride was emphasized in our dialogue – “It was a *huge* hill that went on for *ages*.” It becomes easy to decipher which aspects of Katie’s experiences afforded the most meaning by examining these highly emphasized words and phrases.

Another important theme that can be extracted from Katie’s profile is made evident when she discusses the New Zealand context and its influence on the meaning of her experiences. The local wilderness personalized the experience for her. New Zealand is her home and exploring it in this fashion augmented how meaningful any experience was. It provided a sense of “belonging.” She ends her story with a paragraph on the emotions she felt at different stages of the trip. Each emotional memory is rich with imagery giving an indication of the meaning of those particular aspects of the trip. For instance, she articulates the feeling of it being dark in the morning of the tramp up to the top of the mountain. It felt surreal which meant that making it to the top of mountain, which held a sense of awe, gave her nervous excitement and would be very special.

The various forms of meaning which Katie perceived manifested in some important impacts in both the short- and long-term. Katie perceives a long-term impact of increased

self-esteem, confidence and self-efficacy in outdoor leadership. This impact was more profound in the short-term and dissipated slightly over time, but remains very significant well into the long-term. She perceives those impacts every time she reflects on her former experiences.

The group dynamics and how she perceived them, both at the time and now are also very significant aspects of Katie's experiences. Her memories of frustration and anger were more prevalent at the time and shortly after the course, but have become transformed into positive constructions of what those emotions represented. She feels now that she is more understanding of others and empathic.

Furthermore, Katie shows that the bond which the group shared was very meaningful. That cohesion helped add to the meaning of other experiences. For example, when making it to the top of the large hill, the group was at the top and waited for all to arrive. They cheered people as they approached the summit and this group atmosphere made the experience very emotional. Katie indicates that she remembers vividly the emotional nature of that moment when she reads her diary or looks over photos. Similarly, when arriving at the sea at the end of the trip and when the group ran into the water, it became obvious to Katie how close the group had actually become. That feeling helped solidify her sense of achievement which, in turn, is responsible for her lasting interest in the outdoors both in her personal life and in her teaching career. Perhaps Katie's descriptions provide some evidence for a mechanism by which meaning created by specific moments on outdoor adventure programmes can influence long-term impact. However, such a claim would require corroboration through future research.

Profile 2: Melanie

When I reflect on my life now, there are so many things that I trace to my experiences from Mountains-to-Sea. I've affirmed my career choice as a P.E. teacher that and have incorporated outdoor education in my teaching. I enjoy doing outdoor activities a lot more now and feel a lot more confident in organizing trips with friends. I've gained a lot of skills that I still use today, such as confidence, better communication and teamwork.

It affects me today a lot differently than when I first did the trip. At the time, the impacts of that trip were more personal. I had achieved. I participated in a trip where we travelled for four or five hundred kilometres and without a vehicle, and I was really proud of that. Sometimes, I felt emotions of anger or frustration that we had so much longer to go or that I wasn't performing as well as I had hoped. But, towards the end of the trip, I felt happy and relieved that I had finished it. I felt so proud that it gave me a lot of confidence in the outdoors and in outdoor education.

Today, from a teacher's perspective, I chose to work in a school that has an outdoor education programme and tried hard to get into it because of the inspiration, confidence and skills that Mountains-to-Sea gave me. It was such a positive experience, one that I can see no negatives coming from; none at all. There were some negative emotions of anger or frustration which I felt occasionally at the time, but they all disappeared and I only get excited when I think about it now. I think to myself, "I wasn't really angry." I realize that it was just because I was tired and wanted to be somewhere else at the time. Now, I think, "Oh man! I would do that again tomorrow!" I still feel that sense of achievement and have such

positive memories. I look back on it now and just feel it was fantastic. It's been an inspiration for me. It helped push me into a teaching career that involved outdoor ed.

There isn't a lot of outdoor education in the programme at Teachers College where we went to university. So, it is hard for future outdoor education teachers to know what kinds of programmes they can do. But, because of Mountains-to-Sea, I've gotten a feel for the outdoors. I've had a taste of outdoor education and know what it's about now. It's led me to think, "How can I provide an experience like that which will influence other people? How can I take kids away and give them the experience that was so influential on me? How can I help them gain that sense of achievement which I gained at the time?" Looking to the future, I know that I will teach outdoor education.

I think there should be more of it in university courses. I'm sure most of the people that did Mountains-to-Sea would agree that it is such a valuable experience. There might be a few others like me that actually use that experience today and action it. At the time you don't think, "Ah, this is going to have a lot of meaning in two years." But, when you do action it, it gains meaning and it provides a vital experience for a lot of things like this sort of job. I'm able to relate to my students a lot better. When I take my students out on these sorts of activities, I can understand what they're feeling because I've worked through the challenge and overcome it myself. Like, we might be at the top of a hill, but we're not. The bike to the top was one example of that. We were at the top of the hill, but the trip wasn't over yet. We still had a lot more to go. That type of situation helps me in my teaching.

Perhaps the biggest thing that I pick out from the trip was the mountain biking. This was the activity where we really saw a large variance in ability. It was also where I could see the real spirit of the class. Our group was so competitive, but the mountain biking showed us that it wasn't necessarily about being competitive. The boys who were typically hard-out and

aggressive were a lot more supportive than they were in the normal day-to-day classroom. It showed us just how supportive we can be and how close we had all gotten. I remember on the last night we had a campfire and were sharing things that brought us even closer. Because we had those 3 days of living with each other and challenging ourselves and supporting each other, it was really nice to sit around the fire and talk to each other in that way.

The mountain biking is definitely what I think about most because I hadn't done a lot and that was what I struggled with most. There were some *huge* hills and I achieved quite a lot in getting through that. I was one of the girls at the front which meant a lot to me. Today, I have my own bike and often go mountain biking on little trails. I really enjoy taking kids out biking. Having had those mountain biking experiences showed me that it was something I really enjoyed and motivated me to do it a lot more.

On a personal level, because I've had the experience, I'm a lot more interested in doing things like that. If friends want to go into the outdoors, I'm always keen because I know I can be in the wilderness for a few days and survive and succeed. I went to do the National Park Crossing with a group of friends recently and I felt really comfortable organizing that trip. I knew what equipment and maps to take. My friends didn't quite have that experience so I was quite happy to lead them and take them on the trip. I think that confidence comes from trips like Mountains-to-Sea where we climbed to the summit and did similar things. So, both personally and professionally, I've gotten a lot more confidence in outdoor activities.

The trip forced us to be out of our comfort zones in a lot of ways and that forces you to cope and cooperate. You have to think about others and not just yourself. It's a key element of these kinds of trips. Besides the activities that you do, you have to live in a

different environment with different conditions. We stayed in sheep barns or maraes so you don't get to go home and have a bed when you're tired and have been kayaking all day.

Staying at a marae, especially in New Zealand, was a really cool cultural experience, which for some people is not a common experience and for others it might be. It was an awesome part of that trip. After a hard day, you still have to think about being respectful and consider the culture. It added to the challenge and forced us to work together and be respectful as a group. That was also when you would see different leaders come out. People with strengths in Maori culture would step up and lead, like during the powhiri [welcoming ceremony]. So, you wouldn't ever have just one leader. Every situation is different and people with different strengths in different areas could take a leadership role at different times. Everyone was a leader.

You get all sorts of skills like that from those kinds of experiences. You gain confidence, communication and teamwork skills, which you use in everyday life. You might already have those skills but the challenge in that environment puts pressure on those skills and you get better at using them. You find better ways to communicate. After you come back and you're in a situation where you need to communicate, you can do that a lot better because you have a bit more experience. One example of that came from one of the mountain biking legs. Someone had fallen off of their bike and we had to communicate to the front of the group that someone was hurt and that they needed to stop to keep the group together. A similar thing happened while I was teaching. We were running up a hill with the kids and had to get to point "A" but we couldn't get there because something had happened down below. So, I knew exactly how to communicate to the front that we had to stop to get everyone together, by sending one of our faster riders to send the message to the front and keeping the situation under control.

I think those skills probably apply more to the same environment because that's where it puts pressure on those skills and where they are more usable. When I'm in that environment, I'm a lot better at communicating with a group and more confident in doing these things because I've had the experience. Outside of that environment, things like teamwork, you use all the time, but it definitely more directly applies to a similar environment.

I gave some examples but I'm not sure if I could really trace all those impacts to any part of the Mountains-to-Sea trip. It was the whole experience that gave me those benefits. Mountains-Sea is built up to be a huge challenge, a 5-day challenge. So, achieving it at the end was the most important thing. Achieving something so challenging is the main thing.

As time goes on, I think the meanings for that experience change. Now that I'm in this environment a bit more and in the outdoor environment more, the trip means so much more for me than it did then. If I was someone who had gone into a classroom and was only a teacher, even a primary school teacher, and wasn't using the skills we gained, I might think, "Mountains-to-Sea was a good time and a good experience." But, that would be all. Because I use these skills and because I do similar things a lot more now, it's made it *so* meaningful and I'm able to use my experience with the students I have now. Two years ago, I never had the chance to teach outdoor ed. I didn't have the same opportunities I have now. I might see something that reminded me of the trip and think back on the experience and remember it as a good time. But, now I actually *use* the experience in real life.

There isn't any other singular experience that I can pick out. The entire trip was so meaningful. I wouldn't hesitate to take a group of kids out and do something similar but maybe on a smaller level. Getting to know each other better, helping each other and challenging ourselves was such a positive experience and I'm so glad I got to do that. I got so

many skills from it which I use everyday both professionally and socially. There were definitely no negatives that could have come from it. I hear of other groups that couldn't do it because of weather, or they didn't perform well, or they only did a miniature one, and I think they've missed out on *so* much. The trip was absolutely fantastic. I will remember Mountains-to-Sea and carry those experiences long into the future. I hope that it continues to influence me as it has over the past several years.

Interpretive Commentary – Profile 2

Of all of the participants interviewed, Melanie provides the most positive depiction of her experiences. She overwhelmingly feels that it has directly impacted her and describes how her experiences have translated into long-term meaning and impact. She traces her desire for teaching outdoor education primarily to the Mountains-to-Sea trip. She doesn't actively link those impacts to particular aspects of the programme, such as the setting, the group, her instructor or the activities, but feels that all of them have a cumulative effect on the long-term impacts of the trip. In Melanie's view, the trip was designed as a 5-day challenge and that is how it was perceived by all of the students. Overcoming of the overall challenge and the subsequent sense of achievement could be the locus from which future impacts stem.

Melanie discusses certain instances which she felt were particularly meaningful both at the time of the trip and retrospectively years later. Overcoming the challenge of one big hill was one of these profound events which had lasting meaning. Though she claims that the experience as a whole is responsible for her current passion and involvement with outdoor activities professionally and socially, moments such as these signify the sense of achievement which fuels her interest and motivation.

Melanie seems to have created meaning from these events from distinct but interconnected factors. She witnessed a high variance in ability that day indicating that some of her classmates would be struggling while others would have found the physical challenge easier. She mentions that her class was very competitive. Mountain biking was also the activity in which Melanie perceived herself to have less competence and anticipated a struggle. Yet, she was able to maintain a position at the front of the group. In this way, simply making it to the top of the hill is not purely responsible for fostering a sense of pride and achievement. Melanie also mentioned how shared reflection about such moments during campfire time, enhanced meaning. There seems to be a complex interaction between a myriad of factors including differences in skill, competitiveness, an initial perceived lack of competence, the supportive spirit and cohesiveness of the group, and the opportunity to reflect and share thoughts and feelings on the experience, which helped solidify the long-term meaning and impact of that moment. Perhaps there is a broader indication in Melanie's profile of a process on how a future passion for the outdoors, and a drive to share outdoor experiences with students, friends or family, stem from these types of intricate moments.

Melanie details how the impacts and meanings of her experiences have changed over time. She describes that the meaning of the trip was much more personal at the time and focused on what she had achieved. As time went on, a modified and enhanced meaning was generated by applying her experiences either in similar situations or in her teaching career. The meaning of the Mountains-to-Sea trip increased in intensity and form for Melanie over time. Through repeated engagement with the outdoors, either on personal trips or professionally with students, Melanie is able to continually reflect on and apply what she feels she had gained from her Mountains-to-Sea experiences.

On a more subtle level, Melanie implies that because of the benefits she felt she gained from her experiences, OAE programmes should be incorporated into university courses more commonly. She links the lack of OAE programmes like Mountains-to-Sea in her own university career to the reason why many aspiring teachers may not choose to incorporate outdoor education into their teaching. Melanie might recommend that decision-makers who design university curricula or policy makers on higher education, consider this opinion.

Melanie highlights the uniqueness of this group. She felt that the competitiveness of the group was an aspect of the programme which changed during the Mountains-to-Sea trip. She mentions that some students which she initially perceived as being “hard-out” and “aggressive” exhibited surprising behaviours and were actually quite supportive. This added to the group’s cohesiveness. This is also reflected by the way the students talked with each other on the last night sitting around the campfire. It was these specific events which add to the profundity of her experience and personalize it for her.

According to Melanie, the cultural experience of staying on a marae during the trip was a fairly unique aspect of being in New Zealand, and it may not even be an experience familiar to a lot of New Zealanders. This cultural experience increased the level of challenge and further pushed the students out of their comfort zones. At the end of a long, hard day, they still had to be respectful of this culture as a group. Also, it allowed different individuals with different leadership capabilities to rise. For instance, those that might have more experience with Maori culture could lead the group in a powhiri ceremony. This was a lesson for Melanie on how each individual in a group can be a leader in some way if given the opportunity to expose their leadership skills.

The major theme in Melanie's profile remains that because there was a physical activity medium which Melanie found particularly challenging, namely mountain biking, overcoming that challenge is what added significant meaning to her experience overall and helped create the sense of achievement. Therefore, it would be worth considering whether or not the long-term impact of adventure experiences might be affected if a student lacked a sense of achievement because there were no elements which provided a significant enough challenge to overcome.

Profile 3: Danny

I was part of the Mountains-to-Sea trip in 2007. I feel so glad that I could share it *together* with a group of people I spent four years of my life with. That was by far the most meaningful thing. It's still something I only have a positive recollection of. The overall experience was something I thoroughly enjoyed and when I think about it now, it was a very emotional experience. It sparked a desire to recreate that experience with my students. I'm also really eager to do that kind of thing again but, perhaps, with more of a physical challenge. For all those positive memories and the benefits I've gotten from it, I don't think it was a life-altering experience. It needed to be more intense physically and for longer to have impacted me that much. All that remains now are fond memories, an interest in doing it again and bringing it into my teaching.

Reflection was obviously the biggest part of that trip for me. I was even thinking about Mountains-to-Sea recently and had written some things down. I started to list the different social and physical benefits of the trip and had lots of stuff branching off from those

categories. The social would have far outweighed the physical, though I think you need the physical to create the conditions that bring out the social benefits. The social benefits were all about the group bonding that occurred. As a class, we were already quite tight knit but on that trip we got so much closer because we were all doing these activities together. We used to know each other only in pockets but you're eating, sleeping and preparing for the next day together. You do everything together, and that's a huge part of it. By being in such an isolated area with our class and doing everything together, reflecting on that, and sharing our feelings about it, it made the trip really exclusive to our group. It made it special to us.

The sense of satisfaction we gained became most apparent during our reflection time. We would share our thoughts at the end of the day around the campfire. That was a really important thing for me. You have a whole group of people who go through the same experiences that you do and you can bounce ideas about that throughout the day and at the end of each day. It helped us bond and emerge as a group. I also got a lot of satisfaction from helping others in the group.

Those were the social benefits but, like I said, the physical brings out the social. The physical side of it was all about completion; of the entire trip and of the different stages of challenge in the different physical mediums, which gave us variety in our activities and prevented boredom. You could say at the end of the day, "I've biked 100km today" or "I've kayaked this far down the river." After the trip was over, you could sit back and look at a map and say, "Wow! I've gone from the middle of the island right to the outside!" And, that is quite rewarding. But, you're not going to experience those physical and social benefits unless you push yourself or go through that physical environment.

I remember we would have little competitions like a race up a hill on one of the bike legs. It was great because it added a bit more physical challenge for me and made it fun. We

would race to the top and then bike back down to help others. Supporting other people was really important. I got a lot of reward out of it. Because the physical part of it wasn't very challenging for me, I found that, instead of pushing myself up, I had to force myself to go at the pace of the slowest person in the group. I tried to step back and encourage other people and found it was a way I could challenge myself. Though the physical wasn't a big part of the trip for me, this was how the physical brought out the social benefits. By having to be responsible for my partner and for everyone in the group, I could challenge myself by helping others get the support and encouragement they needed to succeed. That's what has led me to want to do that type of trip again and to recreate the situation with my students – to taste those benefits.

The lack of technology was also important. Exclusion from the outer world and not having cell phones, a TV or a newspaper meant that you didn't have anything else to focus on or impact you as a group. We did have I-Pods, which I think was good because there were times when it did get a bit boring. Especially during the kayak, the river was ridiculously slow which actually made it quite challenging, in a way, to just float along and accept it. So, we just chucked the I-Pods in the back and would listen to them when it got really boring but we didn't really use them that much. Still, not having the technological comforts of the city helped add to the exclusiveness we felt. It was another physical aspect that helped create the social benefits.

With all the tracks after Ruapehu going inland, it becomes metal roads and gets quite isolated for most of the way to Wanganui at the end. Thinking about the exclusiveness, I remember that re-entering society after was strange. The sounds of cars and the smells of the city are things you forget, so it was weird coming back to the concrete jungle. The feel of the

city comes back pretty quick though, so that feeling of isolation doesn't last for very long; maybe just a couple of days, but it was a strong enough memory that I still think about that.

The trip was really well-run. Our lecturer organized it and it was his thing. He loves outdoor education and his enthusiasm wore off on us. I didn't really need him for support or motivation myself, but whether it was biking or kayaking, it was good to know he was there as a mentor. His main role for me was in facilitating the reflection. Perhaps, the reflection meant so much to me because of the way he set that up each night. I could also test my physical ability on him a bit. He was far fitter than anyone in the class and sometimes we'd have a small race on the bike and he would totally burn me. It was great to see that I could get burned every time with him; to put my own physical ability into perspective.

The cultural experience was something I had written down but I haven't thought about much over the years. Staying at the marae was cool because we came down the river and it was just there in the middle of nowhere. The actual marae was being used at the time, so we stayed in tents just around it, which was interesting. Being there wasn't really a new environment because I had stayed at the campus marae a couple of times, but it was cool, I guess.

Although the trip has had a lot of benefits for me and I have so many positive memories of it, when I think back on it, it wasn't a life-changing experience. It was meaningful but it didn't define me. If the trip was a *lot* more challenging or if it was longer, or we had more difficult weather, I think it would have been more impactful. It would make my reflections continue for longer and would make me want to keep reflecting on it. If you've heard of Outward Bound, I think the length of that, the level of challenge and the exclusiveness would make it a lot more intense and could allow more beneficial reflections that last.

Don't get me wrong. The trip was awesome. I gained a lot from it and it did impact on me. But, most of those effects probably wore off after about a month or two. I still want to do that trip again but at my own pace and with friends of similar physical ability. In fact, there was a trip we did as a class in our second year – tramping in the Ruahines. We couldn't complete that trip because people weren't prepared and struggled a lot. People were getting hypothermic and we had to turn back. So, a mate of mine, who's also quite physically able, couldn't leave that incomplete, so we went back recently and did it together.

I think the reason why these experiences weren't as profound in the long run as they could have been is that the types of activities we did and the environment we were in weren't very unfamiliar to me. I grew up on a farm and have grown up going on trips skiing and tramping and going into the bush doing that sort of stuff. So this wasn't really anything new. That's also probably why I don't feel there were any negative aspects of the trip. I never felt frustrated with myself or with other people. It's in my personality because I've been in that type of environment before and grew up around it. I know that environment enhances the exclusion you feel. It's quite serene and peaceful which makes the experiences so much more. Because of that environment, and because we experience everything in that environment together, the group bonding and the social benefits can occur.

Today, my reflections come real casually. I might meet up with a mate, look at photos from it or see the T-shirt that we had made for it, and have a bit of a laugh and remember the times. I haven't felt that I'd like to go tramping a lot more because of this. It hasn't inspired me, but, again, I would like to recreate that situation with what I do now, with teaching. Actually, I'd be really keen to do it with an all-boys group to see how they would go on a similar trip without the female perspectives. That desire to bring it into my teaching is because of the social benefits I've experienced. There isn't one particular aspect responsible

for that but the trip as a whole – the overall experience. In spite of that, the impacts that remain now are only a thought and an attraction, neither of which have really motivated me to act on my interest, at least not because of Mountains-to-Sea.

Interpretive Commentary – Profile 3

Danny's profile is a compelling example of how the Mountains-to-Sea trip retains its meaning in the long-term, whereas impacts are more short-term, diminishing in intensity over time. Danny's created meaning from his experiences by continually reflecting on them, either through structured methods, such as writing a diary on the trip, structured reflective discussions each night on the trip, or more informal methods of casual reflection during the years since the trip. Not only is reflection important to Danny, but by reflecting on his experiences he was able to decipher various physical and social benefits. However, through careful reflection, Danny felt that, in the long-term, the only impacts remaining from Mountains-to-Sea are a professional motivation to recreate the experience with his students and a social and personal motivation to repeat the experience but at his own pace and with people of his choosing.

These social benefits were perceived primarily closer to the time of the expedition. They included group cohesion and the supportive nature of his class. Even though they knew each other really well, their relationships were initially relegated to smaller groups. On the Mountains-to-Sea trip the entire group bonded and the trip felt very exclusive to them. That exclusivity was possible because they were doing everything – eating, sleeping and participating in physically challenging activities – together in a very isolated environment. It gives Danny great satisfaction that his group was able to achieve this state of camaraderie.

Danny describes how the social benefits sprung from supporting others in his group. He indicated that the physical challenges were not too difficult for him, so he had to find a way to challenge himself in order to share in the experience to others and to grow personally. It was rewarding to hold back his physical ambition to support others. These social benefits were closely linked with the physical benefits he perceived. He stills finds it rewarding to look at a map and see how far they had travelled in just 5 days. He felt a sense of pride in completing each day's distance and enjoyed the variety of activities they had. He had small races to test his physical ability and push his body. In these ways, the physical challenges set the conditions which induced social responses that allowing for greater group cohesion and positive reflections.

In addition to having positive long-term meaning, Danny feels that such learning experiences are a reason why he wants to give his students similar opportunities through his teaching. At the time, the social and physical benefits were more personal, but, since then, Danny has transferred this learning to his professional practice. An increased motivation to teach outdoor education appears to be the most significant long-term impact of his experiences.

On a more subtle level, the setting of this trip played an important role for Danny. His eloquent description involving the imagery of re-entering society after the trip indicates that he has attached vivid meaning to this experience, which added value to the whole experience. Without modern comforts available in this setting, Danny felt the exclusiveness of the group was enhanced because there were no distractions from the experience of the trip. This is another example of how the physical aspects helped shape the social benefits. Contradictorily, Danny felt it was enjoyable to have IPODs with them; to alleviate the physical strain of

monotony on the Whanganui River. Nevertheless, Danny places a great deal of value on the importance of the wilderness setting.

The course instructor also played a meaningful role. Danny felt that the instructor organized the trip well and his intense enthusiasm for the outdoors was contagious. His role was less of a source of motivation or support, but more to model the facilitation of reflection-related activities. It is partly why he has valued reflection well into the long-term. He was also humbled to see his lecturer win in small, private challenges on the mountain bike or kayak. It helped put his physical ability into perspective and explains why he wishes to repeat a similar experience but with friends of similar capability.

Danny noted that staying on a marae was an interesting cultural experience, but wasn't something he reflected on much. It was more simply a place to sleep. He had stayed on a marae before so it didn't feel like a novel experience. He also did not discuss this aspect of the trip at length during the interview indicating that it did not have a very influential effect on the meaning of his experience both in the short- and long-term.

At one point in the profile Danny makes a passing statement that he desires to recreate the experience with an all-boys group at his school without female perspectives. This point may reflect more deep-seated gender dynamics, but, unfortunately due to time constraints, we were unable to discuss this at length. Later, when writing these results, Danny was contacted and asked to review his profile so that he could make any clarifications to help maximize the validity of his statements. He indicated that his desire to recreate the situation with boys only was because he currently teaches at an all-boys school, so it would be more applicable to his professional practice. It is still possible that Danny's worldview is influenced by dominant gender discourses but he simply wants to explore this gender dynamic as a budding teacher.

It is quite evident that the expedition still holds a great deal of meaning for Danny. He is explicit that his experiences were and still are meaningful despite some dissolution in impact. He has retained, in the long-term a strong desire to engage with the outdoors personally, socially and professionally. He gives the example of how leaving his 2nd year trip in the Ruahine Mountains incomplete compelled him to go back with a friend to finish it. He feels that with greater physical rigor, or an extended stay in the adventure or wilderness environment, people who are physically savvy like him could receive a more profound, life-changing experience. He feels that courses like those offered by Outward Bound would be more suited to fostering significant long-term impacts.

The trip did not challenge Danny enough to be a defining part of his psychosocial life. He was raised in a rural region of New Zealand where he was exposed to the outdoors regularly. He would go tramping and skiing often, so the physical activities were familiar. This is also why it was not a negative experience. He knows what it takes to cope on such expeditions. He is already aware of the positive influence of the wilderness environment. He understands these benefits, so the effects of this particular trip were lessened. This may be why the trip's impacts dissipated so quickly after the end of the course.

After a few months, Danny's experiences leave him with only a mild interest and eagerness to engage with the outdoors, and a strong desire to include more outdoor education in his teaching. But, the trip was still quite meaningful. Because the physical aspects of the trip were less challenging, he found other ways to extract meaning, such as group interactions and reflection. Nevertheless, the lack of latency in the intensity and diversity of programme effects serves as a testament that, for some participants, OAE programmes do not always produce profound impacts as many professionals in the field believe.

Profile 4: Natene

I marvelled at the wild goats everywhere and the deer we saw some mornings on the Whanganui River. I was captured by the wildlife. There was a DOC ranger who joined our Mountains-to-Sea trip and he did a lot of contract hunting. I was constantly walking and talking with him about hunting. Seeing it up close, I began to realize the possibilities of hunting as a hobby and became really interested in it. I read hunting magazines and about two months after the course, then got my firearms licence and started hunting goats. Mountains-to-Sea was a catalyst for a hunting obsession. I even moved to the Bay of Plenty because of its renown for hunting and fishing. The physical feats of that trip weren't much for me. I had done a lot of kayaking and tramping. I never felt like I was so proud because I completed one of the physical challenges. It was the wildlife and the people I met that meant the most.

Seeing different sides of people I thought I had known was another major part of my trip. The other day, I visited one of my friends who had gone on Mountains-to-Sea with me. I told her I was going to be part of some research about it and she said she might be too. We started talking and reminiscing about the trip. We couldn't believe how many people battled on that trip. She said to me, "do you remember how you wrote your diary on the trip and made a big deal about how no one else wrote theirs until after? You were so fiery about that." She still holds that in her head. Even five years on, she's still bringing up the fact that people were angry and touchy about it. People aren't going to remember this trip for the mark they got or the good things about it, but that someone got angry, or couldn't complete a walk or threw insults at others.

Although the hunting thing stands out for me as a very positive outcome, I feel much the same as my friend did. The negative attitudes and behaviours of the other students is a close second to the hunting thing. People acted differently because they were uncomfortable and it was surprising because I really thought I knew them. After all, I was at uni with them for the past 3 years. My first year about 16 of us lived together in the student hostel and the following two years, I flatted with a few of the guys. But, on that trip, people behaved atrociously. I wrote about one instance of that in my diary. On the last night, it was a tradition for some people to bike into town and get some alcoholic drinks for everyone. I got a bit merry as did a lot of us. But, I didn't go with the group to buy the drinks. I stayed behind at the camp. When they got back, one of the guys said things like, "You're so soft. You're hanging with the bitches. Have you grown a vagina?" You might be trying to help them out and they throw that sort of abuse at you. They're struggling and start accusing you of not helping. They even bring up things from the past and call you names like "cock" or "dick". I remember that and so do a lot of people. It just makes me think about the different sides of people you can see when they are out of their comfort zones.

I'm sure that if we did the same trip with the same people again, it would be exactly the same. I don't think many people have really changed. Some people from my year are organizing a reunion and one of the guys replied to the invitation saying how excited he was to get hammered and have drinks with everyone. He's was always obsessed with drinking will always be like that. I couldn't imagine him changing. It's as though what happens on the trip stays on the trip. That's just how it is. For example one of the guys posted a bunch of stuff about that trip online on a blog website. People were really upset and still talk about that because he was labelling everyone unfairly. So, I don't think people have really learned from the trip.

It is like a form of fraud the way people act, in my opinion. Some of my classmates claim to have so much outdoors experience just because they completed the Mountains-to-Sea trip but that's not necessarily true. My partner went on Mountains-to-Sea and she has a photo from her year and they all look so happy in it. But, she feels that's false advertising because there was actually a lot of squabbling and I agree. Some people even put photos from this trip on their C/Vs when applying for jobs claiming they had outdoors experience. They may have done only *one* trip and it may have been a highlight of their life, but they use that to embellish their experience. They claim to be genuine outdoorsy people and as a person who considers himself very outdoorsy and as a teacher, I'm offended by that. It reminds me of a quote that the head of outdoor education at my school once told me. "A little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing."

I've applied that lesson elsewhere too. I recently got my Rock I certificate for rock climbing and one of the guides was trying to get his clients to be responsible for their own learning and empower them with the skills they need. I asked him if he thought that might be a bit dangerous; giving them a little bit of knowledge but then saying they have the skills to do it themselves. What if they try to abseil or climb by themselves thinking they have the skills but get into an accident? He responded by accepting that this could happen, but that he also debriefs them cautioning that they have only had a taste of the skills and directs them to local alpine clubs to further their experience. Still, I think that such behaviour is unwise.

Similarly, I fear that people who did Mountains-to-Sea and put it on their C/Vs might try to run a 3-day river trip with kids, which could result in serious consequences. I know of one person who had barely even seen a kayak until Mountains-to-Sea but ran a trip down the Whanganui with her students when she started teaching. Another two teachers from my year took their students paddling down the Rangitikei. And, though I feel bad mentioning so many

girls, another one took her outdoor education class out to do a survival unit standard, level 3. That's really hard work. I would ask Mountain Safety Council and Search and Rescue to assist me if I taught that standard. She had gone out with her students and was meant to be out for 3 days but they came back in a day. It may have been raining or snowing, and she might have had people with her. I don't know because a lot of time has passed since then, so I can't say for sure, but I found it odd because she wasn't a strong outdoors person when we were at uni.

Aside from loving hunting, the major way my Mountains-to-Sea experience has transferred to my life today is that I know I need to walk-the-walk, not just talk the talk. I feel that a certain level of experience is needed to be competent leading outdoor activities. It shapes my teaching style when leading outdoor education trips with them. I might have gotten into outdoor education anyway, but Mountains-to-Sea probably furthered my experiences. I'm a lot more confident in organizing trips on a logistical level. I'm sharper to the students' individual needs and can relate to them better because I've done it myself. I know that you need a good night's sleep to be able to function well during the day. I know what kinds of food kids will like on trips and will give them the energy they need to succeed. I can pick up signs, like fatigue, hunger or stress, from the students more quickly because I've been through it and I can anticipate those behaviours better. I probably wouldn't have developed those skills until way later on if it hadn't have been for Mountains-to-Sea. So, even though I remember that trip for all the squabbling and how people behaved, there were a lot of positive outcomes.

Even regarding people's behaviour, when I look back on it, I'm a lot less critical of that behaviour than I was at the time. I was quite bitter then, but now, for instance, I don't necessarily think that Mountains-to-Sea should have been mandatory for all physical

education students. Those who weren't as competent could have found work in an at-risk school or a supportive learning centre. Also, as you get older, you become more understanding, flexible and harder-skinned. I've learned that from Mountains-to-Sea; that when people are out of their comfort zones or don't have the right skill sets they are going to lose the plot and it might not necessarily be their fault. It's like when I was teaching an achievement standard 2.8, which is about risk management. Part of that standard requires people to write reflections on their outdoor trips and from my experiences with Mountains-to-Sea, I stand firm on the belief that those reflections need to be written onsite. Other teachers were more relaxed about it and allowed their students to complete the reflections after the trip was over. I guess I've learned how I want to teach outdoor education with my students but I'm a lot more flexible about how others might go about it. I know now that a lot of people struggled with the Mountains-to-Sea trip and probably didn't want to write their diaries during the trip because of that. So, I can be more understanding of those teachers and students who don't write reflections onsite.

Mountains-to-Sea may have taught me some lessons like these, but it was by no means life-changing. I didn't have an epiphany and find my path in life. But, it did give me some satisfaction and it opened up a lot of opportunities. I'd like to climb Mt. Ruapehu again. I want to paddle the Whanganui again with some select friends who I know would be able to manage it and make the most of it. I'd like to go back there and explore the hunting opportunities that I was exposed to.

The trip also helped me make a lot of influential connections. When we stayed at Teiki marae, I talked to some of the elder Maori people of the area and being Maori myself and a Maori speaker, those connections were very beneficial. The Whanganui River is enriched with history. At every second bend there's a historical story to go with it and you

need the elders to tell you those stories. That's how Maori culture has always been; history is passed on from one generation to the next through story telling. It something my school and my department value a lot as well.

I saw one of the elders, a very respected and knowledgeable person of the Whanganui River region, a couple years later. He remembered me from the trip. We started talking about pig hunting. The same is true for the DOC ranger that joined our trip. After I got my firearms license he took me to the shooting range and taught me how to shoot well. That was the inspiration for my hunting passion. Our lecturer was also a helpful connection to have and was an inspiration. He even wrote on the back of my diary assessment, "You've got a lot to offer as an outdoors person. You can develop that." That helped affirm that I was a skilled outdoors person and it was great to hear his encouraging words.

The local knowledge and connections have helped me to organize personal trips a lot better and given me more confidence in that. I'm taking my mum on a river trip down the Whanganui and she's turning 50. I'm taking my whole family, actually, but would never have done that without Mountains-to-Sea because I just wouldn't have known about that opportunity. I might have climbed Ruapehu anyway, but, now, I know it is an achievable feat. I can challenge myself even further by walking around that National Park area and rock climbing there because of the knowledge I now have.

All in all, Mountains-to-Sea was a great trip; one that I will always remember because I would never have known about hunting without it. It's unfortunate that when I think back on the trip, how badly people behaved and how they struggled are the memories that I first think of. But, that does inform my teaching because I can understand my students a lot better and can organize outdoor education logistics a lot more easily. It has helped me to know the types of people that I can trust and would want to do outdoors activities with. In a way, it has

helped me know who I would want to have as a friend and the kind of person I want to be.

Interpretive Commentary – Profile 4

Natene's responses during the interview were very candid and passionate. He emphasized the impact that the trip had as a catalyst for his hunting passion, but the majority of the interview, and hence, this profile, encompassed his feelings about the behaviour of others' in his group. Natene certainly attaches a great deal of meaning to the trip but in juxtaposed ways.

On one hand, he assigns a great deal of importance to the connections he was able to make on the trip. His conversations with the DOC ranger which got him inspired to take up hunting are obviously meaningful and that positive meaning has been retained in a practical way over time. The Maori elders he met held a lot of value for Natene because of his Maori heritage. The course instructor was another connection instrumental for modelling how to organize outdoor trip logistics, which has left him with increased competence as an outdoor leader in the long-term. The comments made in Natene's diary, show that the course instructor also helped affirm Natene's passion and skill as an outdoor leader.

On the other hand, as evidenced by the length of discussion about how people behaved and how he was initially quite bitter about that behaviour, his interactions with other group members were also significantly meaningful, and seemingly more so than the influential adults he met. It is quite surprising to hear the taunts that he received from his friends simply because he did not join them to buy alcohol. The longevity of this negative association is clear when Natene discusses how he feels that people from his class would not have really learned from the trip or changed their behaviour.

Natene believes that many students mis-represent their skills because they have been on Mountains-to-Sea. He explains how people put photos of them from this trip on their C/Vs and embellished their skills. As a person who sees himself as a very outdoorsy person, he takes offence at what he feels are aggrandized claims. The long-term meaning of such perceptions is ultimately a fairly negative one. However, his seemingly negative judgments have resulted in positive long-term impacts. His perceptions about other group members committing fraud have been transformed into a positive learning lesson about integrity. It consistently shapes how he teaches and helps him to assess his teaching.

In the long-term, Natene is also more reflexive and empathic with his former classmates and his current colleagues, students and friends. He feels that, in retrospect, the behaviour of other people on Mountains-to-Sea was more a result of poor coping mechanisms with physical struggle in the outdoors. He now values reflection assignments being done on site, but is more understanding of other teachers who do not emphasize this practice as much. Natene thinks that his classmates should not have been forced to go on Mountains-to-Sea. They should have been allowed to choose because they could still find work as a P.E. teacher without this experience.

The insults and berating Natene perceived raises a more subtle theme around gender. The behaviour of the group and the language they use portray certain gendered norms about the roles of males and females on the trip. Through Natene's narrative this interesting dynamic is revealed. This behaviour reflects the machismo and a masculine dominance embedded in the culture of this group. Natene believes that this trip helped expose these aspects of people's personalities which were once hidden, and he now values that.

Natene extracts meaning from aspects of the programme less directly related to the physical challenges. It is possible that the meaning of the trip is re-directed to other aspects

when the trip cannot offer an element of physical challenge and struggle. Perhaps, this is why the focus for Natene is on the setting, the group dynamics and the negative aspects of their behaviour when under physical and emotional stress. That behaviour may have isolated Natene which could explain why he was quicker to bond with other adults he met during the trip such as the DOC ranger, Maori elders or the course instructor.

Overall, Natene views his trip as very meaningful, but much of this meaning is negative, especially in the short-term, and is related to his perceptions of social interactions. In the long-term, contrastingly, he ascribes mostly positive meaning to his experiences. He has transformed the aspects of the trip which he once perceived as negative into positive impacts on his personal and professional development. The literature on the long-term influence of adventure education often misses this nuanced aspect of outdoor trips. This profile, in combination with that of the other participants may be able to reveal such hidden characteristics of outdoor adventure programmes.

Profile 5: Nina

On the last day, there was a *massive* hill. We had kayaked to all the way to Papariki and then, when biking, we came to it. I just looked ahead and thought, “Oh, my gosh! I’m never going to make it!” Then, I found my resolve and I passed about six people on the way up. I’m not a cyclist. Kayaking is fine and walking is fine, but cycling is really hard for me. So, when I got to the top of that hill, I started to get a bit emotional. A lot of us did and I don’t know if it was because we were tired or because of what we had all done together or some combination. I was so amazed at the effort and adrenaline. You just kept going. I hate

being at the back of the group, and making it to the top without being one of the last added even more to the experience. It was an intense, defining moment for my trip.

All the days were intense, especially the first two days – the long days. It's not like you're just going for an 8-hour tramp. You have to meet deadlines and when you get there it doesn't stop. You still have to do the cooking and cleaning and prepare for the next day. I still feel *so* proud of myself, especially for making it through that hill and not being the person at the back. It really meant a lot to me. I believe that out of all of the Mountains-to-Sea years we were the only group to make it all the way to the crater at the top of Mt. Ruapehu on the first day. I was the second girl to get there and was so stoked to be there 2nd. I suppose that was a bit selfish. I want to help everyone else and be supportive, but I also don't want to be the person that everyone else has to help. Being one of the first to arrive at the destination for the day or passing people meant a lot to me.

When I think about Mountains-to-Sea, that bike ride flashes into my mind, but I remember the Whanganui River as well. Between Teiki Marae and Papariki the river is amazing. You come into a gorge and you have to paddle a lot because it is quite deep and there's not much movement, which makes it a bit more challenging. You're surrounded by huge cliffs on either side and the scenery is so beautiful and inspiring. The stay on the marae was interesting too. We had a powhiri to welcome us on, but, actually, we couldn't stay in the marae itself for some reason and had to sleep in tents outside. Being on the marae is a special thing because it is like a duty that we have to serve together. It makes the Whanganui River more welcoming. It enriches the experience with a sense of heritage and adds to the family and whanau environment. I suppose it's not something I think about a lot when I reflect on my Mountains-to-Sea experience. And, because I had stayed there a couple of times before, the experience wasn't anything very new for me, but it was pretty cool anyway.

Our leader, the lecturer from the university that organized the trip, was another important part for me. He was so supportive and wanted to give us a genuine outdoor experience. It wouldn't have been the same if someone else had taken us. I remember one night when some people tried to climb a hill to get cell phone reception and he told us, "Not here. We are here to get away from civilization, step outside our comfort zones and leave all that behind." In doing so, he created and shaped the experience for us.

I can remember these aspects of the trip really easily because I'm very good at putting myself back into the moment. It's a general quality that I possess. I've often reflected on Mountains-to-Sea when I look at the photos I have hanging on my wall. I wouldn't necessarily consciously think about it for a half-hour or go so in-depth like I am now, but my memory of the experiences and how I feel about them hasn't really changed over the 4 years since I went on the trip. I still think it was one of the most challenging things I've ever done; like that one hill. I was so proud of myself for making it to the top and I still am. It wasn't just the hill but everything leading up to it that made the experience so meaningful and added to my sense of pride.

I suppose a lot of the feelings I had about pride and camaraderie and unity were a lot fresher and felt more profound around the time of the trip. It would be great to have those feelings continue, but that's not realistic, at least not for me. You have to go to work and have responsibilities, and family and friends are important as well. As the group broke away, those feelings faded probably over the course of about 6 months. But, every time I talk about it, think about it, or look at photos the feelings come sweeping back. That's probably why it was such a significant experience because it has that quality. I was so proud of what I had achieved. Others may have found it quite easy but it was a real challenge for me.

Mountains-to-Sea was truly an amazing experience. It was exhausting and motivating and simply great. At the same time, I don't think it was life-changing. I probably would have been much the same without Mountains-to-Sea. I'm becoming increasingly aware that the sense of pride and accomplishment I got from the trip hasn't always transferred to the rest of my life. It's specific to that trip, and I think it's quite sad that I'm only realizing this now. I haven't really gone into the outdoors and done similar things as much as I would like. I haven't done anything that has been to a similar extent; something that has been so physical and has pushed me so hard. But, I often go for runs in the bush rather than in the city now. I go camping more now. And, I go skiing and rock climbing, and do more outdoorsy things now.

I might have gotten into these outdoorsy things anyway, even if I didn't go on the trip, so I'm not sure if I could credit Mountains-to-Sea for my interest. I grew up in a country town as did a lot of us. When I was younger, there isn't much to do in a rural town, so we would go down to the river and collect tadpoles. We just always did outdoor stuff. I was part of Girl Guides as well, so I made a lot of friends who are into the outdoors that way. It's just what we do. We would rather stay in a tent on the side of the road than in a motel if we went on a road trip together.

Still, I know that I have gained some things from the trip. I met my current partner on that trip. I knew him from university, but I got to know him a *lot* better on that trip. And, as a class we stayed extremely tight for another year after Mountains-to-Sea. Then everyone gets into the regular ways of their life and they think, "Oh, I would love to do something like that again," but the effort is too hard to grasp. In fact, and I think the other students from my year would agree, we probably lost touch in our last year at university because we didn't have another trip like we did each of the other years. I like to think the trip has encouraged me to

get into the outdoors more and do more outdoor activities, but, other than meeting a partner and having a greater interest in the outdoors, it is hard to say what any major long-term impacts are.

The increased interest in the outdoors that Mountains-to-Sea gave me is for doing something similar. Perhaps not right away, because I'd need some training and would have to figure out the logistics of organizing something like that, but if it was offered, I wouldn't hesitate to take up the opportunity. I have that interest, but Mountains-to-Sea hasn't *really* motivated me to actually do more outdoors things in general. I'd say what it did for me is that it taught me a lot about myself and a lot about other people in the class.

It showed me what my strengths and weaknesses are and how much I can push myself. I know I can achieve things if I really want to; if I push myself. On the trip I set small goals for myself, such as getting to the top of a hill, or passing a certain number of people. I knew that I was going to struggle, especially on the bike, so by setting small achievable goals it made it more manageable. I knew it wasn't a physical race, but getting past people made it easier for me and helped me get through the challenge. So, I learned that I am a competitive person.

On the trip the year before in the Ruahines, I had some experiences which helped me the next year on Mountains-to-Sea. I was made to be the pace-setter. There was one student who got left behind and that was a huge learning experience for me on how best to lead the group and keep everyone together. The next year, I was the pace-setter on the Atene-Skyline Track and I really enjoyed the role and felt like I led the group better. Similarly, during that Ruahine trip, when we got back to camp where the vans were coming to pick us up, people got back and were shivering because they didn't have appropriate clothing and gear. So, I loaned them all of my warm clothing because I still had really good quality gear. Likewise,

during Mountains-to-Sea, I made sure to be well-prepared with proper gear and always put a lot of effort in at the end of each day with helping to cook and manage the camp. The other students even called me 'camp mother' because I was always so supportive.

I learned a lot about other people in the class as well. I learned that some people can be really selfish and others can be really caring. For instance, there was one guy on the trip who was extremely athletic. He could have done the trip three or four times over in the same amount of time it took us. But, he hung back and helped others who were struggling on each leg of the journey. He got a lot of respect and praise and I think he was a great guy because of that. There was another guy, a close friend of mine, who was also very athletic but very competitive; even more competitive than I am. People would ask him to calm down as he got so excited about the different challenges and being the first to complete them. He had to be at the front and win and people really disliked that about him. He could have taken the more emotive role and supported others, and he would have been seen as a better team player for it.

In that way, the trip exposed people's true colours and I could see people in a new light. Our class was really tight. It wasn't a typical university lecture where there are 150 people in a class and you don't even know anyone's name. We were already like a little family and we knew each other really well. One girl was a very loud personality and ultra-confident, but once we put her in a kayak she snapped and broke down. Within the first couple of minutes in the kayak she realized she didn't know how to do it even though she claimed to be so good at everything before. As horrible as it might sound, I suppose I was quite glad to see that. That particular person had ruined the experience of the class for a lot of people, so it was really good to see that she was human and actually had some emotion. I'm sure she learned something through that as well; at least about how to kayak.

A lot of those what you might call, ‘revelations’ *have* carried over into my life since going on the Mountains-to-Sea trip. For example, I was working recently with a local Rugby Union and I could see that there are a lot of ‘fake’ people. I’m able to read people a lot better. The knowledge that ‘you can’t judge a book by its cover’ is something I might have had even without Mountains-to-Sea, but the trip helped reinforce that idea. When the types of people who are so confident and in your face in their everyday environment are put in an outdoor environment where they might need your help and are struggling, they act differently. I would definitely help and support them, but I start to think, ‘well, would they do the same for me?’ That sounds quite horrible. I am a really nice person, but that’s how I feel.

I’ve incorporated those types of lessons at work when interviewing parents at the school where I currently teach. They come in with a front and aren’t always genuine. They might say, “I know my son isn’t good but we’re doing this and that at home.” But, are they actually doing anything? Are they saying what they think we want to hear because they are in an uncomfortable situation? We have to be professional, of course, and not all parents are like that, but this is just one example of how I’ve used the lessons I learned on Mountains-to-Sea – I can pick up on some things better about people’s true personalities.

I know now that people’s behaviour was affected because they were just outside their comfort zone. They were in an environment which they weren’t used to, and that can be a dangerous thing if a person struggled too much or couldn’t cope or complete a trip. If they were to become so distressed that they would hate the experience, it could have a negative impact on them for a long time. There weren’t any real negative impacts for me personally, but there may have been some students who might have hated it so much that they wouldn’t want to go into the bush anymore or get involved with similar exertions. For me, it was a

really good thing to be able to see that people were human; to see new sides of people and understand them better.

I've used my Mountains-to-Sea experience in my teaching career in other ways too. When I talk about training programmes or overloading with my students I often refer to it. And, every time I get out my outdoor education supplies I get flashbacks of the trip. In that way, it has helped me relate to my students better. When I'm getting to know the students they often ask a lot of questions about me, and I can tell them stories about Mountains-to-Sea to help establish rapport. I told some stories about it during the year-13 outdoor trip which I joined last year with my school. The kids see that you've been out there and done that type of stuff so they trust you as an experienced leader in the outdoors.

Nowadays, when I think back on Mountains-to-Sea, the first images and memories that pop into my head are walking into the river for the first time and entering the sea at the end. That could just be because I have photos of that on my wall, but it's what I'm reminded of first. Then, I get a mixture of images about the group, the activities we did, and the places we had gone to. The feelings are blended in there as well, like how impressed I was by the beauty of the river and the trees. Also, the feelings of the family environment we had arise when I think back on it. Although I had never before admitted to anyone, including myself, that I felt glad to see when a super-competitive and confident person failed in that environment, I still think we had a close bond on that trip. I'm all about family and the group and it is something I feel we shared when I think about the trip.

Just to emphasize what I said earlier, these emotions were probably a lot stronger at the time of trip and shortly after. There was more emphasis behind them because it was so fresh. The family vibe was a lot stronger then as well. Those feelings faded but I did learn a lot about myself and about other people and how they act when they are in uncomfortable or

challenging situations. Those impacts aren't significant things that have transferred over to the rest of my life in a major way. But, when I get a flashback of Mountains-to-Sea, I get the feeling that I should go out into the outdoors and do something. It's not that I would actually go out and do it, but I'm left with that trigger, which is a really good thing. I just wish I would listen to that voice a bit more.

Interpretive Commentary – Profile 5

Nina's profile highlights that a significant proportion of the long-term meaning she retains comes from the feelings of pride and accomplishment she gained by completing the different physical challenges of the expedition. She emphasized how difficult the mountain biking portions of the trip were, and how much it meant to her to be able to get through it. Nina claims to be able to easily put herself back "in the moment" and feels that this ability is related to an inherent positive quality of her experience. The challenge was something so meaningful that she can re-live those experiences in her mind quite easily. In being able to do so, those meanings are maintained over time.

Though some of her feelings regarding the unity among the group faded in intensity after about 6 months, she still feels incredibly proud of herself. She compares her experience to what she assumes others experiences may have been like. She feels that because she struggled so much with the physical aspects of the trip, particularly the biking, that the level of pride she feels is all the more significant. She thinks others may have struggled less and she implies that their experience would be less meaningful as a result.

Over time, Nina has placed a great deal of meaning on interactions with other group members. Though she had never admitted it before, she felt happy to see that other people

failed or struggled in certain activities, particularly those who were very competitive, confident and boasted about their ability. In this way, the long-term meaning that Nina gets from group interactions comes more specifically by comparing her own behaviour and attitude to that of others in the group. She felt, in comparison to her cohort, she is a very supportive person who looked after others; someone that others saw as a leader, calling her 'camp mother' and assigning her the role of pace-setter.

It appears that there were specific defining moments on the trip which signify the meaning Nina has developed for her experiences. She mentioned that when she reflects on the Mountains-to-Sea trip, the first images that enter her mind are of getting into the river for the first time and entering the sea at the end. The profundity of these moments is enhanced by her feelings that arise about the group, the various activities that the group did together leading up to those events and the effects of the beautiful and inspiring environment which set the scene for those events and the whole trip.

Making it to the top of the hill was not alone sufficient to create long-term meaning. The experience needed these complementary conditions in place in order to make that meaning last. In a similar way, entering the sea at the end of the expedition would be a culminating moment, representative of all the various things that Nina feels she had achieved during the trip, all the interactions she had with the group and all of the feelings that accompanied her experiences.

The long-term impacts of her experiences and the ways in which those impacts have transferred to the rest of her life are also significant aspects of Nina's profile. It is important to note that Nina is quite aware that though she feels she has gained a greater interest in the outdoors, the Mountains-to-Sea programme is not really responsible for creating that interest. This is because outdoor activities were a part of her life since childhood growing up in a rural

community. She believes that even without the Mountains-to-Sea programme, she would have retained the same level of interest in the outdoors. However, Nina does indicate that Mountains-to-Sea was one activity which helped further that interest. With regard to encouraging future involvement and participation in outdoor activities, at least in Nina's case, it could be said that Mountains-to-Sea lacks a notable long-term impact.

Similarly, her interest in the outdoors has not manifested into notable actions to engage with outdoor activities of a similar extent. This is because of the constraints that everyday life places on her. Responsibilities to work, family and friends are equally important and leave little time to be able to organize such an intense expedition. She feels that Mountains-to-Sea leaves her with an inner "voice" that tells her to get out and do things in the outdoors. She would like to listen to that voice more but for an unknown reason she feels unable to act on it. There appears to be a disconnection between the profundity of meaning that the programme has offered Nina and the transference of that meaning to her life.

Nevertheless, there are some long-term impacts from Nina's expedition. Mountains-to-Sea taught her a lot about herself, about interacting with other group members and her skill as a teacher of physical education. Considering Nina's age and her developmental stage of life when going on the Mountains-to-Sea expedition, the trip appears to be a coming-of-age experience, one that helped her mature. She gained a lot of joy from passing other people during different activities. She enjoyed seeing others struggle because it made her feel like she was coping with and overcoming the challenges more successfully. In such ways, Nina discovered she is quite a competitive person.

Nina also learned that one of her strengths is in being a leader and that she is a very supportive person. She knows that she can accomplish quite a lot if she really pushes herself. She knows that in order to complete very challenging tasks it helps to set small achievable

goals, like she did on this trip by getting to the top of a hill or passing a certain number of people.

Nina feels she has learned a lot about other people as well. When people are outside of their comfort zone and are in a situation where they are uncomfortable and struggling, they will act in different ways than one might expect. These experiences have transferred to her life by influencing her professionally. Nina gives the examples of understanding people better when working at the local Rugby Union and when working with parents. She feels their statements and behaviour may be more reactionary because they are under pressure. This understanding has helped Nina to empathize with others.

One might expect that the instances of seeing other people struggle and their altered behaviour would leave a negative impact in the long-term. Yet, in fact, they have been transformed into a positive impact because Nina is able to apply those observations of human nature to the rest of her life, particularly in teaching. Nina feels she is a more effective teacher because her experiences on Mountains-to-Sea help her establish rapport with her students a lot more easily. Her students respect her more and see her as a very qualified leader in the outdoors. Nina also feels that she can relate to her students a lot better.

This interpretation of Nina's profile reveals very interesting phenomena which require further exploration. It is hoped that by comparing the meaning and impacts of Nina's experiences to those of the other participants, some of these themes will become more apparent.

Profile 6: Meredith

Recently, I came across my diary from my Mountains-to-Sea trip. It was so interesting to see what I had written about my experiences then. One of the major entries was from the 2nd day. It was my favourite. We kayaked for about 8 hours and I was really looking forward to it since I knew it would be fairly easy, at least compared to the biking. I had done quite a lot of kayaking in the sea and surf so I knew what to expect. For a lot of people in our class, it was a really tough day because you use a different set of muscles than biking and you go a lot slower. I remember passing one girl within the first 20 minutes of getting into the kayaks and she was already counting her strokes. I thought to myself, “If you’re already counting your strokes, how are you going to manage when we still have 8 hours to go?” So, a lot of mental toughness came into it. We got quite spread out as well, which wasn’t ideal, especially for those at the back. Every time we’d stop for a break, the people at the front would get to rest for longer than those at the back, but since I was mostly up at the front, I was good as gold.

I paddled with another girl at the front and we were just cruising along enjoying ourselves. I would have hated to have been told to slow down then. Especially when you are kayaking for 8 straight hours you don’t want to have to go at the pace of the slowest person like you do when you’re tramping. Having experience with paddling and since I was enjoying it, I made sure I would stay at the front to make up for how much I struggled during the biking. It’s not that I have anything to prove exactly, but I thought to myself, “This is my thing and I’m going to show people that I’m capable.”

I remember it was a *really* nice day and it was so awesome being out on the water. At some stages, as I was paddling with that girl, we wouldn't even speak to each other. We would just cruise along and soak in the surroundings. It was so impressive with the big cliffs and knowing that movie, *River Queen*, had been filmed there. I looked around to see if I recognized anything and would occasionally spot goats. You're on the same river all day but things are always different and changing. You might spot something in the river up ahead, and you'd try to guess what it is until you paddle up to it and find out. It was just so exciting and impressive.

When we arrived at the end, the boys were already there. They always had to be first. We had to carry our kayaks across the river bed and up a steep bit to the marae where we stayed the night. The boys were great since they helped us girls carry our kayaks up. It was really cool to see the dynamics between boys and girls. There were boys that I would expect would stay back and help the girls and boys that I fully expected to turn it into a competitive thing. But, they often surprised me. When it really mattered, they were the ones who sacrificed themselves and supported us girls at the back and the girls usually just focused on themselves.

I wrote in my diary that staying at the marae that night was okay. We didn't have the option of sleeping outside like the previous nights. There were just two bunkhouse rooms and I struggled with that since I get claustrophobia. I had to sleep on mattresses next to others and some people were getting up in the middle of the night to get Panadol or Neurofen. I had the worst sleep that night and was so glad we'd only be staying there one night. It wasn't ideal for me. But, it was nice to meet some of the elders from the area. It was cool to talk to the about what they do.

The next day was when people really started to go downhill. We had all done the same amount of physical activity so you could see the difference between those that were really willing to tough it out and those that would reach for the pain killers at the first sign of being sore. I would think, “Do you actually need that stuff?” It was hard to witness people go through that. Personally, I was fine that day. I was sore and physically tired but I wasn’t complaining about anything other than having to sleep in the same room as everyone else.

That day, a lot of the boys started to make comments about how the girls are weaker than they are. If you’re not feeling good and you’re thinking to yourself, “Am I going to be able to keep going?” the last thing you want to hear is that you are weak. So, when the boys started to say things like that, the girls just pulled together and really looked after each other.

We started that day with a 4-hour kayak. I had quite a lot to say about this day in my diary. I had been up at the front loving it the previous day, but two of my close friends, one of whom was my flatmate, were struggling quite a bit. I stayed at the back, motivated them and helped them get through it. It was quite hard and frustrating to sacrifice my desire to be at the front. I didn’t enjoy it nearly as much as the previous day, but I just wanted to be a supportive friend.

After the kayak we had to get back on our bikes and go down those gravel roads. I was at the back struggling again but eventually caught up with everyone. Then, it started to rain. It became quite slippery, and at one point, I lost control of the bike, skidded out and fell off. I grazed my knee and was just about to cry when one of the boys told me to, “suck it up.” But, he said it in a nice, encouraging way. The worst thing about it was that the friends whom I had stayed back with during the kayak just took off even though they knew I had fallen. The only person with me then was a girl at the back in charge of first-aid who had an injured knee. I was so peeved. When we finally caught up with the group, my friends said, “Oh! Are you

okay? What happened?" And, I just thought, "Don't even talk to me. Some friend you are!" I felt so betrayed. That was by far the most significant memory I had from the trip.

That night, people were quite physically weary and you could see the selfish and self-centred people in the group reveal themselves. We got to a wool shed and people just ran in and grabbed mattresses, sometimes even taking two for themselves. There was one guy who was sick and was having a really tough time coping. He didn't manage to grab a mattress and nobody would give one up for him, which didn't sit right with me. I thought about this one girl who, on the 2nd day kayaking, was placed in a tandem kayak because she was struggling a lot. The older boy who was put in there with her basically did all the work and she didn't have to do anything. So, at the end of that day, she was as fresh as a daisy and still wouldn't give up a mattress for the sick boy. At the start of that day as well, we had to load food and gear into the kayaks. A girl who was one of my best friends, one of the girls I stayed back with on the kayak, was asked by a guy if she could take a bag of potatoes in her boat. She said that her kayak was already full, but when he checked it was actually empty. She was quite happy to cruise along with an empty kayak while everyone else had theirs filled to the brim.

It was things like that that started to make people get a little bitchy and niggly. Because people were uncomfortable and were struggling and were getting tired, they forgot the real reason why we were there. Their own needs started to overshadow the big picture. It was only on that 3rd night that things changed around. Our lecturer got quite sick to the point where he couldn't join the tramp the next day. Because he was so respected as an outdoors person, it was then that people started to put their problems into perspective. They realized that maybe their headache isn't so bad. People started to think about why they were actually

there, and, finally, realized that we were all in this together. That was when the bonding started to happen, especially on that last night.

We went for the tramp that day and got separated into boys and girls again. The girls were at the back and the boys went up ahead. The girl that had a bad knee who was at the back with me on the bike when I fell off, was really struggling. And, since I spent the previous day with her, I knew that she had a genuine reason for struggling – her knee injury. So, myself, and about 7 other girls hung back with her on the tramp and kept her company. It was a beautiful day and we all enjoyed that walk a lot.

The last night was quite interesting as well. The previous Mountains-to-Sea group had established a tradition that if we were willing to bike 25km into town to get alcohol they could do so and the vans would follow to bring them back. So, the boys went to town and got alcohol and we sat around the campfire drinking. That was a really cool thing because on other trips I had been on with school, we weren't allowed to drink. For a lot of us, drinking on that trip was so important. We felt it was an integral part of it. I don't know why, but I think it's just the student mentality. But, there were some people that just didn't want to drink and I think they were getting pressured by those who were drinking. That upset the balance and the group bond that we had finally established. Drinking divided us into smaller groups – those that would not drink, those that would drink a bit, and those who would drink a lot.

On the last day, we had one more bike leg to get to Wanganui and it felt like it went on for a long time. There was a massive hill to climb as well, and I even walked my bike up the hill for a part. But, I found my determination and made it to the end. We finally got to the sea and I remember that was really cool. We just ran down to the beach and we all jumped into the sea with exuberance. I felt so proud to have made it through the whole thing.

It's so interesting to read these accounts of the trip from diary again. I've read it several times since the trip ended and I've reflected on Mountains-to-Sea quite a lot. I find that I view my experiences quite differently now than I did then. Although it is somewhat of a negative, the most meaningful experience to me was when my friends betrayed me. I didn't have to stay at the back with my friends on the kayak. I could have been up at the front and everyone would have said, "Wow! That girl is awesome at kayaking!"

Looking back on it now, I'm really glad I had that eye-opener. I could see how people act when they are under pressure. I could see people's strengths and weaknesses; people I thought I knew and were my best of friends. I was bitter about it then, but I couldn't tell them how I felt. I wasn't a strong enough person to do so. Now, I just really reflect on what I value in friends.

It was good to be able to see people for who they are. For instance, one of the girls in the class claimed to be 'miss-outdoors'. She told us all before we went on the trip that she always went tramping and that she had done a ton of kayaking. But, she was the girl who was counting her strokes within the first 20 minutes. I saw her for who she really was, and now, I've become a lot more dismissive of her. My relationship with my friends who I felt betrayed by hasn't changed much. They are still my friends, but I just know them better. My best friend and flatmate was always perceived by people as somewhat of a bitch. Now, I see what others see and I'll think twice about trusting her in different situations.

It has been four years since I went on the trip, and I do think that I've gained quite a lot from it. I compare that week-long trip to a gap year or an OE [overseas exchange]. Though it was in New Zealand, it was that type of experience that I will never forget. I talk about it all the time. I think of the whole trip as such a positive experience. At the time, I was a young student and I took those experiences more for granted. It was just a challenging but

mostly fun thing to do rather than a learning or growing experience. Since then, I haven't done anything like that again and probably won't, which is why I think it was so valuable.

I realize what actually goes into it, especially from a teacher's perspective. I know the risks that our lecturer would have had to weigh up. It could be that I am more aware of these things now simply because I've grown up and matured, but probably also because I am a teacher. Knowing what our lecturer had to do to organize that trip, I have a lot of respect for him. He was such an outdoors person. He would always tell not to spend our money and weekends drinking in pubs but to do different things. He always criticized about the concrete jungle. After the trip, we had a really sad feeling. It just wasn't as exciting being home. I've reflected on that feeling a lot and I've come to value more the time that I have; the time we were able to spend with friends doing things we enjoy. I would rather spend my money doing something in the outdoors than on a night out on the town.

In that way, the trip helped solidify my appreciation for the outdoors. I try to instill that value in my students as well. This year, on the senior ski trip, there were two girls who hated it after the first day and just wanted to give up. So, the next day, I spent a lot of time with them. I encouraged them and helped them learn and appreciate it. I really didn't want them to leave that trip hating or disliking it. Those girls ended up enjoying the trip and I felt so proud of myself for being a part of that learning.

Mountains-to-Sea also taught me a lot about myself too. I know now that I am the type of person who will do anything for anyone else and will always look after people. It's like with the guy who was sick and didn't have a mattress. I told people that they should give up a mattress for him. I'll always stand up for people and look after those that need help. I've learned that I'm not a selfish person. I don't think about myself like a lot of people did on that trip, which is probably why I became a teacher. I know now that I made the right career

choice as a P.E. teacher. It's something related to physical activity and promoting it; getting people out there doing different things, challenging themselves and pushing them out of their comfort zones.

I think that if I wasn't able to go on Mountains-to-Sea I would have missed out on a lot. I wouldn't have had the opportunity to gain a sense of pride and achievement, which I got from going all the way from Mt. Ruapehu to Castle Cliff beach. It's still so impressive when I see that on a map and people don't really believe it when I tell them what we did. Apart from those that actually went on the trip, no one can really understand what we went through and what it took. So, having that experience and having matured since then, I'm able to appreciate it a lot more.

At the time, I thought the conditions were really challenging and tough. They were. I didn't really enjoy struggling through them then. But, now, I give a lot more merit to those challenges. On the tramp to the top of Mt. Ruapehu the terrain was difficult with all the shingly, loose rocks, but I realize now that we were climbing up a Mountain and we had to go through that terrain to get to those incredible views. It was the same for bike. It was really hard biking on the gravel roads, but it was just a path to get us somewhere. And, we were biking in places surrounded by wilderness where few people have ever been, which made it feel really special. We biked down the Mt. Bruce road, and, now, every time I travel down that road to go skiing, I can't help but remember how great it was to know that I biked that entire road. That was the same for the kayaking. Whenever I think about or travel near the Whanganui River I always recall the Mountains-to-Sea trip.

I think that's how Mountains-to-Sea has left its impact. It's really interesting how I view those experiences so differently now than I did at the time. I value spending time in the outdoors a lot more now. That's partially due to having such a great role-model in our

lecturer. It's also due to the sense of achievement I got from different aspects of the trip, like making it to the summit of Mt. Ruapehu and getting through the biking. And, because I was able to see how people acted during that trip and in that environment, I more careful of taking people at face value. My eyes were opened about who I want to trust and be friends with. I've transformed what I once thought of as really negative aspects of the trip into very positive lessons which I think will stay with me forever.

Interpretive Commentary – Profile 6

It is fairly easy to decipher the meanings that Meredith applied to her experiences close to the time of the trip based on her account of her diary entries. Later, she delineates how that has differed or remained similar over time. Early on, it appears that the most meaningful aspects were related to the behaviour of other group members, particularly her friends.

Her experience of feeling betrayed by her friends is perhaps most significant – a feeling she still holds quite strong even though those feelings have been transformed into positive learning. At the time, Meredith was quite hurt by her friends' behaviour and it left a negative stain on her experience. Similarly other instances of people changing their behaviour as frustration and fatigue set, such as the girl that lied about having a full kayak when asked to carry potatoes or when no one would give up a mattress for the sick boy have negative short-term meaning for Meredith. Over time, she has been able to see this as a valuable experience, because she understands that when people are pushed out of their comfort zones, they reveal deeper sides of their personalities. The long-term impact of this knowledge is that Meredith is much more cautious of who she would trust and knows better what she values in relationships with others. She feels she is able to relate to her students better because of this

long-term learning. She also feels that these experiences have helped her learn a lot about herself.

By comparing her performance and behaviour to that of others, she knows she is someone who is unselfish and who will always look out for other people, especially those in need of support. She knows that she is a genuine person who is not overconfident. She knows the type of person who she would be more willing to trust and support. These aspects were motivational factors which influenced her career choice of becoming a physical education teacher. Meredith is happy working in a field that gets people to challenge themselves in various physical activities and pushes them outside their comfort zones.

Meredith's relative performance to that of others in the group helps define and qualify the meaning different experiences have. In areas where she felt less proficient, such as mountain biking, being behind others or at the back of the group, she generated negative feelings about herself. But, if she was able to pass others, remain near the front, or be one of the first people to arrive at a destination, she added positive value and meaning to the experience. For those activities in which Meredith felt more competent, she made it a goal to be near the front of the group because she felt she wanted to show others that she was capable and to have them believe that she was an excellent kayaker.

In these ways, competition fuels meaning and determines the manner in which meaning is made. Through competition, Meredith is able to feel pride and accomplishment. In the long-term these benefits translate to a greater value for the experience itself and a heightened value for the outdoors. Meredith still marvels at her achievement when looking at a map or when talking with others about her trip. They often can't believe that such a feat is possible which makes the specific experience more meaningful and special. Her happiness at the praise she gets also testifies to the idea that competition fuels meaning. Furthermore,

Meredith has incorporated that value into her teaching. She tries to instill the same value in her students, as the example she gives about her students on the senior ski trip demonstrates.

Gender dynamics and differences are an important aspect embedded in Meredith's descriptions. For instance, Meredith feels that it was a very great thing when the boys, who always had to arrive at destinations before girls, would assist them in carrying kayaks. Yet, she criticized the boys for making sexist comments that girls are weaker. These contradictory statements reflect that Meredith is conflicted about expected gender roles and norms. Her depiction of the dynamic seems to normalize the power relations between males and females on the trip, where males may be seen to be more physically capable than the females. Meredith subtly points out that, in general, the girls struggled much more than the boys. She rarely omits the fact that those at the back were girls. Although she claims that the true purpose of the trip is for the entire group to bond and do all the activities together, she does not seem to question this deeper gender dynamic.

On a more subtle level, the setting of the Mountains-to-Sea trip helped to instill a lot of meaning to her experiences. Much of that meaning has carried over in the long-term and seems quite lasting. The wilderness environment creates some meaning directly, as evidenced by Meredith's description of the Whanganui River; the cliffs, the beautiful weather that day, the wildlife and mystery of the scenery. This direct impact is also demonstrated by the fact that she had a very sad feeling returning to an urban environment, adding to her appreciation of her time in the wilderness setting.

The environment enriches the meaning of other experiences more indirectly, which can be seen in Meredith's descriptions of overcoming challenges or the group dynamics. Her struggle on the climb to the top of Mt. Ruapehu held a lot of personal meaning, but years after the trip, she is able to see that these were conditions that allowed certain benefits. They

created the challenging elements and afforded beautiful views or a sense of isolation. The environment provided conditions to allow for the sense of pride and accomplishment to develop. In these ways, the heightened value for the outdoors, which Meredith claims to be a long-term impact of her experiences, may be at least partially credited to the setting.

The course instructor also played a more subtle role in shaping the nature of the experience by providing the overall purpose of the trip. This goal was to show them the value of escaping from civilization and all its comforts to engage in challenging tasks that push people out of their comfort zones. In this way, he set the scene for the way participants would frame their experiences. For Meredith, this has focused the meaning on overcoming physical challenges. His leadership also had a long-term influence on Meredith by providing her with very practical and directly applicable skills in teaching outdoor education. She mentions that she is much more aware of the different risks that the lecturer had to weigh up and the things he had to do to organize such an expedition. In these ways, Meredith indicates that she has learned similar organizational skills which she can apply to her own teaching ability.

Nearly all of these events which were meaningful to Meredith at the time remain meaningful, but that meaning has changed in many cases. She feels that she is able to reflect on her experiences differently now that she is an adult, a teacher, and has matured over time. For example, at the time of the trip, Meredith felt that drinking on the last night was an integral part of the experience and was a special thing since she had never been on an outdoor trip where drinking alcohol was allowed. It was just a part of the student mentality in her mind. However, as she has matured, she feels differently. She realizes that after the group was finally able to bond that day more than on the previous days the introduction of alcohol separated the group even further, creating divisions based on how much people drank. In

hindsight, Meredith feels that if drinking was not allowed, the experience would have been better because the unity of the group could have been maintained.

As she has matured, Meredith seems to have attributed more positive meaning to her experiences in seeing what she can learn from them as a potential impact. This has helped her gain a great deal of value for outdoor experiences, such as those offered by programmes like Mountains-to-Sea. She feels that though some of these experiences may feel somewhat negative at the time, in the long-term, when one can apply those experiences to their life and can reflect on them in a mature way, they help people grow further, learn things about themselves and learn about interacting with other people.

These interpretations, in combination with the previous five profiles and associated commentary reveal very detailed information about the ways in which former participants of an outdoor adventure programme make meaning from their experiences over time. It also highlights the various impacts that participants perceive and how these perceptions change in the long-term. In the following section the various themes which have emerged from this data will be explored.

SECTION IV: Discussion & Conclusion

CHAPTER 6: Discussion

Overview

Some of the most significant themes emergent from these profiles related to the ways in which participants made meaning from their experiences. It was made in distinct ways for different participants and often came from an interaction among a multitude of factors. On the surface, all participants attached positive short- and long-term meaning to simply completing the Mountains-to-Sea expedition. All perceived an increased level of self-competence and pride from having undertaken a rigorous trip with their classmates and friends in a very isolated area of the North Island of New Zealand. Various aspects of the programme, including physical challenges, group interactions, other course components and gender differences stood out as being especially meaningful.

The short- and long-term impacts on the participants' lives are another umbrella of themes. All participants perceived some level of impact. These varied in degree and duration and stemmed from different aspects of the programme. Impacts were largely on professional, personal, and interpersonal development. Impacts tended to be positive, but many dissipated over time. There was also a significant disconnect between impact and transference.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of more nuanced themes which emerged from the findings. These findings also identify important implications both for professional practice and for future research. The concluding chapter will explore these implications in much greater detail.

Making Meaning

Physical Challenges

Overcoming physical challenges was generally reported as being the most meaningful component of the participants' MTSE experiences because it helped foster strong feelings of accomplishment and pride. Such feelings were typically signalled by a single physical activity or defining moment. Various factors interacted in cumulative ways to influence how meanings generated from overcoming physical challenges were internalized. These factors also helped the participants redefine those meanings through time.

Retrospective reflection on the process of personal development helped participants solidify long-term meaning. For example, most participants indicated that they became aware of how physical challenges were framed by different course components. The wilderness provided the conditions of challenge. Group dynamics and a perception of social bonding and unity made challenging activities feel more profound because the participants needed peer support in order to persevere. The MTSE was also socially constructed as an immense challenge to overcome. The goals of the programme seemed to be focused largely on personal development through efficacy in completing challenging physical activities. Therefore, the participants went into the trip expecting that overcoming physical feats was the purpose of the trip. These aspects of the MTSE acted in an aggregated manner to shape the meaning made from physical challenges.

Nonetheless, the importance of overcoming physical challenges was downplayed by some participants who had pre-existing perceptions that they were physically very competent. For these participants, completing activities still resulted in a sense of achievement but to a

lesser degree than for participants who felt less competent. Instead, they would challenge themselves either by holding back or changing their ambitions. For example, they found it rewarding to give up their personal desires of doing activities at their own pace and in their own way for the good of others in the group.

Physical challenge was still the medium which created meaning it provided all participants with a sense of accomplishment, either by pushing harder or holding back. All participants said they still feel proud to show their friends, family and students where they had been and impress upon them what they had to go through. They relive these intense meanings by looking at photos, reading their diaries, looking at maps of the area or through casual reflection. The ease of which the feelings of pride and accomplishment arise within the participants points to how long-lived meaning is. Such findings corroborate the large body of literature on OAE which shows positive outcomes from participation in adventure programmes in both the short- and long-term (Ewert, 1987; Hattie et al., 1997; McKenzie, 2000; Neill, 2002).

Group Social Interactions

Social interactions within the group served as another significant source of meaning for all participants, but was internalized and understood differently among participants. The behaviour and attitudes of other group members and their interactions created both positive and negative meaning. On the positive side, participants described how they felt that their peers provided a support network which helped them get through different challenging aspects. Group members helped them to have fun and appreciate their surroundings. Other participants felt that having to work cooperatively with fellow group members challenged

them mentally and socially. They felt rewarded by contributing to the group and being supportive. These findings are consistent with research which shows that group cohesion and sense of community are enhanced by participation in adventure programmes because of numerous course components including, leadership styles, weather, physical challenges, reflection and group activities (Ewert & Heywood, 1991; Goldenberg & Pronsolino, 2008). It is also consistent with studies which show that group interactions help programme participants overcome physical and mental challenges and that these outcomes are meaningful to participants in the long-term (Cummings, 2009).

On the negative side, social interactions often generated conflicts and negative emotions. For instance, both Meredith and Natene indicated that negative interactions, such as being betrayed or insulted by people they once considered friends, added to the element of challenge. They recall their feelings closer to the time of the trip in very negative ways. Particularly for Natene, the reactionary and insulting remarks of his peers reflect a breakdown in social integration on the trip. Some researchers argue that outdoor programmes involve a form of cultural adaptation that is required by the participants for healthy group development, and that negative behaviours and interpersonal conflict are just symptoms of culture shock (Fabrizio & Neill, 2005). It is possible that both Natene and his seemingly harsh cohort failed to adapt to their group's MTSE culture because there was inadequate facilitation of cultural adaptation on the trip. This alludes to the importance of the course instructor in helping to shape the experience of the participants, a theme which will be discussed later.

Although some participants made negative meaning attachments, by reflecting on their experiences as adults they have come to believe that people behaved negatively and in unconstructive ways only because they were outside their comfort zones and were coping poorly. They feel that, as they have matured over time, they are more able to perceive a value

for how a challenging outdoor environment can expose different aspects of people's personalities and reveal people's truer selves. In fact, it may be this process of reflection which motivated Natene to join the following year-group's Mountains-to-Sea trip as an adult chaperone.

It may also be that some participants, like Natene, may have only perceived their experiences as negative in the short-term because they felt isolated by their peers. Their view of their own level of competence in the outdoors may have differed from how their peers viewed them. Eys et al. (2008) show that leadership status perceptions are not always congruent with an individual's beliefs about how cohesive a group is. Those individuals that feel they occupy a higher status position in the group's hierarchy than others in the group are willing to accept will tend to have a lower attraction to social interaction and feel the group is less cohesive. Therefore, some participants may have had placed less value on social interactions and viewed the group's level of cohesion as lower. Similarly, these individuals may have placed themselves higher in the group's social hierarchy than their peers did, also resulting in this discrepancy.

These more subtle aspects of social interactions also contradict the same research which found that social interactions are beneficial for participants both in the short-and long-term (Cummings, 2009). Some research has corroborated claims that adventure programmes may not very effective at fostering group cohesion and a sense of community (Breunig et al., 2008; Shirilla, 2009). Nevertheless, social interactions, whether viewed initially in either a positive or negative manner by the participants, were still very meaningful.

Other Course Components

In addition to the physical challenges and social interactions, other course components were also meaningful in both the short- and long-term. For example, both Danny and Melanie discussed the positive meaning made from reflection activities, which helped add to their positive sense of group cohesion. They felt that sharing their experiences around the campfire made them feel more comfortable with their peers and brought them closer.

Many of the participants described how their stay at the marae was meaningful because it added a cultural element to their trip. However, other participants' descriptions of this aspect were brief and lacked the same level of descriptive enthusiasm as other components held. Staying on a marae is a very unique aspect of the MTSE which is specific to the New Zealand context and will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter.

The wilderness setting itself was another meaningful component of the MTSE. Participants used words such as “inspiring”, “beautiful” and “amazing” to describe the setting. The accounts of the climb to the top of Mt. Ruapehu are laden with descriptions of the terrain, the views offered and the challenging physical conditions of the climb. The same is true for the mountain biking and kayaking legs. The Whanganui River was a very meaningful part of the trip evident by rich descriptions of the cliffs, trees and pace of the water. The wilderness environment set the conditions which made the physical activities challenging and offered a quiet, isolated location for the participants to reflect on their experiences. It also added to the feeling of exclusivity in the group. The participants indicated that they are able to vividly recall the setting, indicative that its meaning has carried over in the long-term. Anytime they travel to the trip's locations now, they are instantly reminded of all of their experiences and this demonstrates how powerful the setting can be.

Making different connections with various individuals was another important component of the trip which strengthened long-term meaning for some participants,

especially Natene. These connections acted as a source of inspiration for new outdoor pursuits, a role-modelling of organizational skills in outdoor education and for cultural significance. Natene appeared to give more attention to this facet of the trip possibly because he sees himself as an avid outdoors enthusiast. He found distinct ways of making meaning in comparison to his cohort.

Together, all of these programme components generated significant long-term meaning for the MTSE participants. Some components were more influential on meaning making than others. Physical challenges and social interactions typically help form positive meaning. In some instances, however, negative meaning was generated in the short-term, but was positively re-constructed over time. Other aspects, such as the course instructor, the marae stay and the non-physical activities that the group engaged with were less significant.

Gender Differences

There were differences among the male and female participants according to how they made meaning from their experiences. Some research supports this phenomenon indicating that students perceive adventure programmes differently according to gender. McKenzie (2003) showed that female participants on an Outward Bound trip perceived greater benefits than males, a finding consistent with the data collected for the MTSE. Although both males and females found their experiences to be meaningful, the female participants perceived greater positive meaning than the males, particularly in the short-term. McKenzie's study also showed that there were statistically significant differences in the frequency of comments made about the significance of certain course components. Females reported more often about group support, being physically challenged in specific activities and saw taking care of

others as particularly important (McKenzie, 2003); findings consistent with the data collected from the MTSE. Females focused on overcoming physical challenges as the major source of meaning whereas the male participants centred on group interactions, reflection and influential connections.

Is there a more general aspect about how female participants experience phenomena on adventure programmes which focuses the way they make meaning toward certain course components? The findings from this case study provide would support the existence of gender differences in adventure programme experiences. It may also be that these differences are related to deeper worldviews held by the participants regarding normalized gender roles, a theme addressed separately later.

Impacts of Former Adventure Experiences

Impacts on Professional Development

The meaningful nature of multiple facets of the MTSE manifested into important short- and long-term impacts for the participants, particularly related to their professional development as budding physical education teachers. Every participant interviewed felt that they had incorporated lessons learned from the MTSE into their teaching. They all felt they were more easily able to establish rapport with students because they were viewed as highly qualified and competent in the outdoors. All felt that they could relate to their students better on outdoor trips because they had been through similar experiences.

Participants that placed more emphasis on how meaningful their experiences were, also assigned greater value to the trip for helping to model OAE practice. They felt more competent in outdoor leadership. Participants perceived that the trip was effectively organized and that they gained greater confidence, self-efficacy and an increased value for the outdoors. Through a combination of these factors, the participants retained an eagerness to teach OAE in the long-term. Some participants even chose a career which offered OAE opportunities because of the impact that the MTSE had on them. Melanie went so far as to take very active steps to ensure she would have these opportunities when she began her career in physical education and attributes her motivations specifically to the MTSE.

Such an interest in continued involvement in outdoor leadership can be explained by educational psychology research. Bandura's (1977) theories show that when students successfully complete educational tasks they gain a heightened level of confidence which results in increases in intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy with completing related tasks. Propst & Koesler (1998) showed that outdoor leadership development and self-efficacy act as mediators for each other in a feedback loop. Successfully completing challenging outdoor tasks increases self-efficacy which adds to continued involvement in outdoor leadership activities, which then encourages students to engage in future tasks in a cyclical process. This is consistent with the findings for the MTSE.

Impacts on Personal & Interpersonal Development

In addition to impacting the participants professionally, the MTSE also influenced the participants personally and socially. While these impacts have generally been short-term, some have carried over into the long-term. The majority felt that they have maintained a

heightened interest in doing more outdoor activities in their personal lives. Sometimes that interest transferred into engagement with activities and a restructuring of existing lifestyle practices. For instance, Nina said that she would often go for a run in the bush rather than through the city and that she now goes skiing and rock climbing more frequently. Nina even met her current partner on the MTSE, a man who encourages her to continue to experience the outdoors; perhaps one of her most significant long-term impacts.

Often the impact on their personal lives related to participants' interest and effort to organize trips with friends or family. They felt they had a lot more confidence and felt competent in leading trips. They felt that they had gained the organizational skills needed to be successful in their personal excursions. Natene was left with a very significant impact in that he discovered a new passion for hunting because of the connections and inspirational mentors he had on the MTSE. He even moved to a new region of New Zealand because it was well-known for its hunting and fishing opportunities. He made active use of the aspects of the trip which were most meaningful to him. He intends to organize a trip down the Whanganui River with his family because of the exposure and contacts MTSE gave him. In this way, he exemplifies how effective adventure experiences can be at transferring impacts to participant lives.

Transfer of learning is a critical concern for any educational endeavour, but can be a very tricky matter in OAE programming. Outdoor trips often operate in settings that bear few similarities to the students' typical learning and living environments, making transference particularly difficult to achieve. Transfer can occur through specific transfer where the skills and lessons learned are directly applied to highly similar tasks, or non-specific transfer where principles and attitudes are applied in different contexts (Bruner, 1960). Gass (1999) shows that both specific and non-specific transfer of learning occurs in adventure programming and

delineates a third form of transfer called “metaphoric transfer” (p. 230) where students take certain principles or attitudes, generalize them and then apply them in analogous but very different contexts and situations

The MTSE participants exhibit all three forms of transfer. Specific transfer occurred when the participants learned what types of gear are required and appropriate for an outdoor trip, and used this knowledge on subsequent trips in their lives. The same goes for their feeling that they know exactly how to organize a trip of their own logistically. Non-specific transfer was made evident by those participants who felt they use learned interpersonal skills professionally; such as Nina feeling that she can relate to parents of her students better because she had learned that people behave differently when they are uncomfortable. The transfer of learning has occurred in her ability to relate to other people more effectively. Metaphoric transfer is more elusive, but there are many instances of it mentioned by the MTSE participants. The trip was built up to be an immensely challenging task and the purpose the trip was to push oneself to understand that with effort people can achieve many things. That lesson struck hard with many of the participants who now try to instill a similar value through their teaching. Melanie exhibits this metaphoric transfer to a large degree. She feels that the MTSE is simply a metaphor for life, and tries to teach that lesson to her students.

It appears that Gass (1990) shares the view of many other studies, such as Hattie et al. (1997), Neill (2002) and Sibthorp (2003a), believing that adventure education can be a very effective medium in which transfer of learning occurs quite easily. This appears to be supported to some extent by the findings presented here. However, many of the participants often revealed that transfer of learning was not always significant and that often it did not even transpire. It was a recurring aspect of many of the interviews that a disconnection developed in the long-term between the perceived impacts of the trip and the transference of

those impacts to the participants' lives. This contradicts the findings of Cummings (2009) who argues that OAE is highly effective at transference and leads to lasting effects.

A Disconnect Between Impact and Transference

With the exception of Melanie and Natene, who reported that they incorporate outdoor education into their teaching regularly, heightened interest did not always translate into actions which reflected a transference of perceived outcomes. The same was true for impacts on personal and interpersonal development. Many participants repeatedly claimed that the trip left them with a much greater interest in engaging in outdoor activities. When asked, however, if they have acted on this increased interest, the participants could were unable to provide examples of this having occurred. They claimed that the constraints of life prevented their ability to act on their interest. This suggests that, in many circumstances, the long-term impact of such experiences may actually be weak and for complex reasons, a subtle aspect of OAE often missed in the literature.

The disconnect between perceived and more tangible positive changes in personal development contradicts the findings from other studies which show stronger links between perceived and actual transference (Gass, Garvey & Sugerman, 2003; Gassner & Russell, 2008). Brookes (2003b) states that "while OAE programs may well shape behaviour for the duration, may well influence what participants believe about themselves, and may well teach certain skills or knowledge what they do not build is character" (p. 119). He argues that participants and providers of OAE make false assumptions about the long-term impacts of experiences because of a "fundamental attribution error" (p. 120). Researchers and industry professionals alike inaccurately attribute positive changes in character or personality to one-

off outdoor experiences. It may be that pushing comfort zones is not alone sufficient to produce peak learning experiences which carry through time (Leberman & Martin, 2002). Other course components, such as social interactions and reflection may be more influential. The data from the MTSE supports these critiques and shows that impacts are generated and perceived in nuanced ways. They can stem from factors other than overcoming physical struggle and that they often become dissipated over time.

Most participants claimed that the lack of intensity in impact was because outdoor activities had been a part of their lives since childhood. As a result, the perceived novelty and challenge of Mountains-to-Sea was reduced. It may just be that in order to affix attributions which would lead to long-term positive changes in personal development, participants need repeated engagement with outdoor programmes and trips (Brookes, 2003a). Both Natene and Melanie, who have more actively incorporated outdoor expeditions into their lives since the MTSE were also the participants who exhibited more extensive transference of their skills and feelings of competence.

The Possibility of Negative Impacts

For some participants, not all experiences were positive, especially aspects of group interactions, which generated strong negative meaning, particularly in the short-term. The challenging nature of the activities and the setting placed a great deal of strain on inter-group relations; strain which appeared to be largely left unaddressed. However, over time, these negative meanings were transformed and fostered positive impacts. Participants felt greater empathy for others and felt they had learned how to interact with others in more flexible and

understanding ways. They also felt they were much more aware of the types of people they would be willing to trust as friends and felt they could 'read' people's true personalities better.

The possibility of negative impacts either in the short- or long-term is largely absent, ignored or hidden in much of the literature (Hattie et al., 1997). But, a few studies have shown the potential of OAE programmes to have negative impacts (Gordon & Dodunski, 1999; McKenzie 2003). One study specifically showed that some components of adventure programming have negative impacts on students' self-concept, motivation and interpersonal skills, particularly in the long-term (McKenzie, 2003). These included failure to achieve success, a particularly challenging activity and working as a group. Talking about home, having to interact with group members, their attitudes and their personalities were aspects of the trip that were reported by the students as being negative and limited the positive outcomes achieved.

Instructor Role

All of the participants discussed the importance of the course instructor to some degree. However, discussions about his role were usually brief, which indicates that his involvement was less meaningful than other components of the trip. His role was perceived differently by different participants, but was seen largely as a source of guidance and inspiration for the trip. He was seen as an extremely avid outdoors person with a great deal of expertise. He modelled the reflection activities for Danny and supported others. The respect he had among the participants is evidenced by Meredith's statement that only when he had become ill on the fourth day of their trip did the group begin to put their struggles into

perspective and bond. They could see that someone who they held in such high regard was struggling that the students were humbled, supporting the findings by Eys et al. (2008) regarding leadership status congruency and group cohesion.

The course instructor's role as an exemplary outdoor leader had a variety of consequences. The students were exposed to the skills and logistical considerations needed to run an OAE programme. The impacts on the participants' personal and professional competence and interest in leading outdoor trips stems partially from his leadership. Research supports the importance that the participants give to their instructor. Martin & Legg (2002) show that participants claimed their instructor played a prominent role in shaping their experience even six months after their Outward Bound courses. They felt that their instructor's style of teaching basic skills and providing safety measures early on but distancing themselves later in the trip helped add to their inspirational quality and met student expectations more effectively. Similarly, from the participants' statements it is clear that the instructor on the MTSE also took a more distanced role throughout the trip and may have been perceived as more effective as a result. Anderson et al. (1995) conclude that one key factor which mediates the positive outcomes of outdoor adventure recreation is having nurturing leaders. They argue that in programmes where leaders model various skills, such as communication and social integration, they are effective because they "maintain norms and structure interdependence" (Anderson et al., 1995, p. 4).

The course instructor for the MTSE designed the programme with a specific purpose and with certain goals in mind, namely to model OAE practice and to expose the students to challenging outdoor situations which could foster personal development. He may have adopted a more passive facilitation style because the students were relatively mature university students, and perhaps he wanted to allow them to learn more autonomously. He did

not actively facilitate an enhancement of group cohesion or take steps to address issues arising socially among the students. He did not facilitate natural history interpretation or discussions around students' expectations as future outdoor leaders. As Fabrizio and Neill (2002) argue, this may be why the participants felt the negative aspects of the group interactions were most meaningful – because their instructor may have missed opportunities for teachable moments when conflicts arose on the trip as a means of encouraging cultural adaptation and social integration. As a result, the participants in this study attributed any perceived long-term impacts less to his involvement and more on other factors centred on self and others in the group. These factors diminish the level of impact he is likely to have had on the participants' lives, particularly in the long-term.

Gassner and Russell (2008) support this suggestion showing that the course instructor does not always play a large role in shaping long-term outcomes. This may be because OAE programmes for university courses often involve greater peer-leadership and autonomy among the students (Bell et al., 2008). In the case of the MTSE, the instructor allowed for this autonomy and leadership by only providing the basic structure, logistics and goals for the trip. For participants that perceived his role as affecting long-term meaning and impact in some way, they might feel drawn toward a similar facilitation style when teaching OAE as professionals. In a related manner, the instructor emphasized programme goals of personal development through challenge and the participants seemed to accept that this is the major purpose of OAE. Payne (2002) suggests that outdoor educators need to be more critical and reflexive about their teaching and encourages them to, “scrutinize the meanings they give to ‘experience’, how they construct it pedagogically in and through selected activities in certain environments and how, in turn, there are individual, social and ecological consequences for the ‘experiencer’.” (Payne, 2002, p. 4).

Gender Roles, Norms & Stereotyping

Throughout all of the interviews there were hints that the students came to the programme with pre-existing assumptions about expected gender roles and norms. From their statements, it is clear that this group reinforces dominant masculine and subordinate female roles through their language, behaviour and actions. All of the participants described how the males in the group were always in the front and there was an assumption that the male students were more capable of completing the physical challenges successfully. It was seen as a normal, expected behaviour that the boys would be more competitive and that they would be the first to arrive everywhere. Although Melanie and Nina gave indications that the boys retained a more classic image of masculinity, they also indicated that they were surprised at how many of the boys held their “masculine competitiveness” back. Boys that sacrificed their personal ambitions and competitiveness gained a great deal of prestige and respect from females in the group, which exemplifies an alternative, but still gendered, view.

“You’re so soft. You’re hanging with the bitches. Have you grown a vagina?” Natene’s offence at these insulting remarks further exemplifies the gendered worldviews of this group. Harsh reactions to social interactions, possibly induced by alcoholic consumption and poor coping mechanisms with challenges, reflect assumptions that it is normal for men to drink and be adventurous by biking into town to buy alcohol. Those who stray from this norm are criticized and ridiculed to help reinforce the norm. Furthermore, the gendered stereotype that women are weaker than men dominates the discourse of this group. Meredith mentions how the boys made specific comments about how women were weaker and how it made the

female students bond together. Nevertheless, there were no interventions or attempts were made by the students or course instructor to address such issues.

It is possible that because the participants were all studying physical education, they exhibit similar tendencies toward gendered stereotyping as described in other educational contexts with physical education teachers (Waddington, Malcolm & Cobb, 1998). The participant descriptions of the MTSE experience serve to reinforce these stereotypes and expected gendered roles as cultural norms. This contradicts some research which suggests that outdoor adventure education is more effective at breaking down barriers and elevating the marginalized status typically held by women than most conventional educational settings (Humberstone, 1990; Sibthorp, 2003b). Perhaps one reason why such gendered behaviour and perceptions among the participants exists is related to a broader issue in the New Zealand context. Although New Zealand has been a leader in the world in women's rights and feminist ideology, it may be that outdoor experiences here are still considered to be a realm of activity more appropriate for males than females (Neill, 1997). Outdoor activities in New Zealand may be viewed culturally as a more masculine activity (Nolan & Priest, 1993; Marsh & Richards, 1989), so the way these experiences are constructed would cater more towards males. The findings here show that the New Zealand context may play an important role regarding gender and may even shape the experiences of the MTSE participants in other ways.

The New Zealand Context

As mentioned earlier in the historical background chapter, the New Zealand context is a unique venue for outdoor adventure education. Shultis (2001b) shows that there are

discrepancies between popular and political conceptions of wilderness. Popular conceptions tended to highlight the recreational use of natural areas, whereas the political concept focuses on preventing human interaction to preserve pristine landscapes. Naturally such a worldview would affect the way people experience OAE programmes. Among the research participants, most, if not all, reflected related personal conceptions about the purpose of OAE. Its primary value was seen by them as a place where people can be pushed out of their comfort zones and be challenged physically and mentally; a place to escape the fast-paced modernity of civilization where people can recreate while enjoying natural beauty.

In a related way, nearly all of the participants explained how they thought their experiences were less profound because they had grown up in a society where outdoor activities were fairly common. This might have reduced the novelty of the MTSE. Perhaps this is reflective of a broader cultural difference between New Zealanders and groups that engage with OAE programmes elsewhere. If outdoor activities are commonplace in the upbringing of these participants, they might not find certain aspects of their trip very challenging when the environment is not unfamiliar. Perhaps this is why some of the participants, such as Natene and Danny, derive meaning more from group interactions and less from physical challenge. Perhaps those participants that extracted a lot of meaning from the physical challenges did so because that is how they have always seen the purpose of outdoor activities.

One aspect of the New Zealand context emergent from the data is largely absent from the literature and relates to the impact of Maori culture. All of the respondents discussed their stay at the marae to some extent, and some more than others. For some participants the marae stay was a significant part of their experience – one that created lasting meaning. For Natene, it allowed him to connect with his own Maori identity and helped him build influential

connections with Maori elders which he used later in life. For Melanie, it offered a new sense of challenge since the group had to remain respectful of different cultural customs even after having struggled with a kayak all day. It helped remove some barriers to group cohesion by taking attention away from the fact that many students felt they were out of their element. It allowed different leadership strengths to shine as those more versed in Maori culture could lead the group. It infused culture into the experience of the Whanganui River by providing a rich history and Maori context to their river travel.

Yet, for some participants, the marae stay appeared to be less significant. It seemed to be more just another place to sleep for Katie, Danny and Nina. It should be noted that one of the two year groups could not sleep in the marae itself because it was in use at the time. Perhaps those that felt their marae stay was less significant were from this year group and so were not able to receive the full cultural experience of staying on a marae.

As was discussed in the previous section, the New Zealand context also carries certain cultural characteristics which may promote outdoor adventure as a predominantly masculine activity. Combined with the fact that these participants were studying physical education and the gendered worldviews that may accompany this field (Waddington, Malcolm & Cobb, 1998), the culture of the Mountains-to-Sea group is closely linked to the broader New Zealand culture which continues to normalize the male/masculine-dominant discourse of conventional relations between men and women (Humberstone, 2000). Embedded in this culture is a pervasive element of machismo fuelled reciprocally by a spirit of competition. This competitive worldview may be framed by the New Zealand context where the outdoors is seen as a place to challenge oneself, a place where one can compare their competence with that of others. It may be a context in which goals of 'conquering' challenges represent non-ecofeminist viewpoints and hegemonic gendered discourses.

A Competitive Worldview

The MTSE participants obviously share very unique attributes which limit the findings and critiques offered here to this specific context. The participants all described in detail how close they were as a class; a result of a combination of factors – all were at a relatively small university, most came from the same rural region in New Zealand and all studied the same subject – physical education – adding the sense of exclusiveness they felt for their group. Furthermore, nearly all of the participants indicated that because they all studied physical education they participated in many sports and were familiar with outdoor activities. They associate these activities with being competitive.

This spirit of competitiveness plays a significant role in shaping the meaning and impact of the participants' experiences over time. It has been formed through an interaction among broader social understandings of relationships and success, the framing of their educational training, and the framing of the MTSE. The purpose and goals of the trip are described clearly as training for future physical education teachers who would be outdoor leaders. They will learn experientially that if one pushes themselves and is able to overcome and 'conquer' the risky elements that the wilderness setting places in front of them, their personal and social development will be enhanced. Framing the trip in such a way would cause the students to approach the trip from a spirit of competitiveness because they wish to be the most successful at overcoming challenges.

Uhlik (2006) makes a poignant critique asking OAE leaders to "examine whether their relationship to the risks inherent in challenging Nature's power will be grounded in an

authoritarian hubris or in a respectful collaboration, and whether they will educate the people who they serve in a like manner” (Uhlik, 2006, p. 141). Arguably, the MTSE is not framed quite to that authoritarian extreme but this reflexive question is worth consideration in light of the way competitiveness has shaped experience for these participants.

CHAPTER 7: Summary, Implications & Suggestions for Future Research

Summary

This case-study of the Mountains-to-Sea expedition has elicited a number of insights into the long-term meanings and impacts of adventure programme experiences for the participants interviewed. It shows how these meanings and the perceptions of impacts change over time. Overall, the participants claimed to have created positive meaning from their experiences which has continued into the present. Predominantly, however, the participants indicated that the intensity of meaning has diminished over time because the business of everyday life prevents their feelings from staying fresh. A few participants did indicate that the meaning they once attached has increased in strength over time because they are able to apply their experiences to their personal, social and professional lives.

Different participants created meaning in different ways. For instance, female participants appeared to create meaning differently than males. Females centred meaning on overcoming physical challenges and the support they could both give and receive from their peers. Males, on the other hand, found physical challenges much easier to deal with and they created meaning from other aspects, such as reflection activities and making important connections with outdoor leaders who had joined their trip.

Meaning was also created cumulatively through an interaction of various course components. The components which seemed most influential on creating meaning were the physical challenges, social interactions, the setting, the course instructor, reflection, competition and culture. Often these components worked together. The participants were able to comprehend the aggregated effect of these factors only after reflecting on and reminiscing

about these highlighted moments which included making it to the top of a hill or mountain, emerging from the river or entering the sea.

Not all experiences are associated with an attachment of positive meaning. Some experiences were perceived as significantly negative, particularly those that related to unaddressed conflicts arising from certain social interactions. However, the negative associations for some experiences were transformed over time and were perceived as having a positive influence and value. They now feel that those experiences which they once saw as negative, particularly regarding social interactions, stemmed from peoples' poor coping mechanisms and this awareness is seen as a highly valuable learning lesson. Yet, by acknowledging the potential of fostering negative meaning, this study contradicts the conclusions of most OAE research which overwhelmingly claim positive outcomes (Cason & Gillis, 1994; Hattie et al., 1997; Neill, 2002). Only a few studies were found which corroborate the possibility of OAE programmes to have negative effects (Gordon & Dodunski, 1999; McKenzie 2003).

Positive and negative meaning engendered the development of various short and long-term impacts. These included a heightened sense of competence in outdoor leadership, an increased motivation to teach outdoor education and a greater interest in engaging with outdoor activities in their personal lives. Some participants noted more profound impacts, such as seeking out and choosing a career that offered opportunities to teach OAE (Melanie), a newfound passion for hunting (Natene) and a much clearer idea of choice of friends (Meredith). Others perceived that these impacts did not transfer greatly to their lives. This was due to various restraints that their lives placed on them preventing them from acting on their interest and because their experiences were not profound enough to have left more than fond memories to which they attach positive meaning.

All of the participants felt that the impacts of the MTSE were less profound than they expected because of their rural upbringing. They indicated that because they were often exposed to outdoor activities their experiences lacked novelty which might have added meaning. It also meant that they were more aware of the benefits of time spent in the outdoors, so this was not a lesson which they needed to learn. Perhaps, their familiarity with the outdoors makes them take for granted what their OAE experiences can do for them.

The unique culture of this group became very apparent and the qualities of this culture challenge many assumptions previously made by much of the OAE literature. Their culture was highly impacted by the course instructor's role and the broader New Zealand context. It was immersed in a spirit of competitiveness. Gender stereotyping and normalizing of behaviour in gendered ways stemmed from this spirit and from the framing of the purpose and goals of the trip. The apparent lack of group cohesion for many participants may be a result of cultural norms for this group and because of a lack of facilitation of social integration by the course instructor. These unique aspects of the MTSE group bear important implications for the field of OAE and also inform suggestions for future research.

Implications for OAE

The MTSE is situated within a very unique context, one that begs the question, what is the purpose of OAE in New Zealand? This question is particularly acute for outdoor leadership training, situated within the key learning area of Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1999). Cosgriff (2008) suggests that students do achieve the intended curriculum outcomes of learning hard outdoor skills and developing personally and socially, but questions how well students learn these outcomes and

how effective this learning is facilitated. Such critiques of OAE are very important so that future outdoor educators can steer learning in desirable and appropriate directions. More holistic OAE practice is possible and would help outdoor educators reach the typically lofty goals they have when entering the field. They often have dreams of encouraging students to be inquisitive and inspiring in students a sense of wonder in the natural world or sustainable ethics (Cosgriff, 2003).

The findings from this case study indicate that the MTSE was structured with a specific purpose and with specific goals. The participants perceived that the purpose of OAE is to challenge oneself and overcome these challenges so that one may better understand their potential. They experienced increased self-confidence, self-efficacy and competence, and gained a greater value for outdoor activities. These outcomes left them feeling inspired to provide similar learning experiences for their students and feeling more competent to do so.

These may be important positive outcomes but they do not reflect a full understanding of the potential of OAE to provide more holistic learning experiences. If the future OAE educators view programmes as only having the purpose of pushing limits to foster personal development, how might that affect the way their students learn to experience the outdoors? Would they miss out on the opportunities for the outdoors as a classroom to foster spiritual development? Cosgriff (2003) offers similar critiques asking, “Do mountains and waterways really need to be ‘conquered’? Is the outdoors just a gymnasium for people’s recreational use?” (p. 227).

These implications on the future of outdoor learning present some critiques of the facilitation of OAE experiences. The course instructor on MTSE took a more distanced role and may have missed opportunities to inspire different forms of learning, such as interpersonal or spiritual development. A more active role may have exemplified how OAE

can play a more diverse role in students' learning. The course instructor may have been more effective if he was able to facilitate more open critical reflection of OAE pedagogy.

Gender played an important role in the participants' experiences and also bears important implications on the future OAE practice. There were normalized gender roles projected and maintained in the behaviours, attitude and language of the participants and their peers. These spur questions regarding how male and female participants form their identities as future outdoor leaders. It is important for these participants to be reflexive about how their gender plays a role in shaping students' learning. They should be careful to consider what stereotypes of the typical male or female outdoor educator they might project and to consider what they think are the ideal characteristics of a male or female outdoor educator (Schusser, 2008). The language used by participants, particularly while indulging in alcoholic beverages around the campfire on the last night of their trip, shows that they may adopt stereotyped identities of outdoor role models. They risk their students' perceiving, for instance, that the ideal male outdoor educator is competitive, overconfident, highly skilled and heterosexual.

Suggestions for Future Research

These findings add depth to the research on OAE programmes and both contradict and enlighten the plethora of studies which portray OAE as an educational blessing. The findings suggest that previous research has missed some nuanced aspects of the experience of OAE programmes. It encourages future researchers to use more in-depth qualitative methodologies when investigating OAE so that similar subtleties are not missed and can shed light on how programmes can be structured in the most effective manner. As Davidson (2001) explains, "In this way qualitative data allow for the illumination of individual processes of

making meaning, and illustrate that they are rarely as simple as increased feelings of well-being or positive self-image” (p. 12).

This study demonstrated that instructional style, goal-setting, gender, and short- and long-term impact, have very nuanced facets which were only elucidated through deep inquiry into participants’ perspective. The implications made from these findings suggest that future research into OAE should pay attention to specific aspects of programmes and the interactions between these aspects. A discourse analysis or feminist critique of data gathered about OAE programmes would also be useful in providing alternative research outlooks on finely distinctive characteristics of experiences.

Aspects of the New Zealand context emerged as very important factors which shaped meaning and impact over time. Future research should explore a variety of New Zealand-based OAE programmes across programme type, facilitation technique, duration, participant age, and with participants from diverse backgrounds so that the nature of OAE experiences in this socio-historical context can be better understood. They should also take into account participant groups demographics and upbringing. It would be worth comparing results for groups from rural and urban areas to understand how these groups might make meaning and perceive impacts differently.

It is essential to examine phenomena from as many different perspectives and in as much depth as possible. This study attests to the fact that every piece of research sheds new light on how people understand their worlds. Such knowledge is critical to the field of education. It is clear, both from past research and from the findings presented here that OAE does make an important contribution to students’ development. The positive outcomes described for participants attest to the fact that OAE can be effective. Future research, however, is required to understand these educational processes better. This study is only one

small step towards knowing and harnessing truly effective OAE practices. It offers a small contribution to a field rich in literature, but, like all things, can always reach deeper levels of knowledge and comprehension.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A – Course Outlines for the Mountains-to-Sea Programme

OUTLINE 1:

208.360 Psychophysical Foundations of Physical Education II

Prescription:

This paper will prepare students to use the contexts of outdoor education, dance and physical education for those with diverse abilities. It will develop the concepts of humans as integrated beings and examine the ways that this is manifested in movement.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate the ability to successfully teach physical education to students with disabilities.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of major areas of diversity.
3. Choreograph and perform a dance presentation.
4. Critically reflect on the relationship between dance and culture.
5. Demonstrate competence in a range of outdoor education contexts.
6. Critically reflect on the outdoor education as a context for education.
7. Critically reflect on the relationship between Outdoor Education and Hauora.

Internal Assessment - 60% of final grade

1.	Assignment One	30%	Learning Outcomes 1 and 2 - Disabilities
2.	Dance Performance	35%	Learning Outcomes 3 and 4 - Dance
3.	Practical Assessment	15%	Learning Outcome 5 – Outdoor Education
4.	Assignment Two	20%	Learning Outcome 6 – Outdoor Education

Module Assessment

Outdoor Education (35%)

1. Successful completion of 'Mountains to Sea' outdoor education trip (10%)
2. Trip Diary (10%)
3. Written Essay (15%)

Dance (35%)

1. Dance Performance (25%)
2. Written Assignment (10%)

Disabilities (30%)

1. Written Assignment (15%)
2. Practical Assessment (15%)

Exam – 40% of final grade

Course Requirements

To be awarded a pass in this paper you are required to:

1. Complete ALL assessment tasks and modules
2. Achieve a total mark of 50% or higher
3. Meet attendance requirements. Full attendance is highly recommended, 80% is an absolute minimum

Texts:

There is no set text for this paper.

OUTLINE 2:

Introduction

This module explores dimensions of human functioning that are observable in human movement in the context of *Outdoor Education* and will prepare students to be able to use the contexts of outdoor education to develop the concepts of humans as integrated beings through movement.

Topics include: Risk Management

Curriculum

EOTC Safety and Legislation

Trip Planning

Map Reading (orienteering)

EOTC Research / Theory

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate competence in a range of outdoor education contexts
2. Critically reflect on the outdoor education as a context for education
3. Critically reflect on the relationship between outdoor education and hauora

Assessment

This Outdoor Education Module contributes 35% towards the overall paper grade and is made up of the following:

Practical Assessment 15% (Learning outcome 1)

1. Successful completion of 'Mountains to Sea' Outdoor Education trip (10%)
2. Trip reflection diary (5%)

Keep a detailed and comprehensive personal diary throughout the trip to show an insight into your personal thoughts and feelings. At the end of each day find a quiet place by yourself and note down the thoughts and feelings that you have experienced throughout the day. Include such things as: preparation, group dynamics, problems, difficulties, personal feelings, enjoyment, learning's, lessons, impact on teaching, etc.

I want your true thoughts and feelings and not the things that you think I want to hear. Please make it presentable

Due date: Thursday 30th March

Written Assignment 10% (Learning Outcome 6)

Examine the implications of outdoor education experiences in educational settings. The implications can be based on your own personal experiences in outdoor education but must be endorsed by current literature.

You must use a variety of research journal articles and textbooks to substantiate your answers.

To complete this essay you must use at least TWO (2) research journal articles that are different to the course readings. Please submit a copy with the assignment.

Due date: Monday 27th April

Examination 20% (9th-20th June)

Practical Experience

You will be required to *participate fully* (compulsory) in the practical experiences which will consist of a 5 day outdoor education experience, 'Mountains to the Sea'.

This will involve: Trekking

Mountain Biking

Kayaking

Camping

The field trip is designed as a learning laboratory where you can learn about your strengths and weaknesses. It will help you discover opportunities for personal growth and patterns of behaviour that can help or hinder your development as a teacher.

It will explore the concepts of experiential education, adventure based learning, risk management, leadership and group dynamics.

It will highlight the importance of experience to an outdoor education teacher and provide an insight into the organisation and management for outdoor excursions.

While you will be participating in the activities, setting goals and meeting personal challenges, the field trip is first and foremost a chance to reflect on your professional responsibilities and role as a teacher.

APPENDIX B – Mountains-to-Sea Trip Itinerary, Route Map & Responsibility Groups

Mountains to the Sea - Itinerary

Sunday 8 March

Travel to Whakapapa top car park and stay in Boomerang Ski Lodge (pm)

Monday 9 March

Tramp to the summit and return

Mountain bike from the carpark down the Bruce road to Owhango (National Park) to Whakahoro (Whanganui river). Approximate distance 70kms. Camp overnight.

Tuesday 10 March

Kayak down the Whanganui river and overnight at Tieke Marae. Approximate distance 65 kms (6-9 hours)

Wednesday 11 March

Kayak from Tieke Marae to Pipiriki. Approximate distance 21 kms (4-5 hours)

Mountain bike Pipiriki to Omaka (Atene). Approximate distance 50 kms.

Camp overnight.

Thursday 12 March

Tramp Atene Skyline Track (approx 3-5 hours)

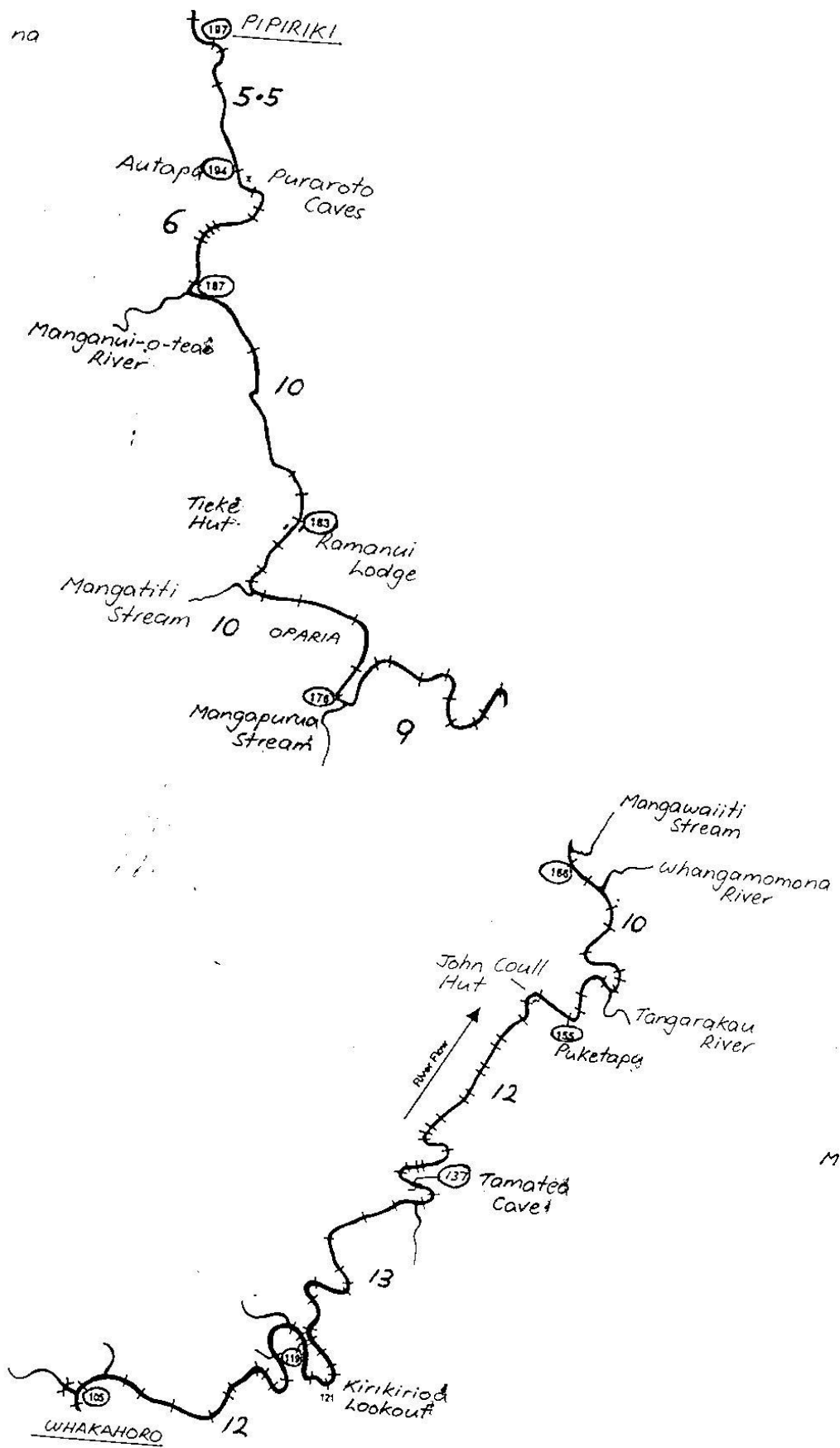
Friday 13 March

Mountain bike to Whanganui Castlecliff Beach. Approximate distance 35kms.

Return to Palmerston North approximately 4pm (mini vans).

Evening BBQ

Whanganui River Route Map



Organisational Groups Required / Responsibilities

Food (5 students)

- Creating the menu for the week
- Purchase and packing of all food
- Organising and writing up of class roster - preparation / cooking / cleaning
- Liaise with equipment group – pots / pans / cookers etc

Kayak (3 students)

- Checking working condition of all kayaks and equipment: paddles, PFD's, sprayskirts
- Organising spares: split paddle / throw bags
- Collection of all kayaks and related equipment
- Stacking and tying of all equipment on trailers

Cycling / BBQ Friday evening (3 students)

- Ensuring all students are carrying spares
- Carrying out minor repairs as required
- Stacking and organising all bikes on and off trailers
- Checking of all bikes general working condition
- Organising 'home coming' BBQ for Friday evening

First Aid / Equipment (2 students)

- Check contents of all first aid kits and restock as necessary
- Ensure all first aid kits are carried on all disciplines
- Administer first aid where necessary
- Liaise with food group and organise all necessary cooking equipment required
- Check all gas bottles

Safety / Camp activities / Tents (2 students)

- Overseeing all general safety throughout the week ie litter / cycling road safety etc

Constructing “Cyclists Ahead” signage for vehicles

Organising evening camp activities

Checking of all tents before and after (drying as well)

Taking the required number of tents

Note – It is very important that you take your role seriously and responsibly as the success of the camp will depend on the overall organisation. There has been past years where some students were not as prepared as they should have been and also Hellison’s responsibility model and the five levels of personal and social responsibility that you will also need to think about throughout the week.

Those students not up to scratch physically will not be permitted to attend the trip due to safety reasons (there will be a mountain bike ‘test’ ride done before camp).

Adapted Responsibility Model for Outdoor Education

Level Zero, Irresponsibility

Students who operate at Level Zero make excuses, blame others for their behaviour, and deny personal responsibility for what they do or fail to do.

I Respecting the rights and feelings of others

Self-control

The right to peaceful conflict resolution

The right to be included

Level One: Expedition behavior. Many an expedition has failed because of conflict among its members. As a member of this group, you are expected to keep your language and actions under control. The single rule here is “be appropriate.” Working together and respecting each other and our surroundings are the keys to a successful team.

II Participation and effort

Self-motivation

Exploration of effort and new tasks

Courage to persist when the going gets tough

Level Two: Determination. Another responsibility is to accept challenges and to keep trying, even in the face of adversity. This includes accepting encouragement and support, particularly when you might least want to. Determination is also a form of courage.

III Self-direction

On-task independence

Goal-setting progression

Courage to resist peer pressure

Level Three: Independence. A more advanced responsibility is to set your own goals and work independently on your skills and attitudes in an attempt to reach those goals.

IV Helping others and leadership

Caring and compassion

Sensitivity and responsiveness

Inner strength

Level Four: Leadership. The greatest responsibility when we are together is to honour our group by looking out for the entire group's welfare. This involves sharing your knowledge and skills, being sensitive to others' needs, and trying to serve them, even if it may be uncomfortable for you. This is sometimes the most difficult responsibility because it requires going beyond yourself ("me first") and sometimes even beyond your friends ("us first") to advocate for what is best for the whole group or the environment.

V Outside the gym

Trying these ideas in other areas of life

Being a role model

Level Five: Beyond the fence. Responsibility for yourself, others, and your surroundings does not only occur when we are together. You will be asked to try to act responsibly at school, in your neighbourhood, and in town, as well as in more remote settings

Course Readings

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APPENDIX C: Informed Consent & Information Sheet

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Title: "The voices of outdoor adventure: A qualitative exploration into the long-term meanings and impacts of an outdoor adventure programme for New Zealand university students"

Principal Researcher: Deepak Dathatri, Master of Education (M.Ed.) candidate

Phone: 04 971 5050; *Email:* dathatdeep@myvuw.ac.nz

Research Supervisor: Dr. Barrie Gordon; Senior Lecturer, Department of Physical Education

Phone: 04 463 9770; *Email:* barrie.gordon@vuw.ac.nz

Approved by: Victoria University Faculty of Education Human Ethics Committee

Agreement to Participation in Research

- I have read & understand the information sheet attached and have been given the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw my involvement at any time before the data analysis of this study is complete, without giving reasons and without penalty
- I understand that my identity will be kept strictly confidential and that any information I give will be presented in an aggregated and non-attributable manner
- I understand that all video-recordings and researcher notes will be completely erased upon completion of the project and I have been given the chance to request an electronic copy of the final report
- I understand that the final thesis will be kept at the Victoria University Library and may be used in publications and/or conferences
- I am aware that this study will use a video-recorded interview and consent to the information I give being used solely for the purposes, as explained, of this research

Participant's Name

Date

Signature of Consenting Party

Date

Signature of Investigator

If you choose to participate in this research, please sign and return this form to the researcher, Deepak Dathatri, by post, to 67 Garden Road, Northland, Wellington 6012, or email to dathatdeep@myvuw.ac.nz

Information Sheet – Individual Interviews

Title: “*The voices of outdoor adventure: A qualitative exploration into the long-term meanings and impacts of an outdoor adventure programme for New Zealand university students*”

Principal Researcher: Deepak Dathatri

Phone: 04 971 5050; Email: dathatdeep@myvuw.ac.nz

Research Supervisor: Barrie Gordon

Phone: 04 463 9770; Email: barrie.gordon@vuw.ac.nz

Kia ora and greetings,

My name is Deepak Dathatri and I am currently working on a Master of Education thesis for Victoria University of Wellington trying to understand what outdoor adventure experiences mean and do for people long after they complete a programme. I would like to invite you to participate in this study involving an interview expected to last for about one hour. I emphasize that you are under no obligation and your participation is completely voluntary. The information you give will help increase the knowledge and quality of outdoor adventure programmes in New Zealand.

The purpose of the interview is to have you describe, in detail, your former experiences from a specific, week-long outdoor adventure programme that you participated in between 2004 and 2008 as part of your physical education degree at Massey University. You will also be asked if those experiences held any special meaning for you, as well as what impact, if any, the programme has had on your life. The interview will use an open and flexible style. Breaks will be provided at your request and you may choose a comfortable location. The interviews will be video-recorded for research purposes only. After each interview you will have the chance to clarify and comment on my notes and the dialogue, and can ask questions or raise concerns.

If you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time before data analysis is complete. Your identity and any information you give will be kept strictly confidential. Your responses will be combined with those from 5 other interviews and will be reported in a way that your identity is not revealed. During the interview you may use a fictitious name and inform me of any identifying characteristics that should be altered to protect your identity. The video-recording and all notes will be erased after the study is completed and the finished thesis will be securely stored at the Victoria University Library theses holdings. This research may also be used as the basis for published articles in professional journals and be disseminated at academic and professional conferences. You may contact me for an electronic copy of the final report upon completion of the thesis.

This study has been approved by the Victoria University Faculty of Education Human Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Human Ethics Committee, Dr. Allison Kirkman, at 04 463 5676. If you have any further questions about this study you can reach me or my academic supervisor at the phone and email details above. *If you choose to participate, please email me and/or post the attached consent form to 67 Garden Road, Northland, Wellington 6012.* Thank you in advance for your consideration.

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