THE PHENOMENON OF THE OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE
AND HOW IT INFORMS PEDAGOGY

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the holistic nature of the outdoor wilderness experience as recounted from interviews of grade 11 and grade 12 students in BC's public education system. It also examines retrospectively and in rich detail the experience of a core sample of students who attended a progressive Outdoor School. The inquiry and methods used are holistic in nature and I attempt to capture the phenomena of their experiences in a narrative form. The emerging narrative also includes the phenomena of my experiences as teacher and learner in outdoor and wilderness environments. The literature review is part of the main narrative as a contributing part of a 'plot' so it does not prevent the flow of the story. The resulting thesis concludes with a model that describes the effects on the individual that actuate and actualize both the inner learner and the lifelong learner.
DEDICATION

To my Dad, who finds peace in the woods.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all I would like to thank all the interviewees who participated in this study, who gave their time and energy generously and who could celebrate their outdoor experiences. Many thanks go to Dr. David Zandvliet, my senior supervisor whose patience and expertise in the academic field I respect and whose integrity in producing a ‘clean’ and polished ‘document’ was both necessary and needed, particularly in the closing stages. Thanks also go to Dr. Celeste Snowber, for her timely and invaluable input into making this a story to be told. Many thanks also go to the research group the “Eco-thinkers”, who propelled me towards a viable conclusion when I was most stuck.

I would also like to thank my colleagues, Senga Fullam and Grant Osborne who worked with me at the Outdoor School and all those not connected directly with this thesis that helped form some part of my (unconscious) ideas. Lastly I would also like to thank my wife Anna for working with me with endless editing and patience in knowing I would complete this project and for the times we could share our knowledge as we worked on our Master theses together. And to my 2-year old daughter, Zoe: as I watch her I learn more about the natural world and my place in it through new eyes.
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CHAPTER ONE – PREPARING THE GROUND

My Dad would often say that in order for the clouds to shed their snow, the ground should be ready for the snow to land. This first chapter prepares the ground.

Purpose and Importance

*A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worth while.* (Dewey, 1998, p.35).

It is appropriate to start this story with an introduction from great Grandfather Dewey, providing an easy way to immediately reveal the central focus and rationale of this paper. The purpose of this study is to uncover the organic nature of the experience of students in outdoor and wilderness environments, in order to help educators discover more about the experience. Hence ‘...know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute...’ (1998). It is also the purpose of this study is to articulate the outdoor experience as felt by a number of students that attended the New Ventures Outdoor School (NVOS). The intention of the study was to investigate the nature of the student learning experience in the outdoors and compare two agendas: that carried by students to grow and transform, and of the BC curriculum to inform and educate. Ultimately, it is the goal of this paper to bring the two
agendas together to develop a cohesive conceptual framework for future learning in the outdoors.

This study is important because so much of one's every day experience is taken for granted. With a more conscious understanding of how students experience outdoor and wilderness environments as places to learn and grow, we as educators could begin to adapt our curriculum and practise in a way that allows our teachings to speak to students' inner experience, without intervening with or spoiling the 'flow' of learning. Importantly, this is a study in how life affects learning, and how learning affects life in a truly 'experiential' way.

Why This Thesis is Different in Appearance

This thesis is in three chapters. This first chapter tells why I have chosen this specific field of study and provides a justification for the phenomenological inquiry methodology that has driven the intertwined and inter-subjective writing. The second chapter is woven together so that the literature review is included in the narrative as a landscape within which the story can be discovered and so unfold. The third and final chapter presents an emerging model of phenomenological learning and hopes to deliver further insights to the 'story' with some recommendations for the future. In writing with a narrative style, my intention is that the medium might represent and emulate the type of message I am trying to convey. My purpose is not only to deliver the content of the message, to allow the 'feel' of the experience of being and learning in the outdoors to lift off of the page and become part of the 'message'.
I write about the description of experience and how that experience can inform teaching and program construction. I reclaim the word ‘experience’ back from the field of experiential education and place it firmly back in the field of phenomenology where I believe it rightfully belongs. Clandinin and Connelly discuss Dewey’s perspective on the nature of experience as “… is a key term in these diverse inquiries.” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). For Dewey experience is both personal and social and provides the foundation for understanding. “The term experience helps us think through such matters as an individual child’s learning while also understanding that learning takes place with other children, with a teacher, in a classroom, in a community, and so on.” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). It is this concept of the individual, his or her social grouping and their activation of the learning self specifically with respect to outdoor experiences that I wish to discuss. And most importantly I place myself at the centre of this narrative inquiry in order to find out the most I can about me.

About Me

This thesis is also about my personal journey of inquiry into the nature of experience in wilderness situations as a learner. It is also about learning in secondary school and, of course, it is about self-discovery. Writing in a narrative style preserves the sense of story through out the paper. As author and researcher, and being immersed in the experience of wilderness travel, I have deliberately placed myself within the story. In discussing Geertz’s work as an anthropologist, Clandinin and Connelly note that the researcher is to be a “…careful observer gathering a variety of field texts in the hopes of offering accounts of connections among things.” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 6). The most salient part of my writing is that I provide my own ‘field text’ to join those of the
others in this study. Such a move preserves my integrity and honesty as a writer. Placing myself in the story allows any bias I might have in my viewpoint to be included as a necessary part of the story’s landscape. Thus I fold myself into the narrative’s pages as a ‘flawed’ character whose complicit involvement in the story is an integral part of the telling.

I am a 38-year-old white male and have lived in Canada since 1998. I was born and brought up in England to an English father and a Greek mother in a relatively comfortable lower middle class home near London. I have traveled extensively throughout the world and have been teaching in public schools since 1992, and in outdoor environments since 1995. In July 2000 I was part of a staff team that started an outdoor school within a school district in the lower mainland of British Columbia. Unfortunately the school was closed 2 ½ years after its inception. It is from my experiences at NVOS that I became really interested in how learning curriculum in the outdoors might be better facilitated through outdoor environments than in the classroom. I already had a sound understanding of how instructors used outdoor experiences as a vehicle for personal development through shared wilderness experience from my work with Outward Bound in Canada, and also in Scotland and Wales. What I really wanted to find out is how these environments spoke to the students involved in the study and in what ways this affected them as human beings, particularly in relation to their goal to graduate from high school.

As a child, I had two major types of outdoor experience: the first and most special was sailing during summer holidays in Greece when I was just nine years old, a skill I perfected when I was twelve. The second type of experience - family walks in local woodlands in the UK - was a little more ordinary but no less significant. This was one of
the few times I would see a distant father at peace with his life and surroundings. These two activities provided me with a sense of how nature and my experience of the outdoors could nurture my soul. The trouble was that I had no mentor at the time to help me recognize the relationship that I had with nature and my poet’s heart was too young and too immature to distil such powerful and yet peaceful moments into words. Describing the sensations of being at one with nature requires a practice and skill level that I am still acquiring. My father, in his ham-fisted way tried to impart his appreciation of the natural world and I felt in him an unspoken sense of his concern for the preservation of natural environments. His dictums, however, were an intrusion into my experience, and as pre-pubescent and teenage sons are wont to do, I rejected his ‘inane ramblings.’ Twenty-six years later I now attempt to describe those experiences, with considerable help from some friends.

Background to the Method

In the absence of any regular contact with grandparents growing up, I have actively and consciously sought the experience and wisdom of other ‘elders’ in many areas of my life; researching and writing academically are no exception. In my time as an Outward Bound instructor, I explored much contemporary writing on the how to’s and why’s of conducting outdoor programs (Priest & Gass (1997); Nadler & Luckner (1992) and view this work as instructor manuals that delineate protocols for practitioners to achieve desired objectives. This type of work can also be used as a ‘handbook’ for structuring a program with specific purposes, usually personal development and sometimes wilderness therapy. Such programs are generally well run, well constructed and instructors and program developers have had a sound understanding of the change
that outdoor wilderness experiences can have on an individual’s psyche. Common to these approaches is the deliberate changing of environments to generate cognitive dissonance within the individual thus breaking down perceived barriers to personal change and generating new paradigms for future life.

In contrast, this study focuses on reflective inquiry into the phenomena of the outdoor experience and I examine how these experiences educate and re-format the identity of ‘learner’ for life. As a result, I have not considered literature on outdoor programming that has defined end products, processes and outcomes (Priest & Gass (1997); Nadler & Luckner (1992). The authors in this discipline continue to offer perspectives on outdoor programming and I have learnt and changed my personal practise as a result of their research. The point of stepping away from this area of research is to instead approach the field of outdoor education experiences from a different point of view in order to situate the field within a stronger phenomenological context.

But it is the combination of phenomenological study and narrative writing that I really turn to in enlivening this research. I agree with Clandinin and Connelly in that I see “...narrative as both phenomena under study and method of study.” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). For me the very act of writing is a system of doorways that provide access to deeper and deeper meanings and consciousnesses – as I write I open a door to another area of study, for which there is a key to the next door. (The analogy to William Blake is unintentional but relevant: “If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is: Infinite.” --William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.) Of course I have not arrived at a ‘place’ and I do not conceive of a final door, but each entry point is usually more illuminating than the last. At home I have a Banana plant
whose leaves emerge from the middle of the plant. As each leaf grows and dies, its stem provides part of the support network that serves to increase the size of the plant and the size and number of the leaves. The oldest leaf is the one closest to the ground and the one that lies on the outermost side of the plant. It is also the oldest and most withered looking. But I am fond of it nonetheless, as without it the plant would never have grown. So it is with my first ever writings in this or any other topic and I look forward to every immerging leaf. It is this continual and emerging sense of purpose of continuity in narrative and the subsequent unity to other ideas and possibilities that allows further exploration of narrative and the questioning of the experience itself. Narrative and life are essentially one. (2000, p. 3).

Simply put, this narrative inquiry is “...a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place, or series of places, and in social interaction with milieu...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told.” (2000, p. 20).

You Can’t Measure Phenomena

Other positivistic sciences have tackled the outdoor classroom in some detail with varying amounts of success and reception from the wider community of outdoor educators including a summary by Davidson (2001). My aim in this study was to approach the realm of human experience in the outdoors from a more poetic standpoint – a standpoint that celebrates in words and story the holistic and human experience of endeavour that characterises those who, in this study, have discovered treasure in the natural world inhabited most comfortably by their own souls. I have spent considerable time watching students interact with their peers in outdoor environments and I have
noticed a single consistent and prevailing phenomenon: their time and experiences in the outdoors have enabled them to celebrate self. A poet better narrates the creation of happiness than a scientist and it is for this reason that I particularly chose to adopt a phenomenological approach. Van Mannen cites Merleau-Ponty on this exact topic:

So Phenomenology, not unlike poetry, is a poetizing project; it tries an incantentive, evocative speaking, a primal telling, wherein we aim to involve the voice in an original singing of the world. (Merleau-Ponty, 1973)...What we must do is discover what lies at the ontological core of our being. So that in the words...we find “memories” that paradoxically we never thought or felt before. (Van Mannen, 1990, p. 13).

I chose not to make this a psychological inquiry for a number of reasons. Firstly, I have no formal training in psychology, but perhaps more importantly I wanted to capture as many facets of the participants’ learning experiences, reflections and personal narratives as part of a whole ‘re-telling’ of a story about outdoor, wilderness and experiential education. It is this element of story that is important. Husserl himself debated against “psycholigism” in the construction of his “phenomenological method”, preferring to talk about the “essence of cognition.” (Husserl, 1964). The narrative of this paper is written to include all perspectives, actions and thoughts. I am aware that phenomenological inquiry has its detractors but it is not my role to defend the practice. Indeed, “Phenomenology has been described as a method without techniques.” (Van Mannen, 1990, p. 131). I also wanted to use the inquiry as a way of discovering what exactly is different about the experience of being in the outdoors and what being in the outdoors does for the learner that allows them to be ‘healthier’ in some way. I also
wanted to look at the effects of the whole entity of ‘being outdoors’ and how that in particular affects the person. Davidson, in a study similar to this one, emphasized the importance of using a ‘qualitative’ approach to research in her study and her comments describe the rationale for thinking, researching and writing phenomenologically. In the section of her paper entitled “Methodology Trends: Meaning-Making and Measuring Rods”, she cites O’Brien, Project K, Schoel, and the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre, and Park:

Increasing numbers of outdoor education programmes base the justification of their activities on their ability to increase elements of self-concept. Such rationalisation may be increasingly necessary, as economic utilitarianism demands well-defined and measurable outcomes to match dollars spent. As a result, a substantial amount of research focuses on determining the accuracy of claims that participation in adventure activities positively influences individuals’ self-concept. (Davidson, 2001, p.11)

In contrast with the above concept, a return to Dewey’s original formulation of experiential education allows a more pure and certainly less positivistic view of this field of education. He states: “…there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education. If this be true, then a positive and constructive development of its own basic idea depends upon having a correct idea of experience.” (Dewey, 1998, p.7). Here we are examining the purely human aspects of experience rather than what that experience can ‘yield’ for the teacher, not the student. Davidson continues citing Ewert and Park:
The majority of this research attempts to measure psychological outcomes using various quantitative instruments, predominantly self-report questionnaires, designed to assess the degree of change in self-concept. While many have reported an increase in participant self-concept as a result of outdoor education courses, results have been far from conclusive. According to Park, such studies have been dogged by problems including methodological and conceptual weaknesses, inconsistent measurement instruments, and poor theoretical frameworks. (Davidson, 2001, p. 12).

Davidson goes on to outline some of the shortfalls of quantitative assessment and provides a convincing rationale for using qualitative inquiry. She cites Bogdan & Biklen, in the following part of her article:

Meaning is the “essential concern” of qualitative research, which has the intention of exploring ways in which people “make sense out of their lives”. Qualitative research techniques such as participant observation, focus groups and in-depth interviews collect relatively rich information about relatively few people, and can be used to capture the personal nature and the phenomenological aspects of the adventure experience.

Davidson (2001) recognizes here the need to remove the scientific ‘objective’ approach from this area of study and return the area of study to a more humanistic approach that embraces all the foibles and idiosyncrasies of human existence together with all its inherent joys and risks. She concludes:
Participants can be encouraged to speak in their own voice, which is particularly important when the information gathered from each individual varies considerably and becomes a story in its own right. In fact qualitative research is often narrative in form, with close attention to detail as “everything has the potential of being a clue” to understanding (ibid.: 28). In this way qualitative data allow for the illumination of individual processes of meaning making, and illustrate that they are rarely as simple as increased feelings of well-being or positive self-image. (Davidson, 2001 p.12).

Approach and Rationale to the Data

On reflection, I have always been fascinated by what it must be like to be someone else. To actually feel the things they feel and smell the smells the way they smell them. I have always wanted to understand how someone might hate spaghetti bolognais and love liquorice (I dislike liquorice intensely) and gain an understanding of why that same someone considers purple to be their favourite colour. Without the ability to metaphysically inhabit someone's body, talking, listening and watching others have become my main tools for climbing under another's skin. It is not just the discovery of the students' experience that is important but where the understood feeling leads the study - a new understanding of what it is to teach and learn in the outdoors for the benefit of future teachers and learners.

Academically speaking a phenomenological inquiry process is best met by examining the students' whole experience in a way that considers the whole person and their history. Van Mannen describes the purpose of adopting a phenomenological
approach. “Phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning of structures, of lived experience.” (Van Mannen, 1990, p. 10). This statement underpins my journey to discover more about the phenomenon of the outdoor (learning) experience. My intent in embarking on this type of research was not specifically to uncover an explanation of the actions of individuals or groups but to inquire as to the nature of individuals’ experiences whilst part of NVOS. This in turn lead to the drawing out of universal threads and the weaving of an organic tapestry of understanding in order to better view the outdoor learning experience. It is from viewing this tapestry that I am able to discern the nature of my own pedagogical practice and generate new theory.

In contrast to the more positivistic and behavioural empirical sciences, human science does not see theory as something that stands before practice in order to “inform” it. Rather theory enlightens practice. Practice (or life) always comes first and theory comes later as a result of reflection (Van Mannen, 1990, p. 15).

Ultimately the conclusion will lead to a re-writing of curriculum. This data and the narrative that accompanies it will necessarily accompany this re-drafting:

This leads to a second principle of curriculum design; that of incorporating into the curriculum unit the data derived from the phenomenology of the student. To continue with the same example of a curriculum dealing with space, the student’s own experience of space should be elicited as it provides a vitally important database around which the curriculum can be built (Bowers, 1974, p. 116).
Of course the inclusion of the experience of space is just one of the criteria that I discuss as an emerging theme later in this chapter. The concept of including student experiences in the construction of curriculum can be applied to any emerging theme.

I interviewed seven former students of NVOS and a colleague who has been working at a local college for some years. (I have left their introductions as characters to the main narrative in order to preserve the felt sense of story). I have, at times, also included my own personal narrative as an outdoor learner and teacher. Van Mannen describes the purpose of the interviewing process as follows:

The point of phenomenological research is to ‘borrow’ other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience... (Van Mannen, 1990, p. 62).

I will consider this ‘deeper meaning and significance’ in the final chapter in the form of a pedagogical model that seeks to exemplify the nature and essence of learning in an outdoor environment that asks the teacher to respond to such student ‘significances.’...

Phenomenology does not ask, ‘How do these children learn this particular material?’ but it asks, ‘What is the nature or essence of the experience of learning (so that I can now better understand what this particular learning experience is like for these children)?’ (p. 10).

“Phenomenological research always takes its point of departure from lived experience or empirical data.” (p. 22). In the interviews I tried to facilitate the release of the students’ story for the time they attended NVOS. Capturing an individual’s story in
depth is a tricky business. The best conversations that reveal the depths of an individual’s experience have, in my experience, occurred in light informal environments over food and drink and the research interviews sought to capture the same ambience in similar environments. From these initial accounts of the experience I probed the subjects’ dialogue for relevant depth in the hope of facilitating the telling of stories that painted detailed pictures of their experiences with accompanying tastes, smells, sights, aesthetics and sounds.

Clandinin and Connelly discuss Dewey’s two criteria of experience: continuity and interaction related to their own practice. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 32-33). These two criteria are in relation to the individual’s experience. I am particularly interested with the notion of continuity, particularly as it relates to the aspects of student life and the creation of a lifelong learner as discussed in the final chapter. Clandinin and Connelly discuss how “Issues of continuity led to tensions of temporality, people, action, and certainty. Issues of interaction led to tensions of context, people, action and certainty.” (2000, pp. 32-33). For Dewey, however, these two criteria were inseparable. Clandinin and Connelly have further examined Dewey’s notions of continuity and interaction by providing a framework of the relationality of interaction in research. They discuss the four directions of inquiry: inwards and outwards, and backwards and forwards. “By inward we mean toward the internal conditions, such as feelings hopes...By outward, we mean toward the existential conditions, that is the environment.” (2000, p. 50). This relates dynamically to the nature of ecological and environmental change and situates the role of narrative in describing this mutual inward/outward change.
"By backward and forward, we refer to temporality – past, present and future." (2000, p. 50). The fifth direction relates to the situation of place.

I questioned the participants with a view to adding an organic depth that circumscribed or defined connections with the universal, but in simple terms I tried to have the best conversation I could with these subjects in a way that left them with little else to say. I approached these interviews with a view to generating questions that naturally emerged and that followed the lead of the participants’ natural attention to topics within the discourse, although there were some questions to which I particularly wanted answers:

- What does one gain from the outdoor experience that helps one learn?
- How does the outdoor experience facilitate the expedition of learning through the teacher?
- How does the experience of the teacher mediated through the outdoor experience help the student (to learn)?

Phenomenological inquiry is a description of the lifeworld we live in, in this case the world of outdoor and wilderness (educative) experiences, (Van Mannen, 1990, pp. 25-26). Such an inquiry is not given over to analysis as in psychology nor is it donated to the world of interpretation. Van Mannen is explicit in his discussion of the differences regarding descriptive phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology although he is careful to note that, “…it has been argued that all description as a method lies in interpretation.” (1990, p. 25). It is in the telling of these stories that facilitates our entry to understanding our own lifeworld. And so we see in the writing of others’ experiences that the aim of phenomenological research is to, “…transform lived experience into a textual
expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful…” (1990, p. 36). For me the process has been the most humanistic and probably the most honest approach to enable me to include all that I could in the data gathering part of this inquiry. “To do phenomenological research is to question something phenomenologically and, also, to be addressed by the question of what something is really like.” (1990, p.42).

At all times I kept in mind where I wanted to head with the data that I was gathering: “Phenomenological themes may be understood as the structures of experience. So when we analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience.” (1990, p. 79). I wanted to discover where I was going to land as a result of finding this data, these stories and the sense and feel that emerged from my interactions with the participants in this story. Their role has been crucial.

Pragmatics and Practicalities

With my approach to gathering data established, I had to climb down from my ideological clouds and ground myself in order to invite very real people with very real bodies to sit in front of me in very real chairs to hopefully provide real answers to real questions, which they did.

I selected students from NVOS that I thought could bring their own particular perspective to their experience of learning in the outdoors. I also wanted to select former students who could dialogue about themselves and whose self-awareness was attuned to the different effects life had on their sense of self and their own sense of being. I wanted
to aim for an even gender mix and tried to select a variety of social, economic and family backgrounds. I recorded the interviews using a digital recorder and downloaded each interview to my computer hard drive. Using ‘Voice Studio’ software I was able to see the timing of each sound track and mark each part with a ‘flag’ indicating a point of interest or particular relevance. At any break in the conversation or interview I switched the machine off and this would automatically start another file or recording track once the interview re-started. As I listened to each interview I noted the number of the track and the time in minutes and seconds on the track that an interviewee spoke about a particular topic. This allowed me immediate access to student ‘sound bites’ and negated the need for extensive transcription of the interviews into written form. Each interviewee would have a number of track notes (see Appendix 1). Each track note was highlighted with one or more colours, each colour denoting relevance to particular themes as I heard them emerging. I then gathered all similar colours from each interviewees completed track notes and aggregated all similar colours together (See Appendix 2), thus beginning the collection of ‘theme’ from all the participants comments.

All through the interviews, I had a niggling question in the back of my head, “How will I ‘assemble’ this data?” and “What is this going to change, if anything at all?” I knew I wanted to aim for some kind of new model but had no idea what that model might look like, but that was OK by me. I would let the interviewees’ story drive the telling of the direction of the story and allow the narrative to flow between their different perspectives. Van Mannen provides the period for this particular section:

The end of human science research for educators is a critical pedagogical competence: knowing how to act tactfully in pedagogic situations on the basis of a
carefully edified thoughtfulness. To that end hermeneutic phenomenological research reintegrates part and whole, the contingent and the essential, value and desire. (1990, p. 8).

What emerged from the interviewees occasionally surprised me or required me to inquire further. (This further inquiry, as a researcher was what I was really looking for. I was sure the former students would bring more to the table about their experiences than I ever had a chance to conceptualize as their teacher.) Most of all, everybody interviewed was profoundly honest about their experiences and I am proud to have been a part of this special and revealing process.
CHAPTER 2 – WATCHING IT SNOW - THE PHENOMENON OF THE OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE

An Overview of the Story

From here I attempt to recount the whole story of each participant’s outdoor and wilderness learning - their experiences, their learning, their fondest memories and the most significant changes to their lives since. The common story will show the route that students travel to becoming significantly healthier and more in control of their choices and reveal their changed feelings about life and learning. It will be a story of how the internal change affects a new future external story.

An Introduction to the ‘Characters’

As I wrote at the beginning of Chapter One, my Dad would often say that in order for the clouds to shed their snow, the ground should be ready for the snow to land. The first chapter prepared the ground. This second chapter watches the snow and attempts to describe the most interesting snowflakes as they fall. Fortunately I am in a position to introduce you to the ‘gods’ that inhabit the clouds. They have been kind enough to release the precipitate they gathered from their time at NVOS in order that I might piece together, crystal by crystal, a new and refreshed landscape of outdoor learning experience. These are the ‘gods’:

Philip - Philip is a lecturer at a local college. He is a good friend as well as a role model and informal mentor. He is also a maverick in the sense that he thinks for himself and acts according to his own beliefs and values. He is one of only a few individuals I know who actively pursues his life with purpose: to reveal and peel the layers of his own
being, to be kind to others and most of all, to be happy. Philip has been involved with outdoor education since the 1970s. Not only has he taught in a number of outdoor education institutions but he uses outdoor and wilderness experiences as an inquiry into self and his own understanding of own life. Philip often ventures out into the wilderness alone or with a partner for up to seven days. He is extremely funny, outwardly structured and inwardly enjoys the profound chaos that life brings to lived experience. I truly enjoy being in his company.

Keeter - Keeter is and has always been outspoken about his views on almost anything, but particularly his views on education. He had been enrolled in a number of local alternative schools and was somewhat of a connoisseur of the student alternative education experience, more as a way of life than a method of education. I would often find myself in conflict with Keeter’s opinions and points of view, particularly with respect to individuals’ rights and responsibilities. I have come to realise that we both share a passion for changing the mainstream educational paradigm and I have learnt a great deal from him. I sometimes found him stubborn and belligerent but discovered that he was wrestling with others’ inability to understand joyous education experiences. His understanding and articulation of the common education experience, whilst being ‘in the system’, was an unusual facet of his personality for one so young. It made him angry. I think (and hope) that one day he will make an excellent teacher in a new paradigm.

Suzie - Suzie and I always got on very well together. She was part of NVOS’s first intake but unfortunately did not complete the first year. By her own admission, she made some poor decisions with respect to her choice of friends and activities outside the school. I have always admired and respected Suzie’s ability to be truthful. Her honesty
has enabled her to grow and emerge from these early experiences to become a young woman able to make sound decisions about her future. She has always been candid about her point of view without ever being confrontational and has an abundant sense of fun about her. She enjoys the company of good friends and good times and is always upbeat and cheerful. Her interview was notable for her ability to speak pointedly and without hesitation, in a way that suggested that she was more in touch with herself than I had ever seen her before.

*Orbit* - Orbit came to NVOS after the school had completed its very first semester. I first met him quiet and somewhat introspective, with an intense fascination with what was going on around him. He arrived a tall and almost gaunt individual, with excellent artistic ability and good listening skills. He was apathetic, at best, about his previous education but showed considerable enthusiasm for NVOS, a show of emotion that was rare for him. Orbit would often follow the thread of discussion from afar, and then provide the concluding and frequently insightful comments to dialogue enabling the rest of the group new access to complex issues. He was at his best talking one-on-one.

*Gwendolyn* - Gwendolyn arrived at NVOS at the start of its second year having been recommended the school by another alternative program that she was attending. She is naturally introspective and much like Orbit preferred to spend time at a distance from the group. She is naturally intelligent and inquisitive and is able to dissect issues thoughtfully while remaining open-minded about a number of possible solutions.

*Grace* - Grace arrived at NVOS from Saskatchewan through a family connection with the school district. Her family background was Christian in origin and this made up a considerable part of the organising and running of her life. Like her pseudonym
suggests, she is extremely graceful with her friendships and exceptionally kind. Her sense of responsibility for the program was quite amazing. She could always be found organizing others to do what needed to be done or doing extra work extra to help the school function. Her understanding of the value of her own education was considerable and like Keeter, she understood the value of learning in the outdoors and relished every moment of her time at the school.

**Willie** - Willie is a very practical person with a simple and approach to life. Generous to a fault and extremely polite, Willie is always low-key, calm and able to make simple and sensible decisions about his life. Practicality is important to Willie and his decision making throughout his life is based on sound common sense judgements. Willie was also extremely reliable when things needed to be done. Of all the students at NVOS, he was the one that I felt most able to have a semi-adult relationship with – he was in fact slightly older than most of the other students. His contributions to this research are more practical than they are phenomenological but I asked him to be part of this inquiry for what he could bring that was different to the other students.

**Amara** - Amara arrived at NVOS at the beginning of its second year. She had previously been home schooled for her elementary education and had had a couple of extremely negative, even violent experiences at alternative programs. She is an extremely sensitive person and has a fondness for good friends and good company. She is very intelligent and has a profound sense for what is right and just in the world. Small in stature but big in heart, Amara is also proud of her independence and remains open to the entire world and all that it has to offer.
The rest of this chapter is organised under seven main headings that provide the model for the flow of growth in the final chapter.

Disaffection with Current Schooling

...the experiences which were had by pupils and teachers alike, were largely of the wrong kind. How many students, for example, were rendered callous to ideas, and how may lost the impetus to learn because of the way in which learning was experienced by them? How many acquired special skills by means of automatic drill so that their power of judgement and capacity to act intelligently in new situations was limited? How many came to associate the learning process with ennui and boredom? How many found what they did learn so foreign to the situations of life outside the school as to give them no power of control over the latter? How many came to associate books with dull drudgery, so that they were “conditioned” to all but flashy reading matter? (Dewey, 1998, p.15).

Every person interviewed in this study expressed dissatisfaction with the current mainstream school system. This may not seem too outstanding initially but it does provide a landscape upon which to transpose the experiences of the interviewees, particularly as they relate to the delivery models prescribed in mainstream school compared with that at the New Ventures Outdoor School. The infrastructure and practise in such a school are key to understanding the likes and joys experienced by participants in outdoor programming and the disaffection felt by those interviewed with their experiences in mainstream school.
The students interviewed can all be said to be proponents of the alternative school system; four of the seven former students interviewed had come from other alternate programs. The complaints regarding conventional mainstream schooling are various and quite real. Keeter introduces the topic with some excellent commentary as to the nature of curriculum in school settings:

...curriculum limits a person's knowledge of the world...it's like putting a track into everything and breaking things up and it's really confusing to learn for so many years...to have these certain subjects pounded into your brain every day in these sections of time and then to leave...and it's not really like that. The world is a huge place and it is all interconnected...

This brief statement is intensely powerful for me and as I read and re-read time and again as I write this paper, I realise that it is a separate paper all its own, that I am not sure I can do justice within the scope of this phenomenological inquiry. Orr is clear in his understanding that nature is a holistic phenomenon experienced as a '...medley of sensations'. (Orr, 1994, p. 94). His thoughts on the organization of curriculum are particularly pertinent:

The great ecological issues of our time have to do in one way or another with our failure to see things in their entirety. This failure occurs when minds are taught to think in boxes and not taught to transcend those boxes or to question overly much how they fit with other boxes...And there is a connection between knowledge organized in boxes, and degraded ecologies and global imbalances. The situation
is tragic in that many suspect where all of this is leading but believe themselves powerless to alter it. (Orr, 1994, pp. 94-95).

Keeter and Orr together illustrate clearly the lack of connection that conventional curriculum can have to the students’ lives and the immediate occurrences surrounding them. The surroundings being those outside of them as well as the relationships they have to the occurrences in their lives. Keeter’s statement above could have come from a page by David Jardine:

If we begin to unearth the notion of the integrated curriculum, it begins to disrupt deeply held beliefs and images of understanding, self-understanding and mutual understanding, pointing to a sense of ‘inter-relatedness,’ ‘inter-dependency,’ or ‘inter-connectedness,’ which is belied by our analytic, definitional, and frequently dis-integrative approaches to educational phenomena. It also belies the desire to finalize, control, master and foreclose upon vital curricular issues. (Jardine, 1998, p 72).

Keeter’s thoughts adequately describe in simple colloquial terms how his whole sense of understanding curriculum affected his “brain”. His description gives us a really solid feel, phenomenologically, of what it was like for him to try and learn through the mainstream school paradigm. His very sense of himself and his very being as Keeter seemed to jar aggressively against education as it is composed in that system; one gains the impression that he was not even able to subsist in that system and his comment, for me, exposes the ‘black holes’ in the system that show a lack of representation for the
individuation of self; it is as though those holes are waiting to be filled by Jardine himself.

Keeter’s comment is also a highly personalized view of how mainstream schooling restricts a desire to be and learn. It appears that mainstream school, for Keeter at least, actually inhibits learning and I will talk later of its relation to the concept of flow and my own experience of mainstream schooling. He also hints at the notion of a personal learning agenda – an agenda that I believe fits the developmental stage of the adolescent in their own emerging negotiation with the world at large, the acquisition of knowledge about it and their subsequent place in it. Jardine cites Hahn: “With the interdependence of all things or ‘interbeing,’ cause and effect are no longer perceived as linear, but as a net, not a two-dimensional one, but a system of countless nets interwoven in all directions in a multi-dimensional space” (Hahn cited in Jardine, 1998, p. 70). Hahn summarizes with the following: “The universe is a dynamic fabric of interdependent events in which none is the fundamental entity.” (Hahn cited in Jardine, 1998, p. 70).

Philip in a very adult and somewhat scholarly way interrogates this whole notion of freedom in the curriculum and the students’ desire to explore other learning opportunities: Curriculum is what is supposed to be taught and by…[indecipherable part of the recording]…is what is supposed to be learned and so when you have a teacher walk into a room, there’s a certain curriculum about the power structure that that involves…”

Philip here draws parallels with the agenda of the ‘teacher’ as both representative and enforcer of the power structures of the mainstream system and its desire to maintain the status quo. I propose curriculum is a living organic process rather than a specified
ascription of content in which the students played no part. As the students talked about their lives in mainstream school, it appears that the system failed to nourish them in a way that they were able to feel a part of the system. (I use the term ‘nourish’ deliberately as part of the organic sense described previously). Where the students recognized their inalienable right to grow and move into a free future space for them to learn, it seems that the structure of knowledge acquisition in high school is so inorganic as to be incongruous with the growth and learning processes of these individuals. It also appears that these particular individuals were just aware enough to recognize this and willing enough to express it. Margaret Boniface picks up on this point well. She discusses the concepts of flow and adventure activities in the article, “Towards an Understanding of Flow and other Positive Phenomena within Outdoor and Adventurous Activities.” Her introductory sentence is a fitting commentary on the absence of flow in the mainstream school curriculum and the disharmony with the learning agenda of the individual. “When considering what draws some people to become involved in adventurous activities, Yaffey (1993, p. 10) refers to special moments of ‘pure perception, uncontaminated thought and freedom to Be’ that provide intense feelings of aliveness and occur spontaneously as peak experiences.” (Boniface, 2000). The objective of this paper is to acknowledge the ‘peak experiences’ of the individual as deep learning experiences and develop curriculum that multiplies the volume and intensity of these experiences.

Keeter’s comment above identifies succinctly and in a deeply personal and yet natural way how he perceived the restriction of flow in his own learning life: “…it’s like putting a track into everything and breaking things up and it’s really confusing to learn for so many years…” Intuitively he knows that part of his life and his search for meaning
within the context of flow experiences has been destroyed. His comments speak closely
to my own experience. Reading about the concepts of flow and joy within the paradigms
of activity, particularly with respect to the way they relate to educational precepts and the
whole notion of being happy in one’s life, has been a seminal experience. School for me
was always a place where flow would be interrupted: a place where one’s enjoyment of
life was curtailed for the sake of having to align oneself with a prevailing authority.
Inevitably, that authority, whether it was teacher, administrator, school structure (and
function) or society at large, imposed that which is to be learnt upon the individual or
group. The invitation to discover was permanently denied. Since that time I have viewed
school as an interruption into my own personal world of inquiry into the world, my social
group and society and my life and place in it as an individual. School for me has been a
place that inhibits true discovery and learning about oneself and one’s environment. I
have heard justifications: ‘wait until later for that sort of thing’; ‘later’ is too late to learn
and live in the moment, and outdoor activities and wilderness travel have been the best
vehicles for me to do just that.

I regard the year that I taught in a mainstream school in BC with a deep sense of
shame. That I supported a system I felt, by its very structure, denies one’s individual right
to advocate for one’s own learning agenda troubles my conscience and I could be found
guilty of intellectual hypocrisy. How could I have been part of a system that, in the worst
cases at least, has sought to restrict one’s ability to be free and deny one of the most basic
of human rights – the freedom to think?

I turn now to the concept of freedom at school. Orbit’s comments illustrate his
strong felt sense of the denial of freedom.
... I felt confined; I did not really have a choice of what little points I wanted to learn. It was, 'this is the curriculum, and you have to stay in this curriculum.' At this school (NVOS), hearing about this is what we learn—it was a little more diverse.

There is a strong unifying thread in all the students' narratives—that of a perceived lack of freedom and a restriction to explore their own ability to learn and the lack of this opportunity in curriculum. Orbit's comments embody the issue well: "I felt confined..."—a suggestion that the attention paid to the development of individual growth as a function of freedom is minimal at best. Richard Rorty makes specific reference to Dewey in his article "Education without Dogma: Truth, Freedom and our Universities." Rorty cites Dewey from 1903 that Emerson was the "philosopher of democracy" (Dewey cited Rorty, 2001, p. 112). Rorty states: "Dewey's point was that Emerson did not offer truth, but simply hope. Hope—the ability to believe that the future will be different from, and unspecifically freer than, the past—is the condition of growth." (Rorty, 2001 p. 112) This simple synopsis illustrates the number of frustrations and disappointments that the student narratives convey. In my own experience, both as student and schoolteacher, school has been no place to invest in one's education—quite the opposite. I found the physicality of being indoors to 'learn' has gibed aggressively against my own sense of my education being about my growth. It is the context of hope that the mainstream school system fails to provide. The overriding presumption that somehow everything is going to be all right is a facet of pedagogy that is sadly missing from the day-to-day functioning of the mainstream. The confinement I have felt by the four walls and the ceiling has reminded me perpetually that 'approved' learning is learning that must occur within such
confines. The removal of these barriers and such confines is the very act that precedes the expanding of one’s own thinking and one’s own consciousness to the limits of the, albeit humanly visible, universe. I have found making the sky part of my daily learning to be an enriching experience.

Of course, educational environments come with their own forms of organizational structure and Suzie concurred: “...it was too structured in general for us we were not ready for that... [the Outdoor school] was not unstructured at all...it was not so structured that we did not want to come to school.”

I asked Gwendolyn specifically how an outdoor school differed from a regular school and her answer summarizes the above comments well:

...You follow strict routine. You are forced to arrange your day by the sound of a bell...no difference to your life or the world around you -- same building, same footsteps down the same hall. There’s no real relation to what you are learning and what is going on in your life or what your surroundings are like...the curriculum itself is pretty basic and it does not really spark much in anybody except how it is presented.

Outdoor education experiences offer something in the way of hope. Indeed, during my time working as an instructor at Outward Bound, part of the ‘framing’ of the experience of a course was deliberately and consciously set within the context of hope: I focussed at the beginning of a course on planting a seed in students that they could and would feel better about their lives and themselves.
Gwendolyn states that learning in high school depends mostly on how good the teacher is and the connections they are able to make in context to the student and their surroundings. Rorty cites Dewey once again: “growth itself is the moral end” and that to “protect, sustain and direct growth is the chief ideal of education.” (Dewey cited in Rorty, p. 111). For Suzie and Gwendolyn the structure and routine of the mainstream school system is another facet of confinement, the continued restriction of freedom, the repression of personal growth and the subsequent denial of hope. It is the lack of alignment here that the school system has with the natural buoyancy and enthusiasm for life that is inherent in the teenage mind. Takahashi recounts the story with an elementary school teacher who attempted to introduce environmental education into his classroom that reflects another facet of conventional schooling to spiritually exhaust young hearts and minds and spirits:

...many of his students were exhausted by the competitive mode of schooling, feeling disconnected from the world and from themselves. He said, “These children don’t feel that they matter, that they are important. How can they possibly feel that the planet matters?”... If we are to teach peace, justice, and ecological sustainability, we not only need to teach it, but we must also enable students to hold such values and create them within themselves. (Takahashi, 2004, p. 170.)

Drugs, teenage gangs, truancy and anti-social behaviour are the consequences of the system’s failure to align with the individual’s natural sense of hope for personal identity. The establishment of such a paradigm helps participants understand the nature of
transformative experience. Wilderness and outdoor education experiences can provide a new landscape of hope.

The physical confinements I mention above are a small part of the restriction of freedom; it is the sub-script, the implied imposition of the environment as a metaphor that impacts the growing learning individual the most. Bowers introduces this topic with fluidity as he defines aspects of culture.

Another aspect of culture that teachers need to understand is the metaphorical nature of the language/thought process, including how metaphorical thinking is encoded in cultural objects such as buildings...Student thinking is largely dependent upon the process of analogic thinking framed by the deep root metaphors of the culture, and they could not think or communicate without using these iconic metaphors. (Bowers, 1995. p. 195)

Architecture is a major part of this cultural and pedagogical shift. The building itself is the iconic metaphor that delineates thinking. The students above recognised this at an intuitive level. To have no architecture (i.e. no buildings), to have your education happen out of doors is to have no restriction of thought and, I would argue, is one’s way to the learning of truth as a felt experience rather than a socially constructed phenomenon. Stephen Bacon in his book “The Conscious Use of Metaphor at Outward Bound” outlines the unconscious constructs of metaphor in human beings:

For centuries, philosophers have argued that it is impossible for humans to encounter the world “as it truly is,” people form models of the world within their
own minds based in the filtering processes of their sense perceptions, their idiosyncratic opinions, and their cultural attitudes.” (Bacon, 1983, p.5)

Without embarking on a protracted philosophical debate, I propose that the world ‘as it truly is’ constructs the metaphor of reality that the individual has of that particular world. Bacon points out the nature of the Isomorphic metaphor. “When all the major elements in one experience are represented by corresponding elements in another experience, and when the overall structure of the two experiences is highly similar, then the two experiences are metaphors of each other.” (Bacon, 1983, p.4). I would also argue that this isomorphism with one’s surroundings is the foundation of relevant learning and construction of the self. It is an all-encompassing surrounding - a catalyst for the individual to learn about their environment and their sense of self. It does not contain human-constructed distractions but allows us, as humans, the basic human right to think without prescribed architecture or confinement. It is to this cognitive opening of the individual first that I now turn.

Opening up the Individual First

In my work with Outward Bound, in Wales, Scotland and here in BC, the focus of a course was for the personal development of the individual: “…experiential educational programs that inspire personal growth through shared experiences…” – (Outward Bound Canada course guide 2004). The organization is extremely successful at fulfilling this mission statement in Canada, and I was privileged to be a part of the delivery of programs that significantly altered my outlook as to the purpose and value of education. My work
at NVOS was significantly influenced by my experiences as an educator (and as a learner) at Outward Bound.

The scope of the program as situated in the school district was not overtly to ‘inspire personal growth’ – at least not as its main focus. As a public school (alternative) program it was designed to provide an alternative opportunity for curriculum delivery through the outdoors. (Throughout this account I will use the term syllabus instead of curriculum to denote the delivery of those things that have to be taught or learnt – more simply, ‘these are the things you must learn.’ I will reserve the term ‘curriculum’ for later discussion concerning the purposes and methods of educational delivery). However, given that I did not particularly have ‘personal growth’ in mind, the personal growth and development experienced by the students was considerable despite the fact that I did much less to facilitate the review and reflection of the outdoor experience compared to my days as an Outward Bound instructor. I recognize now that personal growth was part of the lived, and for my part, unconscious curriculum. Indeed curriculum as part of landscape connected to horizons of growth.

Nevertheless there is an ordering suggested in Philip’s comments below that require a process where the individual is engaged before the information syllabus can be absorbed by the learner. (Philip, with his years of experience in Outdoor Education since the 70’s, illustrated the value of ‘Personal Development’ from both a psychological and educational standpoint). He states categorically:

If you are interested in learning as opposed to teaching...stuff has to get somewhere and be processed by a learning growing organism, then you have the responsibility to open that learner. That’s where outdoor education and wilderness
education come in... In describing the opening up process we discover, “Opening up Johnny means two things: helping him discover who he is, that’s 50%, the other 50% is helping him construct who he is.”

When Philip mentioned this in the interview I was immediately drawn to Yon’s comparison of “Routes” and “Roots” in his book “Elusive Culture” (2000). Yon’s discussion throughout his book is about gender, race and identity and there is a process here that we can link with the construction of the self and the effects of community working towards common goals in natural environments, a topic I will discuss later. Yon (2000. p. 64) discusses a youth “Steve” who is troubled by his formation of certain friendship groups that results in his appropriating a label. In describing the situation, Yon relates:

... the social relations that help form the relations form the identities of Steve and other youth like him have more to do with ‘routes’, the various trajectories, interactions, and networks through which these youth are connected, than with ‘roots’, or countries of origin, birthplaces, and ethnicity. (2000, p. 64).

We can equate Yon with the Philip’s idea of “50% of who he is” – his “roots”, with the other 50 % of helping him construct who he is – his “routes”. In my own personal outdoor experiences I remember, around 5 years old, tirelessly following my Dad through the local woods back in my hometown of High Wycombe in the UK, a country now practically devoid of wilderness. I use the word ‘tirelessly’ somewhat paradoxically: I remember forever dragging my feet as my Dad strode off into the distance and yet wondered about the place, these woods that I was to find myself in. I
also remember having a blind faith that there was very little else worthwhile to do and that the “route” we were taking would lead somewhere – one day. At the same time I always felt a sense of belonging in that place as my parents had made a point of taking me out to natural environments before I could either talk or walk.

Yon’s work focuses on the “route” that an individual takes as a result of difference in his/her community and he states that outdoor programming has a homogenising effect that enables the diaspora between “routes” and “roots” to be more tightly compressed (2000). It even leads to an increase in homogeneity given the control exerted by the surroundings. The experience for most participants of a relatively well balanced, high-functioning group is often similar and students hear frequently the echoes of the general experience as commonalities in each other’s feedback. At a deeper level, individuals are wont to process the experience in different ways through different meaning-making processing, arriving at various conclusions, left with images that frequently reflect their “roots”, their own sense of personal history that may or may not include aspects of ethnicity and country of origin (2000). In this aspect outdoor experiences are able to embrace aspects of “roots” and “routes” as they pertain to the construction of individual identity and ultimately one’s consideration of the self. Such an environment is able to embrace both facets of identity concomitantly such that the individual is able to negotiate continually with the environment but more importantly with their teenage peer group in such an environment. The deliberate inclusion of environment here is key. The concept of sacred space is also particularly important. “Sacred Space always leaves its mark on the seeker…the seeker is irrevocably transformed – he has entered the Sacred Space is forever transformed.” (Bacon, 1983, p.
53). With the evident compression that the environment and purpose of wilderness expedition travel provides, it appears that the environment is also an aspect of relationship(s) that go to forming the identity of the individuals participating in a trip, in the same way that Yon talks about Steve above. I will talk more about space and sacred space in the next section.

Philip talked about this issue at length in his interview and I was particularly taken with his outstanding articulation of his ideas combining a syllabus of knowledge, with an understanding of the knowledge of self.

If I am going to help Johnny get the textbook facts then I am going to have to open up Johnny and that is a different set of facts — that is facts about Johnny and not about the war of 1812.

As we step away from the ‘inorganic’ school system, for which there are numerous complaints and problems, we start to actually consider the possibility of ‘opening’ the individual. Thus we include and extend the mandate of an organisation like Outward Bound and seek the activation and actualisation of the individual to become a learner. Philip gives a cursory description of how this process relates to our previously discussed notion of curriculum and the power structures present within it:

...part of the facts [of curriculum] become that person, who that person is and what that person can do...if curriculum is about something being learned then I have to open these learners which means that I have to do these sorts of activities which don’t have any text book facts in them yet...
There is a further suggestion here of a partnership between personal development and the learning of the syllabus in high schools, although 'partnership' indicates that maybe the syllabus will allow room for the personal development momentum generated from the outdoor experience. What would make more sense is the creation of a new curriculum that consciously seeks to amplify the effects that the outdoor experience has in opening up the student such that other learning can take place, learning for which the student would have had no previous interest. Moreover, it makes sense to introduce this fact into the delivery of education through the outdoors as part of the introductory dialogue. Jardine (1998) writes poetically on just this point in his discussion on integrated curriculum and the power and effect of the teacher. Here, Jardine succinctly expands on the idea in the context of integrated curriculum:

Integration leads to glimpses of a truly lived curriculum, a true *curriculum vitae* [italics sic], one that exudes the generativity, movement, liveliness, and difficulty that lies at the heart of living our lives, as educators in the presence of new life in our midst (Smith 1988b, 175) sic], in the presence of children A truly integrated curriculum involves the ambiguous and difficult ways that in which are lives are intertwined with children – the irresolvable paradox of children ‘being part of us but also being apart from us’ (Smith 1988b, 175) [sic] – and the ways in which our lives together with children are interwoven with the life of the Earth It is *this* ‘integer,’ *this* ‘whole,’ *this* ‘integrity,’ that the integrated curriculum voices. (Jardine, 1998, p. 73).

Jardine suggests integrating our whole awareness of the individual to incorporate our inherent care of young children and youth, and Philip suggests that we actually have
to attend to the individual as a developing being first. In my experience, I found it is also important to ensure that individuals feel safe, both physically and emotionally. This necessarily involves caring for the group and its individuals at the outset when preparing for wilderness trips. Taking time to prepare equipment, clothing and particularly food is a profound expression of love, so that the individual knows they will be cared for, and it is often enough to invoke enough trust that one is able to quickly immerse oneself into the environment to both learn from and learn about. This natural process generates an entry point for initiation of an ‘integrated curriculum’ without more deliberate even cumbersome practices from within the confines of a classroom. Such preparation is part of the flow of an outdoor program that naturally merges the syllabus and the development of self in a way that we can truly say invokes this aspect of ‘curriculum’ in inclusive ways, without having to use the prefix ‘integrated.’

Other students’ testimony supports Philip’s hypothesis and discussion of the above ideas. Keeter states, “In that community there was safety to open up to the things that they had never been able to open up to before.” Previously, Keeter had been talking about how communication between students on trips had helped them acknowledge and realise some of the more pressing issues that featured in their lives. The tone and nature of the community experience in the outdoors seeks to focus interest in the self. Another student, Amara, concurs with the idea of ‘arriving’ at a place, both geographically and personally where she “…get[s] past my own blocks to allow myself to learn in the first place…in terms of the academic part it definitely had to do with my self esteem and how I looked at myself.” Suzie also talks about her voyage of self-discovery when she states:
“basically the most important thing was [sic] that I learned more about myself... that school made me grow as a person even though I did not grow right away. I learned the steps to learn how to be myself that I still use today and I will never forget them.”

Gwendolyn comments: “For me it was the ideal place for my mind to be open” and Keeter speaks of a more forceful position that NVOS put him in stating: “When I was out in the woods I was really forced to look at my life clearly for the first time. There were never opportunities before.”

There has been much written on the transformative nature of outdoor experiences (Nadler & Luckner, 1992; Priest & Gass, 1997)). In order to incorporate a different aspect to this work, one that I consider to be more phenomenological than analytical or psychological, I have chosen to adopt an alternative perspective. Wanda Hurren’s book Line Dancing offers a feminist viewpoint to the negotiation of space and the study of geography that lends some intriguing insights into the above comments of Suzie and Gwendolyn and that of Amara below particularly given that they are all women. Hurren discusses the contribution of Catherine Nash. What she describes is a powerful yet appropriately realistic discussion as to the nature of feminist thought with respect to the discourse of geography and its deliberate interposition in the study of feminism:

Post-modern, feminist, and post-colonialist perspectives within human geography attempt to get back the body by acknowledging, and often privileging, the local, the personal, the situated nature of our lives. These perspectives actually point out
the even in the disembodied viewing, the body is often present in the form of the landscape. (Hurren, 2000, p. 69).

Hurren’s discussion of the feminist perspective on the study of geography is an interesting one, particularly as it connects outdoor education with the field of personal development. The ways in which Gwendolyn and Suzie talk about their experiences suggest that the inclusion of the surrounding geography and its affect on their psyche can only have been mediated through the body. In discussing Hillis, Hurren shows how a disembodied perspective might allow the eye to venture forth but leaves behind our marginalized bodies as insignificant (2000, pp. 70-71). Hurren concludes her discussion of Hillis: “Like Hillis, my desire for a more embodied geo-graphying is because I ‘understand the material body, eyes included, to form the basis or actuality of geographic experience from which we negotiate ongoing and inter-subjective relationships’” (2000, p. 71). Whilst Hurren here offers a “geo-graphic” perspective, the young women’s comments above seem to have encapsulated the landscape and surroundings to become part of the “inter-subjective relationship” in a way that one is unable to discern the landscape from the individual. Indeed, in discussing Nash, Hurren goes further to suggest that there is a gender difference in the ongoing discourse, that “Landscape is often equated with a woman’s body, an essentialized, close-to-nature, maternal body in some cases, and in others, a mysterious, exotic, wild body that must be known and tamed.” (2000, p. 69). In contrast, she comments on Kathleen Kirby’s work: “…there is a gender differential in spatial negotiation; that men somehow are accustomed to erasing their physicality and that women do not have the same luxury…” (2000, p. 70).
Amara continues with this theme. I was quite taken with Amara's perception of her experiences of her journey at NVOS; and so include a lengthy passage with little comment attached.

I struggled a lot...going out on the camping trips because it forced me to look at myself. It forced me to, you know, see myself in an environment where I couldn't hide behind the, you know, all the everyday things of life...it was just such an amazing gift to be in that place where I was totally surrounded by nature and beauty and the naturalness of all that...I totally realised how important every moment of that was and it would not have all been similar if I hadn't been outside in a tent, in my sweaty fleece [we both laugh]...There is definitely something to giving up your comforts. There's a purge, there's something in completely leaving your four walls, your sink, your bathroom and your bath tub, you know, every thing like that to actually get down and dirty and expose yourself to the wilderness and realise that, you know, way back in the day we actually didn't have this stuff...I don't know, you know, if a lot people were directly connecting it but I think that in a roundabout way it helps people connect with their roots, you know; like what humans originally were, what we still are. We're animals, to actually, call ourselves human, we're not animals, we're people, like we're special, we're different.

In fact I see this passage as a conclusion to the discussion of Wanda Hurren's work in a way that preserves the honesty and viewpoint of Amara's passionate interpretation of her experience. Her synthesis and inference of her experience and the
inclusion of wider perspectives lends itself to part of the overall meaning-making process that enables her to arrive at such satisfying personal conclusions.

There is a connection here with Philip’s comments about the student discovering who s/he is (50%) and helping him/her construct who s/he is (the other 50%). Amara shows here how she is connected to more of herself through the group wilderness experience. In fact, Amara’s comments above serve to bring the inclusion of “roots” and “routes” full circle. Amara continued to talk in great detail about how aboriginal peoples were connected to the earth in their daily functioning lives:

Human Beings don’t work with nature anymore – we work mostly against it...and human beings as a whole are trying to re-learn those things, we’re trying to work with nature again or at least now we’re realising that if we’re not going to work with nature again that we’re all going to kill ourselves basically...those are the best learning lesson you can have, in terms of being able to go out into the wilderness...and say look I can do this. I can live in the wilderness and take care of myself...

Amara’s connection to history and the way people used to be connected to nature illustrates some of her own personal journey through the outdoors. There is a very real sense that she has immersed herself into this outdoor culture, “...as a whole...trying to re-learn those things...” There is inherent in this description of the true nature and state of human beings, a description of her process. She feels ‘whole’ once more as a result of being out on a wilderness trip with her peers and the experience that ‘...forced me to look at myself...’ This is a description of the opening up of this individual as it occurred for
one person but the personal perceptions involved vary from person to person. Although there are strong common themes, the methods and language used to describe this experience vary.

Keeter helps us understand this notion of force: “I was really forced to look at my life clearly for some of the first times [sic]. There was never opportunities before to be clear headed and check out what was going on.”. Much like Amara, Keeter’s thoughts suggest that the wilderness experience reaches something deep inside the individual that needs to be discovered in order to grow and discover the inner self – the ‘...50% of who is...’ component from my interview with Philip.

I asked Orbit in what ways did other ways of being and feeling affect his ability to approach the learning of curriculum. He replied:

If you are going to feed the mind then you have got to feed the soul too, so that’s what that feeling is - right. You are being educated in a place where it is comfortable to be educated in...because there is more feeling in it you want to take more out of it, you want to get more out of this experience.

I suggested to Orbit that someone was looking after his soul and that it was part of the whole school experience, he replied, “...it was that whole learning thing – it had to do with all aspects of it...of body, mind and soul.” As a result of being educated in a place that is ‘comfortable’, Orbit illustrates how attention to one’s soul and the concerns of the whole person, mind, body and soul are part of the ‘learning thing’. Indeed, he states that the areas of mind, body and soul should “be attended”.


The key idea here is that when an individual’s growth needs are being addressed or attended to, either consciously or as a by-product of the outdoor experience, then the individual knows that s/he is being valued. Moreover, the growth learning experience is a key factor in improving the individual’s willingness to become a learner of ‘...text book facts’, which I shall address in the next chapter.

Whilst I did not pre-empt the outdoor learning experience as such, I will certainly move into the future with a sure understanding that this is the beginning of a process that creates an effective and lifelong learner.

New (head) space

This section of the study discovered how the interviewees acknowledged the effect the environment had on their sense of self with the acceptance of a new perception of self as situated in their environment, a perception that suggests the augmenting of a ‘cleaner’ and ‘newer’ self. The interviewees comments were the easiest to understand from the point of view of empathy and the most difficult to understand when considering wider (contributing) phenomena involved in their experiences. Van Mannen provides us with an adequate overview:

The four fundamental existentials of spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality may be seen to belong to the existential ground by way of which all human beings experience the world, though not all in the same modality of course...Lived space (spatiality) is felt space...but lived space is more difficult to put into words since the experience of lived space (as lived time, body) is largely pre-verbal; we do not ordinarily reflect on it.' (Van Mannen, 1990, p. 102).
This aspect of lived space for me is truly pre-verbal and comes across as such in the interviewees' perceptions of the spatiality of wilderness. The notion of space, however as being felt directs our attention to the intrinsic embodied sense of lived space. This space invites the psyche to accept a more multifarious nature of being. This could possibly be similar to the way music invites us to a more multifarious way of feeling.

The space, the arena, the milieu of study of learning changes everything. Students' experience is modified in every way by the learning milieu, particularly when the powerful and impactful milieu of wilderness and natural environments and the resulting student experience combine to form an integrated, organic and functioning system of mutual exchange. My participation in wilderness environments has been mostly spiritual and I empathize with Orbit's comment below: '...an experience like that, your mind kind of goes 'ahhhhh". Indeed I experience an almost immediate transition into a different mental space when walking in my local forest. Wilderness travel for extended periods of time has catalyzed transcendence into higher plains, both literally and metaphorically, and my experience has been one of a relaxing of the mind and an inclusion of self into the wider space of natural peace. At its highest elevation, I have been unable to discern the boundaries between the tactile nature of my own skin with the 'mind' of the landscape - indeed, land and I have become one and it is the closest I have probably come to experiencing the mind and peace of God in the secular sense. Bowers has illustrated this point well: '...the starting point in the learning process [is] the exploration of the interface between the student's existential self and the social-cultural milieu.' (Bowers, 1974, p. 115). Discussing the learning environment as a function of culture is wholly appropriate given the potential transformative nature of wilderness experience. There is here an
inherent link with the universal characteristics of transformative change and development, particularly as expressed by Takahashi:

…the four major aspects of personal transformation – movement beyond modernist worldview; awakening our whole persons; reconnecting ourselves with the rest of the world; and affirmation of ourselves in the process through which individuals move beyond their minimal self to embrace ‘ecological consciousness.’ (Takahashi, 2004, p. 179).

These four aspects can be seen in the concluding pedagogical model in the concluding chapter of this paper.

Perception here plays a role and Bowers illustrates at length the implied and even tacit message invisibly transmitted through the environment of contemporary culture. Advancing into an entirely different environment provides a comparison to contemporary culture that allows the student to assess their own culture whilst allowing opportunities to experience a new awareness, a new consciousness and new mental paradigm, a paradigm that serves other ways and opportunities for learning, discovering, asking new questions and accepting answers to old questions. (1974, pp. 119-120). Bowers continues:

Establishing the sense of connectedness between the existential self and that dimension of the individual's social-cultural milieu under investigation legitimates questions that explore both the socially sanctioned beliefs and explanations, as well as how that dimension of the culture impinges on the individual. (1974, p. 115).
This connectedness, as stated above, for me is close, intimate and personal. As a child I found it difficult to access male spirituality and connect remotely with a distant father unable to connect with, mobilize and disseminate his own feelings. Indeed a good friend described my father as a pinched soul. Imagine a flower with a cold steel metal clip pinching the petals such that they are never able to burst open revealing the beauty of natural spirit. Family walks when I was a young child were the only times that I saw him come close to being at peace. I recognized this now and have used nature as a conduit to be at one with the universe and myself. This route to spirituality has been my only route to establishing and exploring a deep sense of my own masculine spirit in a time when masculine spirituality is lost. The combination of industrial change and social upheaval has done little to establish authentic masculinity when brashness and bravado have been the dominating mileposts of male culture for the latter half of the twentieth century. History and the social dimension also play an important part in each student's individual negotiation with alternative (learning) environments and each student is responsible for their own part in this internal dialogue, a dialogue which for me has been largely speechless. (1974, pp. 117-118).

Each student interviewed seemed to mediate their wilderness experiences producing what appear to have been similar outcomes. Suzie illustrates this well in her description of mental space particularly with respect to learning and environmental phenomena associated with learning.

"When you are learning and you see what is around you then you are in a better state and it's that much easier, right... When you are in an environment that you love and you have respect for and it's just so beautiful, your head is in a better
place to take in what ever you are learning...I learned about myself, about what I wanted. It is a good time up there to really get thinking – you are away from the city – it’s a good time to reflect and just really learn – not only what you were learning in the classes but just about yourself and the people around you – and kind of like what you want from life. It’s just a really good time to really think – like I said, the environment it just clears your mind, right – it’s easier to intake [sic] all that information, right.

Suzie talks passionately about how the special space of wilderness transforms her own frustrations into a sense of calm. The time set aside for reflection to regard her life and herself was necessary and important, and was a part of her process to ‘clear your mind’ that creates this new mental space. Takahashi acknowledges the holistic contribution of wilderness as a representation of the wider universe to heal and transform: “…the process of reaffirming ourselves in our deep connection to the rest of the universe becomes an important part of personal transformation and social transformation.” (Takahashi, 2004, p. 177). I suspect our immersion in wilderness environments is the closest we can ‘physically’ come to being in contact with the universe phenomenologically speaking; my own perception of wilderness is as a gateway to understanding or communing with the infinite that enables a reassuring feeling within, a feeling of calm and a ‘knowing’ that the universe might be unfolding as it is supposed to and that I am playing my part in this scenario.

Suzie confirms here that as one goes into a new different [real] space, one is able to create a new mental space. This relationship phenomenon is well documented by Bowers and his reference to Bateson.
One of Bateson's more important insights is that an individual (or any other organism) never simply acts in a unilateral way upon the environment, like one billiard ball hitting another. Rather, there is always a context and an interacting relationship. The context, or 'system' to use Bateson's metaphor, involves relationships, and these relationships involve an ongoing exchange of information taken into account in the subsequent behaviour of the participants. Viewed in this way, we would know another personally in context, and only in terms of his/her relationships with other things.' (Bowers, 1993, pp.159-160).

By viewing relationship in this way we gain a solid foundation for accepting the notion that Suzie's environment played an active role in 'clearing her mind'. This cybernetic system acknowledges the organic nature of such a relationship and its exchange of difference as the unit of information is key to understanding the transformative nature of the learning experience. Suzie was able to realize her learning consciousness, although this could also be said to be part of the culture of NVOS as part of the mediated social-cultural milieu mentioned above. She paid particular attention to her mind in this part of her interview response and it is a topic that Bowers provides significant commentary related to Suzie's phenomenological shifts in consciousness as to her role and relationship within a system.

This example of a system includes...both human and non-human elements. By reframing how we understand the relationship in terms of the information flowing through the pathways that are the points of contact within an interactive system, Bateson overcomes the long-held Western bias that represents humans as the source of mental activity, and the non-human as essentially material and non-
intelligent. This example of the coupling of tree and man as an independent mental system overturns this bias. To use Bateson's own words, 'in no system which shows mental characteristics can any part have unilateral control over the whole. In other words, the mental characteristics of the system are immanent, not in some part, but in the system as a whole.' (1993, p. 161).

When viewed in this way it seems that Suzie was open and receptive enough to consider the intelligent input of her environment on the school's wilderness expeditions and experience states of consciousness that would seem to be the natural 'immanent' characteristics of the system in which she found herself. In this system there is a free exchange of information such that each participant actively contributes to the shared mind of both human and non-human participants. It seems clear what Suzie gained from this relationship and this exchange allowed her to assume some of the characteristics needed in her life.

If this is an equal exchange of information, then what does the wilderness have to gain from Suzie's participation in this shared mind. Bowers' work focuses on the ecological crisis and how education needs to change in order to engage with these problems. But on the face of it, it appears that Suzie is the only one to gain from this 'exchange.' I would argue that at least the environment has secured one more steward, one more guardian who will continue to include wilderness as part of the socio-cultural mind of contemporary culture for the richer life of all those who choose to participate. This hope is captured by Suzie's comment below.
For me I was just a different person up there and I just loved it. I was myself, right and then I came back down here to the city and it was just like – ‘I don’t want to be here I want to be back up there’, and it was just total change you know. And it was kind of hard to get back to the city life after being back there for so long… You really respect the fact that you are able to even go up there, right, … that we live in such a nice province.

There is something quite passionate here in Suzie’s comments. I sense there is the grabbing of an opportunity to be oneself and a recognition of a relaxed authenticity. It is worth asking what aspects or criteria of the experience lead to such powerful phenomena that we become more conscious of these criteria and thus more able to replicate them for the benefit of future students. Csiksentmihalyi (pronounced Chick-sent-mee-high-ee) has written extensively on the subject of Flow experiences. On an experiential level, Flow experiences establish a losing of one’s boundaries where one is unable to perceive any sense of self during the activity and one’s concept of time disappears. S/he relates the experience as being highly enjoyable and one that requires considerable personal sustained effort that results, at the conclusion of the activity, with an experience of growth and a sense of being different than before. (Csiksentmihalyi, 1990).

Suzie’s thoughts suggest that there has been a change in her perception of herself and that she has recognized that she is truly comfortable in herself. Such effects must include some perceptual change although the interpretation of the experience is largely physical and mediated through the senses.
We might say that making a distinction between flow activities that involve functions of the body and those that involve the mind is to some extent spurious, for all physical activities must involve a mental component if they are to be enjoyable. (Csikmentmihalyi, 1993, p.118).

Whilst Csikmentmihalyi is considering activities that have a particular focus: for example, athletics, a physical game with a strong and necessary mental component, and chess a mental game that requires top players to stay physically fit, one can’t help notice the similarities with Suzie’s immersion into physical wilderness and the subsequent mental benefits and general feeling of well-being; “…the intrinsic rewards they [the athletes] get include a lot more than just physical well-being: they experience a sense of personal accomplishment, and increased feelings of self-esteem.” (1990, p. 118).

Various authors and commentators have identified this increase in self-esteem and general well being as a result of participating in outdoor experiences. (Priest & Gass, 1997) and (Nadler & Luckner, 1992). Csikmentmihalyi however has sought to address the deeper psychological issues at a phenomenological level.

Suzie continues:

You just have so much more of an appreciation, it’s just totally different being up there and then coming back- and even though you come back – this city, these cars, these people, you know, you are just more calmer [sic]… you’re just not as frustrated when you come back, I find myself still getting frustrated…at the college it’s kind of busy, people are walking in front of you and cutting you off, usually I’d give them a dirty look and keep walking. But after coming back from
being in the outdoors and being in such a peaceful atmosphere, you come back and someone cuts you off, you are going to calm down and stop...you are not going to yell at them or swear at them – it’s more respect in general and more appreciation.

Stephen Bacon’s book on metaphor strikes a resolute chord here with Suzie’s experience. There is a sense of having ventured and a returning from a special place with some small part of a grail, unconsciously quested, but sought and then found. Bacon consciously seeks to address the question of metaphor through his use of archetypes. Participation in ‘Sacred Space’ (Bacon, 1983, pp. 56-57) as brought to one’s consciousness by ‘the instructor’ is key and culminates in the final...

Ascension to Heaven – Normal reality is archetypically represented as Earth. Transcendental reality is archetypically equivalent to heaven. All answers to existential questions require the overt or covert presence of these two archetypes; the manner in which they interact however, is infinitely variable. (Bacon, 1983, pp. 73-74).

Bacon’s use of metaphor adequately frames the transcendental nature of the Flow experience and is key to understanding the foundation of new headspace that Suzie and others experience.

Csikmentmihalyi spent considerable time interviewing a variety of people from different cultures, backgrounds, faiths and practices and also found a number of commonalities with flow experience.
In our studies, we found that every flow activity...had this in common: It provided a sense of discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality. It pushed the person to higher levels of performance, and led to previously undreamed-of states of consciousness. In short, it transformed the self by making it more complex. In this growth of the self lies the key to flow activities. (1993, p. 74).

Going out on wilderness expeditions is hard work and the physical commitment, whilst not necessitating a high degree of skill, is considerable. Still it is the investment in time and energy (and money) that establishes the physical and therefore mental commitment to a lifestyle (albeit temporary) enables transcendence, transport and transformation. Indeed, I have found my own perspectives of the 'civilized' world significantly altered and I have asked myself significant and basic questions about the nature of our societal structures within the new context of wilderness travel and the sense of peace that I have brought with me from wilderness experiences.

Indeed Csikszentmihalyi has spent part of the fifth chapter discussing the merits of yoga and the martial arts as the ultimate control.” (1990, p. 103). He even goes so far to say, “...everyday experience of duality between mind and body is transformed into the harmonious one-pointedness of mind.” (1990, p. 106). This is a reminder of the first principle. I have been practicing a form of the martial art, Aikido, that aims to enable the individual to coordinate mind and body in order to achieve a relaxed and calm state of mind from which one is to organize and live one’s life. The practice is focused on four key principles:
1. Keep One Point: This is the natural place of physical, mental and spiritual balance. By concentrating in our one point and keeping correct posture we can naturally coordinate mind and body.

2. Relax Completely: When we calm our mind, our body naturally relaxes.

3. Keep Weight Underside: The weight of an object naturally settles to its lowest point. Living calmness is a state where the weight of the body naturally settles underside.

4. Extend Ki: Ki is living power. Extending Ki is to utilize our living power to the fullest extent. By focussing our mind and body we can live a healthy vigorous life. (Vancouver Ki Society. Brochure).

Practising just one of these principles allows the student to unify mind and body. It is the last of these principles that reminds me of Suzie’s experience the most, and the principle that aligns the most with the quote from Csikszentmihalyi above. (The translation of the Japanese is a little inaccurate. The expression is better understood if we say ‘Ki is extending’ rather than ‘Extend Ki’, implying that the energy of life is all around us and travels out in all directions to infinity). When we, as students would be practicing the last principle, our Sensei (chief instructor) would say consider yourselves as tea bags in the ocean. The tea bag still exists but it is unified (through mind/body coordination) with the energy of the universe. In such (mental) states life becomes easy, energy is ever-flowing and one is left with a ‘light floaty feeling.’ Aikido is just the means by which we are able to test for this principle. (Indeed there are a number of people who just practice these principles without practicing Aikido as outlined in *Ki in Daily Life* (2001) by Koichi Tohei). Suzie’s descriptions of her experiences in the
outdoors are well represented in the literature of Csikszentmihalyi and in the practices of Ki Aikido.

The practice of the co-ordination of mind and body is a difficult practice, particularly for beginners. Instruction tends to focus on either mind or body practices in order to bring about ‘co-ordination’. Notwithstanding these phenomena, the Sensei has challenged me to chance my sub-conscious mind, that changing one’s mind is a facet of the outcome phenomena of this type of training. Indeed Daloz endorses this change of mind for individual, social and environmental benefit. “As Einstein famously observed, you cannot fix the problem with the same consciousness that caused it in the first place. We have to change our minds – as individuals as a culture.” (Daloz, 2004, p. 30). I have benefited enormously from Ki training and feel considerably calmer and more focussed as a result. I am also mindful that this training is an infinite journey and even in this earthly world and I am still a beginner compared to some of the instructors who have been training and continue to train upwards of ten years. My outdoor experiences have helped me to understand the phenomenon of mind/body co-ordination and Suzie talks passionately about how the special space of wilderness transforms her frustrations into a sense of calm. The time set aside for reflection to regard her life and herself was a part of her process to ‘clear your mind’ that creates this new mental space. It is this aspect of Suzie’s experience that returns us once again to the realms of wilderness.

Abrams (1996) illustrates how out of touch we are with our spiritual roots, as much as we are out of ‘touch’ with the roots of the trees and plants of Earth today. Abrams and Taylor (1991) both talk of a retrieval of ourselves from times when we were able to define ourselves by our geography rather than by our hegemony; a time when our
very identity was represented in the *embodiment* of landscape. This connection still lies dormant within us though periodically woken from its slumber and aroused from the malaise that contemporary culture impresses upon us. Such a retrieval can still be part of future transformation as we re-realise ourselves in a simple and more spiritual world.

The human mind is not some otherworldly essence that comes to house itself inside our physiology. Rather, it is instilled and provoked by the sensorial field itself, induced by the tensions and participations between the human body and the animate earth. (Abrams, 1996, p. 262).

The above quote allows us to consider the introduction of wilderness environments into the psyche as art of a new way of being, but Abrams takes this approach one step further.

By acknowledging such links between the inner, psychological world and the perpetual terrain that surrounds us, we begin to turn inside-out, loosening the psyche from its confinement within a strictly human sphere, freeing sentience to return to the sensible world that contains us. Intelligence is no longer ours alone but is a property of the earth; we are in it, of it, immersed in its depths. And indeed each terrain, each ecology, seems to have its own particular intelligence, to its unique vernacular of soil and leaf and sky. (1996, p. 262).

Abrams beautifully describes the link we have with the ‘intelligence’ of our world and how we are ‘loosened’ from our confinement to realize its poetry of an ecological psyche. This provides our final puzzle piece to understanding how Suzie’s experience changes her perceptions leaving her more willing to access alternative realities and a
consequent increased sense of consciousness. This process enables the learner to embark on a personal educational journey. She goes on to speak of the origin of her new habits as a learner in college:

It just came to me – like I learned that when I was up on the mountain, you know what I mean, and then I could use those tools when I came back into the classroom when we were here…like I remember doing really getting into the math and I got quite a bit done, right…I was able to do that because my head was in a better place from being up there. I would come back from the mountain…come back to class and I was able to do that, I was able to back into the homework and stuff which I would never even have thought to do in the high school.

Suzie’s recounting of her experiences show how we might conclude with a purpose or objective for embarking into outdoor learning experiences in the first place; the initiation and origination of a truly life long learner. She describes the environment and milieu that she needs to study from her textbook, a form of learning that she admits she still finds hard. (Although Suzie did not graduate from NVOS, she still credits her development as a learner from her time and experiences in the outdoor program). It is this facet that I find the most meaningful aspect of outdoor experiences. It is the transformation of self into new and higher states of consciousness that allow one to establish one’s natural predilection for learning. Once this is established the learning schemata, facts and purposes of education and of educating oneself are allowed to flow and the high school curriculum becomes relatively inconsequential to the overall goal of becoming a life long learner. Returning to this section of the thesis some months later I
discovered Daloz’s discussion of Robert Kegan’s clear map of the sequence of adult development of consciousness and the general nature of the transformation of individual consciousness. (Daloz, 2004, p. 30).

Robert Kegan...[is] describing a great dialectical movement from a late adolescent orientation framed in an interpersonal lens (“Third order consciousness”), through a counter movement toward a self-authoring stance (“Fourth order consciousness”), to a new “trans-system” position holding the strengths of each but transcending both (Fifth order consciousness”)...Progress from one to the next “order” is not inevitable, however, and may or may not occur depending on a wide variety of lifespan circumstances.

It is in the wide variety of lifespan circumstances that outdoor and wilderness experience helps in contributing to the development of this ‘adolescent’ consciousness. The development of this ‘interpersonal lens’ (see later section entitled ‘Point of View”) is the key step that an outdoor school helps to facilitate. In terms of the development of a lifelong learner, Daloz relates Kegan’s Fifth order consciousness with Parks’ sense of ‘interdependence’, “...to make a phenomenological assertion about the nature of reality; and to describe a highly developed way of making meaning.” (Daloz, 2004, pp. 30-31).

Orbit contributes to the discussion: “The English...we were given authority to have solos every once in a while and we were allowed to take our own space...it was not in the classroom so there is inspiration all around you for writing poetry...” When I first came to understanding solitude as an entity to be enjoyed I was a grown man and self-taught. Dealing with solitude as a creative space is an important skill and a major
contributor to the development of self-awareness and other-awareness. It does help for the individual in question particularly a teenager to have some focus for the time of solitude but this orchestration is not difficult.

The ultimate test for the ability to control the quality of experience is what a person does in solitude, with no external demands to give structure to attention...But what happens when we are left to our own devices? ...are we forced into frantic attempts to distract the mind from its coming? Or are we able to take on activities that are not only enjoyable, but make the self grow?

To fill free time with activities that require concentration, that increases skills, which lead to a development of the self, is not the same as killing time watching television or taking recreational drugs. Although both strategies might be seen as different ways of coping with the same threat of chaos, as defences against ontological anxiety, the former leads to growth, while the latter merely serves to keep the mind from unravelling. A person who rarely gets bored, who does not constantly need a favourable external environment to enjoy the moment, has passed the test for having achieved a creative life. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 171).

It is this creative life that Orbit has managed to use as part of his time 'on solo' and could possibly be considered to be another facet of the successful emerging learner as mediated through an outdoor/wilderness experience.

"It kicked me into a feeling of one-ness..." Orbit describes a mountain scene where he had watched the clouds roll in and roll out and he would see the stars:
...an experience like that, your mind kind of goes ‘ahhhhh’. It clears right out and you have nothing to think about except for what is going on around you. You are not even thinking about the curriculum, you are not even thinking about your life, you’re not even thinking about the teachers. It’s a feeling of absolute bliss...there is no future there is no past; I am just sitting on this rock looking up at the sky.

I read this piece almost as a work of existential poetry. It captures the emotive and sensuous nature of the outdoor experience as a flow experience that transforms the individual. Here there is real sense of the loss of self a ‘letting-go’, a relaxing of the mind that allows the expansion of the imagination – a moment that truly unites self and surroundings.

The loss of the sense of self separate fro the world around it is sometimes accompanied by a feeling of union with the environment...So loss of consciousness does not involve a loss of self and certainly not a loss of consciousness, but rather, only a loss of consciousness of the self. What slips below the threshold of awareness is the concept of self, the information we use to represent to ourselves who we are. And being able to forget temporarily who we are seems to be very enjoyable... Loss of self-consciousness can lead to self-transcendence, to a sense the boundaries of our being have been pushed forward. (1990, p. 63).

Gwendolyn adds her thoughts on the topic of the mental environment as it relates to one’s location in the geographical environment:
For me it was the ideal place to allow my mind to be open... With English... your mind is more set in a place where you can be more creative and open to learning... Being out in these places jogged my creativity more than anything. Things would come into my mind and I would feel more creative than any other place.

Gwendolyn continues on at this point to describe an experience she had at a frozen lake where she described and wrote about a water god coming out of the lake. It appears that the milieu, the environment, and the power inherent in the moment both stimulated and animated Gwendolyn’s imagination as a result of her presence in that very same place. Such a creative moment is both powerful and moving and motivated by the momentum of the senses and one’s perceptions in that moment. Indeed Gwendolyn talked about the moon and the lake and the surrounding environs and the conversation moved to include discussion about Jungian archetypes and the psychological source of such images.

Fundamentally this thesis is looking at the conditions in outdoor experiences that serve to make the individual a better learner. That is to say, one more in control of themselves, their thought patterns, their life and one whose general interest in learning aspects of the informational curriculum – the syllabus – is rekindled. In the midst of consciousness raising experiences and the retrieval and identity with embodied knowingness, there is nothing shameful about subscribing to the learning of facts of information. What is important to know is the preceding processes (opening up the individual first) that need to come beforehand in order to establish a learner that is willing and even enthusiastic about recognising the syllabus as having some value and knowing
that the process and conclusion of the learning of the facts has in and of itself implicit and
intrinsic rewards. Csikszentmihalyi spends some time discussing the effects of flow
experiences on learning, although most of his discussion focuses on the ability to pay
attention. Children with attention disorders lack the ability to learn effectively and
experience flow activities. In effect they lack the ability to control their own psychic
energy (1990, pp. 84-85). He also subscribes the same condition to people who are
unusually self-conscious or particularly self-centred. (I remember one individual at
NVOS, not interviewed for this paper, who I found so overly self-obsessed that despite
having considerable intelligence, intellect, learning ability and excellent communication
skills, was so overwhelmed with a self-obsessed world of ‘I, me and mine’ that they were
unable to devote any real attention to discovering new facts, learning new skills and
developing realistically as a human being). Csikszentmihalyi states that,

Attentional disorders and stimulus over-inclusion prevent flow because psychic
energy is too fluid and erratic. Excessive self-consciousness and self-centredness
prevent it for the opposite reason: attention is too rigid and too tight... Those who
operate at these extremes cannot enjoy themselves, have a difficult time learning,
and forfeit opportunities for the growth of the self. Paradoxically, a self-centred
self cannot become more complex, because all the psychic energy at its disposal is
invested in fulfilling its current goals, instead of learning about new ones. (1993,
p. 85).

Whereas some outdoor programs seek to make breakthroughs in attentional
difficulties, this thesis does not focus on this aspect of outdoor educational programming.
The point of this research is to make the statement that outdoor experiences will facilitate
the retrieval of students' ability to learn. My view is that some mainstream environments for education actually debilitate one's ability to pay attention and deal with self-centredness. It is Abrams loosening of the psyche that allows the individual to enter into a relationship with the learning environment on equal terms. Csikszentmihalyi states: “The impediments to flow considered thus far are located within the individual himself. But there are also many powerful environmental obstacles to enjoyment.” (1990, p. 85).

Outdoor experiences are most effective for the student who occupies the middle ground or slightly below the middle ground of ability. The adept and elite will enjoy the experience but realise little in the way of any significant academic improvement beyond the personal transformations inherent with most outdoor experiences. The lower end of ability into the arena of special education requires sustained and extensive focus by experienced practitioners that can use outdoor environments and experiences as a tool. The work is exciting, real and able to realise results for the students in all areas of their life, both academic and personal. This is the nature of the combined (holistic) curriculum.

Suzie speaks with an internal confidence here in her assimilation of the perceived transformation in herself as learner:

I was able to find a better learning technique for myself which I use as a tool today to learn in college...I learned techniques to learn through the outdoor school that I could use today...when I read my textbook I can focus better.

What is most remarkable about this state of affairs is Suzie's ability now to include whatever educational experiences she may chose as part of the value of a new (outdoor) high school experience.
Abrams illustrates how the term ‘present’ and its synonyms symbolize a drawing together of a ‘present’ understanding of the phenomenon of affinity on the spatial landscape.

*The unshakeable solidity of this experience is curious* indeed. It seems to have something to do with the remarkable affinity between this temporal notion that we term “the present” and the spatial landscape in which we are embedded. When I allow the past and the future to dissolve, imaginatively, into the immediacy of the present moment, then the “present” itself expands to become an enveloping field of *presence*. And his presence, vibrant and alive, spontaneously assumes the precise shape and contour of the enveloping sensory landscape, as though this were its native shape! It is this remarkable fit between temporal concept (the “present”) and the spatial percept (the enveloping presence of the land) that accounts, I believe, for the relatively stable and solid nature of this experience, and prompts me to wonder whether “time” and “space” are really as distinct as I was taught to believe... In this open present I am able to isolate space from time, or vice-versa. I am immersed in the world. (Abrams, 1996, pp. 203-204).

Philip’s thoughts seem to echo Abram’s:

…which would be to me the highest level it articulates of the purpose of curriculum. Because I think that’s what happens. If I am teaching in a classroom and somebody is present, in the present and this experience is a present to them then it doesn’t matter what I am talking about…the curriculum had a presence, the learner had a presence, the educator had a presence – that’s just so special.
Abrams goes on to confirm the contribution of Einstein’s special theory of relativity in order to confirm his suppositions.

Philip also manages to echo Bowers: in further connecting experience with space, and the issue one of curriculum: 'What is needed in schools is the development of new curriculum materials that provide the student with an opportunity to develop the awarenesses and skills necessary for decoding how his culture influences his existence. This would involve taking a systematic approach to the study of different facets of their cultural experience.' (Bowers, 1974, p. 115). When the environment and the curriculum are one then the holistic nature of self and learning can be truly realised. The technocratic institution of (Cartesian) compartmentalised learning that surround contemporary curriculum can be given a breath of fresh air quite literally.

The links made to one’s state of being ‘in the present’ as a result of being present in wilderness environments are clearly made here to the presence and subsequent effective learning of curriculum. Keeter describes his frustration with his previous school experiences:

If you are curious about something, you are pushed along by this curriculum, you have no chance to stop and think about how things are happening in the world and why, and to explore them on your own. You are so far away from how the mind naturally wants to stop, consider something and go look at it. We are given curiosity as a human trait for a very important reason - to explore, to find. What’s happening in the world, curriculum breaks down that...and I think that is why a lot of kids are sad and depressed in school. They are not given their natural right to be curious about anything...
Presences, space, a sense of freedom, and a joining with one’s peaceful surroundings are key factors in creating a joyful receptive learning state. Under these conditions students can rediscover a sense of wonder and appreciation for learning. During the process of creating new mental space are the very beginnings of the creation of ourselves as human beings at our very highest level – joyful, happy and in harmony and in unison with the universe. Indeed Csikszentmihalyi discusses, “The Making of Meaning”, the relevance of the ability to make meaning out of these experiences. He isolates three types of meaning focussed around the ideals of purpose, action and harmony (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, pp. 216-217). I can only comment on my own experiences in outdoor environments; the experience is one of beingness. Harmony is what is achieved when one is prepared to fully immerse oneself in the first two goals. (1990, pp. 216-217).

This section has been about the creation of New Head Space resulting from extended immersion in outdoor environments. An expanded consciousness of self means loosing one’s self in experience and reattaching the self to one’s conscious embodied ability to learn.

As a conclusion I let Orbit elucidate on the final point: “If you are a human being, why wouldn’t learning make you happy?” Indeed, why wouldn’t it?

Experiential Participation

I have always wondered what ‘hands-on’ learning means and am curious why I have heard so many people describe outdoor education experiences as ‘hands-on’ whilst standard high school classes like Shop, Car Mechanics or Cookery have failed to
appropriate the 'hands-on' label. Indeed it has been interesting to note that various students at NVOS have described their learning at the school as 'hands-on' but have provided descriptions of learning that speak of the phenomenon of the experience and have included very human reactions to their learning environment. This thinking lead me to conceive of a different way of discussing hands-on experience as being just as sensuous as it is pragmatic, particularly as it pertains to outdoor and wilderness experiences. Common and popular texts on experiential education (Dewey, 1938, 1958; Kolb, 1984; Walter & Marks, 1981), among others, detail highly descriptive processes of 'hands-on' experiential models with a strong bias in detailing cognitive models of 'development' and processes. These models have provided a strong reference to unify the field of experiential education and delineate the approach to experiential delivery, assessment and reflection. Nevertheless this thesis is about phenomena and in order to stay consistent with the goals as set out at the beginning, I will continue to discuss the phenomena of experience rather than the educational outcomes and consequences of learning through a systematized model. Of course the phenomena of these experiences from a 'hands-on' point of view will deal more with the interface of the experience (with the environment), and I have sought to de-code the transactions the student/individual has with their learning environment in a deeper and more personal way. I cannot proceed, however, in discussing the phenomena of the experience described by the students without linking these to some of the major features of experiential learning theory, particularly from the authors above.

John Dewey is probably the first educator of the modern era to identify and communicate in depth the value of experience in education and its relevance to society,
but most of all to the future freedom of the individual (Dewey, 1938). His work has been modernized a number of times particularly with authors during the eighties. Walter & Marks study begins with the delineation of a number of models that seek to immerse students and groups into experiential learning with a specific purpose, where the processing is deliberate and often previously contrived. The authors offer seven main models: Conflict, Fulfillment, Consistency, Cognitive/Perceptual, Contextual, Learning and Life Sciences. (Walter & Marks, 1981, p. 14). Of these seven models, the model of Cognitive/Perceptual best describes the phenomenological approach that I am taking in this study. This model, "...focus[es] on how thought patterns are established, how they are changed, how they affect the individual’s experiencing of the world, and how the individual acts on the world." (1981, p. 29). The authors also break the Cognitive/Perceptual model into five other areas:

- **Personal Construct Theory:** The way the individual constructs their world as a result of experience. In turn it affects the way the individual experiences the world.

- **Belief Systems:** Includes beliefs and disbeliefs and the perspectives of past, present and future. “Beliefs about the self and body image are also important...” (1981, p.31)

- **Expectancies:** Identifies action and subsequent experience in accordance with a number of prescribed individual needs. “The notion of external versus internal locus of control of reinforcement is closely linked to generalized expectancies regarding success.” (1981, p. 32).
- **Developmental Adaptation**: Closed aligned with Piaget's processing of thinking through age appropriate stages.

- **Cybernetic Analogues**: The formulation of a plan as an approach to achieving some goal and the inclusion of events and occurrences into the plan to reformulate new actions. The consequence of the 'Plan-Do-Review' model that I used in my first days as an Outward Bound Instructor in Wales.

The authors summarize these different approaches within the Cognitive/Perceptual models' paradigm.

All of the cognitive/perceptual models discussed have mutual consistencies. Conceptions of self and the world are organized in some highly complex and individualized cognitive manner...Conceptions about the self are central, and the existentionalist' notions of continuous choice and the need for meaning in life are easily integrated into cognitive models. The problem central to the conflict models' view of competing desires and unacceptable impulses is addressed in the ego structures developed in the cognitive/perceptual models. The solution is one of mental mastery through cognitive complexity and flexibility. (191, pp. 33-34).

This last point dovetails into Csikszentmihalyi's need for complexity in life for flow and development. The purpose of chapter three is to develop a model that introduces students into wilderness environments immersion phenomena that actualizes a more authentic learning individual.

Kolb has sought to investigate in more detail the process of experiential learning again from the point of view of circumscribed models that have outcomes (Kolb, 1984).
His work is an investigation of the processes that occur and the theory that binds the individual to the learning process. His work focuses on the structural dimensions underlying the process of experiential learning and the resulting basic knowledge forms. Kolb's well-known basic model is laid out below:

Figure 1: Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning

Kolb describes the different types of knowledge appropriated by different methods and even includes synopses of the different types of personalities that will adopt different learning styles. He also describes a variety of occupations available for individuals to choose as a result of their preferences.
There have been criticisms of Kolb's model from Tosie and Gregory (2001): "The model has been criticised for being stronger conceptually than as an accurate representation of the way people actually learn through experience." Likewise Fenwick takes the personal view of learning through experience that I prefer and says of Kolb's work, "...the reflective or constructivist view of development denigrates bodily and intuitive experience, advocating retreat into the loftier domains of rational thought from which 'raw' experience can be disciplined and controlled." (Fenwick, 1999). It is the positivistic aspect of his work that suggests a certain incompatibility with the phenomenological approach. Kolb, however, does say that, "...the experiential learning theory of development focuses on the transaction between internal characteristics and external circumstances." (Kolb, 1984, p. 133). There is certainly a transaction that occurs between the individual and the environment. The expression, "...external circumstances" is a little understated when describing an active partner in the transaction, particularly when the wilderness environment is such a powerful agent for transformation, and I think it is this facet of experience that Kolb fails to include in his writing. Indeed Kolb himself says, "Learning Involves Transactions Between the person and the Environment. So stated, this proposition must seem obvious. Yet strangely enough, its implications seem to have been widely ignored in research on learning and practice in education..." (Kolb, 1984, p. 34). With this final statement I will leave the discussion of 'experiential learning models' with a real sense that the area of study fails to address the human condition and, as a researcher leaves me with an educational void that I think has neglected to include the paradigms of the human (and ecological) soul.
Keeter provides a brief yet to-the-point introduction to this whole field: "It was the real world for the first time for a lot of kids, that is the real world.". Orbit comments that, "There is more to education than what is in a book." (In my experience as a teacher, I have often seen too much emphasis placed on the textbook as if the textbook were a source of learning rather than a source of information). I was struck by Keeter's comment above. He is an intelligent individual with a personal bias for interrogation of his (social) environment. I have had conversations with him where he has questioned even the most basic assumptions in his everyday experience. For him, this was a striking statement and one worthy of further inquiry. Abram discusses the effects of literacy of the language, patterns of cognition and thought whilst criticizing the restriction of the research to that only defined by literacy (Abram, 1996,).

Yet the limitation of such research – its restriction within the bounds of human social interaction and personal interiority – itself reflects an anthropocentric bias wholly endemic to alphabetic culture. In the presence of phonetic literacy, neither society, nor language, nor even the experience of thought or consciousness, can be pondered in isolation from the multiple nonhuman shapes and powers that lend their influence to all our activities… careful phenomenology of perceptual experience had begun to disclose, underneath all of our literate abstractions, a deeply participatory relation to things and to the earth, a felt reciprocity curiously analogous to the animistic awareness of the indigenous, oral persons. If we wish to better comprehend the remarkable shift in the human experience of nature that was occasioned by the advent and spread of phonetic literacy, we would do well

Abram goes onto mention that without this connection to the animistic, any literacy theory can only be “…provisional and speculative.” (1996, p. 123). It is this aspect that Keeter above describes as the “real world for the first time” and points Orbit to comment “there is more to education than what is in a book.” It is this facet of adolescent experience that is city bound, and that Suzie described in the previous section, denying students a connection to the sensory animistic world. Indeed in my experience of watching my colleague teach a course on world religions at NVOS, the students were most enthusiastic about the animistic religions in some cases to the detriment of studying the other religions on the course. It is this connection to the nonhuman yet animistic that connects the individual to the ‘other’; a realm of human living and learning that, I think, is sadly missing from our culture. It is impactful that Keeter thinks it was “…the real world for the first time…” I would also argue that with this connection comes a freedom and a willingness to learn more about this new “…real world for the first time…” experience. With skill and knowledge it is an avenue to teach the BC syllabus from the perspective of the animistic experience, although how this is achieved is a topic I will leave to the last chapter.

Suzie comments:

I actually wanted to learn because we were right there in front of it you know what I mean. Like, everything around you, you want to learn about it when it is
right in front of you. You don’t want to learn out of a textbook. Reading about glaciers, it’s just not the same.

We return once again to this idea of ‘presence’. Once we have the learner, teacher and curriculum as that which is ‘...right in front of you...’ then we truly have a curriculum that students can embrace. Classroom curriculum is often fabricated, contrived and brought into existence through a teacher’s perception of reality, usually a reality of what is ‘important within a syllabus. When the curriculum is ‘...right in front of you...’ we have a common shared reality divided by individual perceptions – a true environment for learning if ever there was one. It also creates a culture where the common reality is affected by individual point of view (a topic I will discuss later) that creates and serves to amplify the organic nature of the experience within the group. It is this that animates the curriculum into existence as a ‘learning-future’: a plethora of learning opportunities created by the diversity brought by individuals through a multi-dimensional experience. Indeed the content of the syllabus and the learning present within was, “...all-encompassing, of course, it is what you are there to do. That’s part of the experience.” It is this last comment of Gwendolyn’s that provides a suitable link to discussing the nature of sensate experience. Abram comments on a personal level about his perceptions of the natural world. “But neither can I say truthfully that my perception is ‘caused’ solely by myself – by my physiological or neurological organization – or that it exists entirely ‘in my head.’ (1996, p. 53). Abram continues on with a from quote Merleau-Ponty:

…this transaction between the subject of sensation and the sensible it cannot be held that one acts while the other suffers the action, or that one confers
significance on the other. Apart from the probing of my eye or my hand, and before my body synchronizes with it, the sensible is nothing but a vague beckoning (Merleau-Ponty, cited in Abrams, 1996, p. 53).

Abrams summarizes: "There is thus a solicitation of my body by the sensible, and a questioning of the sensible by my body, a reciprocal encroachment..." (1996, p. 53). This is the facet of experience that describes the transaction of self with the environment that facilitates access to the animistic and the realization of wholeness as a "...real world for the first time." It is the essence of the relationship we have with the sensuous world of wilderness and it is this access to the self that helps us open up the individual as described earlier. It is also the precursor to the synaesthetic experience of the world that facilitates the experience of the world through multiple senses that intersect with the world itself. It seems to me that only wilderness has this affect on our psyche and, I would argue, opens the doorway to accessing the world of a previously concealed but newly revealed holistic learner, eager and enthusiastic to engage themselves in the world in order to learn more about the world and, reciprocally, about themselves. The teenage years are the perfect time to be involved with such experiences given, "transformational skills usually develop by late adolescence." (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 202). Csikszentmihalyi also identifies three main steps that the individual develops to be involved with transformations of synaesthetic (experience).

- Unselfconscious self-assurance
- Focussing attention on the world
- The discovery of new solutions
It is the second of these that is the most relevant for this study for the time being. Csikszentmihalyi describes a climber’s experience on the great wall of El Capitan in Yosemite and the attention that he necessarily has to pay to his outside surroundings and the enjoyment that is reciprocated as a result (1990, p. 205).

Achieving this unity with one’s surroundings is not only an important component of enjoyable flow experiences but is also a central mechanism by which adversity is conquered… the person whose attention is immersed in the environment becomes part of it – she participates in the system by linking herself to it through psychic energy. This, in turn, makes it possible for her to understand the properties of the system, so that she can find a better way to adapt to a problematic situation. (1990, p. 205).

I would also suggest problems are opportunities to learn, inquire and discover through such a paradigm. It is this approach that I consider for meeting the demands of the BC syllabus.

Suzie introduces the details here of what it is to be fully involved with an outdoor learning experience with all one’s senses:

I liked the fact that it was hands on, you know what I mean. The one thing that pops into my head was when we were learning about the glaciers and we were sitting right below a glacier… we didn’t have to look in a textbook and see a picture of a glacier – we were right there. And we could just see it, we could go touch it, you know, we went and touched the nevé…. it was intense, it was
awesome, it was a good experience...I learned about glaciers at a glacier, sitting right below a glacier.

At this point I would like to spend a little time discussing the pragmatics behind such a philosophy. If a number of questions regarding the environment were laid out before a particular wilderness trip for students to discover the answers to then there is a preconceived purpose to venturing out on a wilderness expedition. Whether it is to inquire about the physiology of glaciers or suggest reasons for the growth of lichen and moss in wilderness locations, the phenomenological approach to mediating experience as I have described above represents a more meaningful personal way for the individual to learn. A way that takes stock of the inventory of experience that the individual has accumulated to arrive at that place, the here and now, and have these questions of existence be part of their own existential inquiry.

Amara continues with a sound argument for experiential outdoor learning that simultaneously circumvents the need for 'book learning' and justifies the need for 'reading':

When I read something on a page, you know, maybe I'll retain that information for a few seconds and understand it in that moment but it's not going to interest me or engrave in my memory nearly as much as if I actually [sic] see it in front of me or experience it first hand...that is so important, that was everything for me. Just the fact that I was able to learn in more ways than just reading out of a book or hearing someone speak. It was so important.
Interestingly enough, I have been working recently on implementing a scheme for active reading called SmartReading in the program where I currently work. SmartReading is more about slowing down the ‘reading’ process to allow students to spend considerable time, pre-reading, processing and paying attention to criteria such as images, what’s important and asking questions. The conclusion is for students to develop the skills to infer, predict and most of all synthesize. Of course the same time for ‘analysis’ is worthy of natural landscapes to consider the impact and relationality of wilderness. The essence of the SmartReading process also applies to the experiential/phenomenological paradigm as I have described above and could well be part of a concluding structure for the teachers ‘delivering’ such an opportunity for experiential learning. I pay more attention to this in the concluding chapter.

Amara’s thought reminded me of two articles concerning the free play with the words ‘word’ and ‘world’. The two authors in question, Paulo Freire and Wanda Hurren seem to have arrived at a similar mediation point without reference to each other at all. Hurren’s is more, “…a search for spaces of poetic possibilities in how word and world are related, it is useful to consider theories where language and signification figure prominently.” (Hurren, 2000, p. 7-8). Hurren uses the ‘l’ in the word ‘world’ to signify the transition between worldly experience and the signifiers of the word, and the ‘l’ represents ‘the line’:

I am more interested in the mingling and dancing of wor(l)de and what that mingling and line dancing might mean for geography lessons... There is a dancing back and forth between world and word; the relationship between the two is not static, there is a kinaesthetic energy in the line (2000 p. 25).
Paulo Freire's work is more concerned with the word delivering knowledge through the word although the title of the interview suggests something slightly different: Reading the World and Reading the Word: An Interview with Paulo Freire. (Hare & Portelli, 2001, p. 145). His approach to this issue is very similar to Hurren’s although Hurren comes from a geographical perspective where Freire’s appears to originate from a more literary rationale. There is a permanent movement back and forth between “reading” reality and reading words – the spoken word too is our reading of the world.” (2001, p. 149).

Freire continues later in the interview:

Reading words, and writing them, must come from the dynamic movement of reading the world. The question is how to create a fluid continuity between on the one hand reading the world, of speaking about experience, of talking freely with spontaneity and on the other hand the moment and then learning how to read, so that the words become which become the starting point of learning to read and write come from the kids’ ideas and not from the teacher’s reading book. (2001, p. 150).

Here, Freire provides a beautiful, even poetic description of the integration of experience into the processes of reading and writing. More importantly, he connotes an increased meaning to ‘reading’ by acknowledging that reading of the environment. It is the process that leads to the liberatory experience that will, in turn, lead to the individual’s desire to read and write as a transactional process of idea integration with the individual’s psyche. Freire concludes, “The basic question in school is how not to
separate reading the word and reading the world, reading the text and reading the
context”. In an outdoor school I would suggest these problems are solved and it is indeed
to this problem that I turn to next with a quote from Suzie.

I asked all those that got onto this topic of hands-on learning what was so special
about the experience of learning in the outdoors – the response was similar in almost all
instances. Suzie: “Touch is awesome. It is nice to be able to touch what you are learning
about and smell...to smell what is around you.” Orbit reiterates the same message: “It
would most likely be the sight, and the touch...to be able to feel something and to be able
to, like, look at it and hold it in your hands if it was small enough, you know.” Grace
expands on this idea of touch, the sense and learning. I asked her how much more was
she able to sense rather than just record? She replied authoritatively:

A lot...with a mainstream school you are just looking at it but here you are able to
feel it, you’re able to smell it, you’re able to actually experience it and that really
does make a difference. It makes a he difference in learning. To actually be able
to go up to the glacier, take a little chunk...

Where contemporary scholars have spent time analysing the word for learning we
have seen a transformation into reading the world. And in so doing we make the journey
from text to texture. Abram describes an encounter where he describes the experience of
being amongst trees on a windy day. “My muscles, too, feel the torsion as those branches
bend, ever so slightly, in the surge, and this imbues the encounter with a certain tactile
tension.” (1996, p. 60). We see here the beginnings of what it is to be immersed in one’s
learning. Everything about the surroundings including the learner, the learner’s senses
and perceptions has become ‘curriculum’. The whole idea of physical touch can be expanded to include a different sense of the word, a sense that one is *being touched* by something on the inside at the same time that one is touching something on the outside. In these instances it is more likely to describe an experience as if God touches one – the experience changes every part of the individual and his/her body without necessarily having to be a religious or life-changing revelatory experience. The individual can at once enter into a relationship with the thing being studied, magnifying the learning experience with ‘feeling’ – both feeling the object and having a feeling for the object.

I also asked Grace about the impact of scientific terminology to do with the identification of the parts of the glacier and its processes:

A lot of times now these words, you throw them out and there’s a picture there of what that is instead of, ok well... in a textbook you see a picture of a glacier and that is about it and then you read all these words and all these different things and they get so mixed up. But when you are actually out there you can take that word and put a picture to it and put a feeling to it and put a smell to it and just make it real and attach your memory to it and then it’s going to stay there a lot longer than just a word because now it is a feeling, now it’s a smell...

Abram describes how the mingling of the senses seeks to enliven us to new awarenesses and learning opportunities:

...Lévy-Bruhl used the word ‘participation’ to characterize the animistic logic of indigenous, oral peoples – for whom ostensibly ‘inanimate’ objects like stones or mountains are often thought to be alive...particular places and persons and
powers may all be felt to participate in one another's existence, influencing each other and being influenced in turn (1996, p. 57).

Grace, in an innocent way illustrates how she creates this 'synaesthetic' relationship with her environment as part of her learning. Grace actually compares the above experience with more pragmatic learning procedures she carried out whilst on a task investigating the diversity of trees and their anatomy:

One of the projects was to actually go [sic] and collect a whole bunch of different types of leaves and different types of barks [sic]... this is from this tree and how do we know because of this and this does this for the tree. We had to collect so many different things that did different functions – we need to collect one water function, one energy function. That was a really good way to just kind of learn it, rather than you teach it and say this is that and this is that, you gave us a list, these are things go collect them and then we came back and talked about the things we had already collected.

There is a real sense of empowerment in Grace's words here. She has been able to take responsibility for her learning and through her interactions with her environment. The facet of empowerment in improving life effectiveness is a more important factor than the issue of 'learning relevance'. Grace here describes the interactive approach to learning about one's environment where the tactile response seems to have guided the learning experience in addition to having both excited and fed the desire to learn. Feeling the object generates an emotional internal feeling for the object. I asked Amara what
connections were being made in the context of her education in the outdoor environment. Specifically, I asked her, “What things were being connected.” She replied:

Our emotions to what were learning, you know, things that we were experiencing that were, you know, important to us and things that we were learning that we could, you know, um, connect to, you know, in an emotional way either because it was a beautiful thing or because it was a powerful thing or we could connect to it in a physical way because we were physically working with it, you know, building something or just being able to touch it something like that….

Amara describes this connection of these aspects of self to the thing as an active process initiated as a result of being present in the moment and in touch with what is being observed, experienced and hence learned about. It is as likely to be as intangible a thing as it is tangible. Amara illustrates this well in this description of her summit a mountain with the group:

I have actually one specific memory…that was a really special one for me because I was just totally struggling the whole way up and, er… as soon as I got to the top and I roared at the tops of my lungs…that was the most incredible experience I have ever had. Being that high on the earth, being on top of a mountain, having a 360-degree view, you know, having the most incredible combination of terror and awe…although in that moment maybe I wasn’t specifically learning about, you know, like, er… some specific biological thing or geological thing, I was having an experience that was being facilitated by you and this great group of people that I totally wouldn’t have been able to have otherwise,
You know just that one moment, I treasure that moment so, so much. It just felt so incredible to be at the top there and to see everything around me, you know, that’s the kind of stuff that’s really amazing. That’s life and so being in a classroom to me is not living in a lot of ways.

Such awareness of the present acts as the facilitator to learning that which is actually present. The special moment becomes the captured moment. This captured moment anchors and transcribes the authenticity of that moment into the memory of the individual forever. Anchoring through such an experience takes with it all that is present in the surroundings as a contribution to the learning about self through environment and the learning of environment through self. I asked Grace if she saw connections between transformational and informational learning. She gave an extremely succinct answer that blended her experiences of learning in her lifetime:

I think that where there’s both, that’s a really awesome combination because, you know, it’s great when you can sit in a classroom and learn about something and read it in a book and listen to a teacher talk about it and then you can take that, go out into the wilderness or go out into the world...and then go and experience it and see it and touch it and totally work with it and have an emotional experience with it and then you’re like whoa, and you connect those two and then you’re like bang on, then you have it because then you have, you have the words on the page, you have the experience, you have the emotional aspect you have the physical aspect, erm..., you know, then when all those things come together I think that’s definitely erm..., probably one of the most powerful, you know, teaching combinations.
The combination of the individual with the experience of the environment is twofold: the first is the integration of the environment internally within the individual’s psyche or internal consciousness; the second is the absorption of the individual by the environment, a function of how prepared the individual is to feel a part of a larger environmental continuum.

Grace’s articulate response mirrors the awareness, value and investment that Amara places in her education. The combination of a variety of teaching methods directly linked with an (emotional) experience is the key factor that revitalizes the desire for learning and creates enough impactful learning experiences to generate the momentum to set free a lifelong learner.

Retention.

Of all the emerging themes coming from this research, the issue of memory and retention was possibly the most surprising. I always thought memory mattered (I have always conceived outdoor education experiences as a vehicle to annex ‘informational learning’ with real personal experience to manifest the ‘captured memory’). The importance that the interviewees placed on the retention of facts and of learning in general has drawn my attention to this topic. Initially in writing this section, I considered investing time into discussion of neuro-cognitive pathways of memory, particularly given my presuppositions in the introduction of having a ready method to download the environmental/outdoor syllabus. However the students do not specifically speak of memory but of retention and it is therefore this facet upon which I shall expand.
As a teacher with necessary learning 'outcomes' in mind I have frequently been unable to quantify the outdoor learning experience. This statement in itself indicates the validity of the experience. (Education with 'outcomes' in mind has frequently been a dull impersonal approach to maintaining the status quo of a syllabus of things to be taught than of the development of human beings). However, I have a sense that retention was the most viable measure or 'product' that suggests the efficacy of outdoor educational experiences as being of value to the overall education and development of the individual. I see it as an important marker, a yardstick by which these students were able to measure the efficacy of their learning – to assess the value of the learned thing. Indeed the more the learned thing was retained the more value the thing had to the individual.

William James, for example, said on the one hand that retention of something in memory was the ability or tendency to recall it, and that the ground or cause of this ability or tendency was the persistence of neural paths “left in the brain by past experience.” On the other hand, James also said that the retention of experiences and information is identical with the persistence of those neural paths: “The retention...is no mysterious storing up of an ‘idea’ in an unconscious state...It is a purely physical phenomenon, a morphological feature, the presence of these ‘paths’, namely, in the finest recesses of the brains’ tissue.” In these latter remarks James is equating retention with physical storage: the experience or idea that is retained is not itself physically stored, but what is stored is a neural representation of it. And this is what retention of memory is (Malcolm, 1977, p. 195).
It is this concentration of retention by the students that makes the most sense in terms of recording experience that is both impactful and informative and that facilitates the tracing of experience “...left in the brain...”

Orbit explains the retention of knowledge well. In the following excerpt he originates his ideas about retaining knowledge gained through the outdoors that points to the subtleties and gratitude that he has for learning and retaining knowledge in this way:

... another thing was the retaining of the knowledge...Basically it was the experience – experiences I retain more [sic]. I can read something again and again and again every three months – it’ll sink in slowly but if I experience something, I mean that’s part of my memory, like, I was there..

Orbit here shows how the experience of the thing that he learned became part of his memory and so became part of his make up. Part of the cells, water, chemicals and synaptic transmissions that physically and psychically make him up to be who he is now. It is this organic feature of the nature of ‘retention’ that features strongly in Malcolm’s synopsis as he quotes Meldrum: “The encoding phase of learning has been characterized in terms of the fact that information has first to be registered in the nervous system before a record can be made” (Malcolm, 1977, p. 200). This ‘registering’ I would argue is mostly non-verbal and as a result is the one that has the largest impact on the ‘nervous system.’ My own record of my first outdoor experiences lead to my interests today, is of my father striding out through the woods of High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire (UK), feeling at peace and enjoying the benevolence of nature.
Willie comments on the cognitive aspects of retention: “You can get a whole image in your mind instead of just thinking that was box number two that we were looking at, that black thing, what was that thing? It’s all lost in the muck”. Here Willie seems to have to apprehend a memory as he thinks through a box-like system of his memory. The outdoor experience seems to generate an image that is both unique and instantly accessible. I got the impression during the interviews that this ready retrieval brought a higher level of joy to the individual. There seemed to be both delight in the ability to access the memory more quickly whilst enjoying the memory itself. Amara’s comments as mentioned previously in this paper help to support this point of view. She illustrates how important memory retention of learned material was for her as a learner:

When I read something on a page, you know, maybe I’ll retain that information for a few seconds and understand it in that moment but it’s not going to interest me or engrave in my memory nearly as much as if I actually [sic] see it in front of me or experience it first hand...that is so important, that was everything for me. Just the fact that I was able to learn in more ways than just reading out of a book or hearing someone speak. It was so important.

Suzie talks about the pleasure of retelling the memories of her learning. I originally asked Suzie what the culture of the school was like; she originated the following vignette of her experience in the outdoor school:

I remember going home after one of the trips and trying to explain to my mum every thing I seen [sic]. It was so fresh and clear in my head and you know my parents had never seen me happier...The way I explained it them was – I just
explained that every thing I learned, I remembered it, it was in my head, I didn’t forget any thing. I tried to explain to them, like, the environment that I was in, the atmosphere and even when I came home from my days when we were here in the classroom, I mean, I would still explain to them everything that I learned that day, you know. You know when you come home and your parents ask you, ‘what did you learn today?’ If I was going to the high school, I would be like ‘Oh nothing,’ you know. I’d have a very negative attitude towards that. But when I came home from school after being at the outdoor school, you know, my mum would be like, ‘Oh what did you learn today?’ I’d go on and on, she’d have to actually like cut me off, you know…I went into that much detail…they’d never seen me that happy right. That’s how I would explain it. I would just really get into detail. I remembered everything so I’d want to tell them.

In this excerpt Suzie sounded proud of the fact that she could at last tell her parents that she was learning something and excited about how she could now retain the information that had previously eluded her. There is a direct connection here with the sense of purpose and meaning that comes with outdoor learning. Like Grace who ‘felt good’ about that and how she was ‘doing school’, Suzie makes direct links with her good feelings and her learning.

I didn’t want to learn because I could not find a way that was fun in learning. When I came to the outdoor school I found a way that worked for me, right…in the outdoor school, it was different, you know, I actually wanted to learn and I found that that was the best way for me to learn.
There is a considerable link here between the qualities of the learning moment, it’s inclusion into the culture of learning and community of practise and the joy one experiences in learning in these environments with such an alternative paradigm.

A great deal has been made of the connection of learning with language, and language with learning, but very little captures the imagination of learning like Grace’s articulation of her outdoor learning experiences as follows:

With a mainstream school you are just looking at it, but here you are able to feel it, you are able to smell it, you are able to actually experience it and that really does make a difference. It makes a huge difference in learning. To actually be able to go up to the glacier, take a little chunk…

I asked Grace about the inclusion of technical vocabulary as an invasion of the learning space as a necessity to becoming an ‘expert.’ She replied:

A lot of times now, with these words, if you thought them out, there’s a picture there of what that is instead of just OK well… in a textbook you see one picture of a glacier and that’s about it and then you read all these words and all these different things and they get so mixed up but when you’re actually out there you can take that word and put a picture to it and put a feeling to it and put a smell to it and just make it real and make it… make it… a captured memory and it’s going to stay there a lot longer than just a word because now it’s a feeling, now it’s a smell, now it’s a… you know…

Sean: I like that, ‘captured memory.’ That’s going to appear in my essay…
...And so it has. Grace has so beautifully articulated this notion of 'captured memory' that in keeping with the organic nature of precious narrative, I will add nothing more lest I should spoil it.

**After word**

In including this section as part of the narrative I have asked myself questions as to whether this is truly part of the organic process of outdoor learning particularly at a phenomenological level. Other than the inclusion of memory and 'retention of the knowledge' as part of the cyclic nature of experiential learning as articulated by Kolb, I do not see the retention of knowledge or learning as a part of the phenomenological process rather, as I have suggested, an end point to quantify the effects of learning through the outdoors. The final section on the making of an updated phenomenological learning model will show how this knowledge retention features as part of the phenomenological learning process.

**The Right to Roam with my Own Point of View**

I have met with a lot of resistance trying to get students to adopt or consider alternate points of view or even listen to them willingly. The compressed environment of the outdoor school meant that escape after a 100-minute class was not an option. Students were living, sleeping, eating, working and studying together. This realistic, nomadic, even tribal way of life meant that any conflicts within the community created through lack of acceptance would return directly back to haunt one.

Orbit was affected at the very beginning of his outdoor school experience when he was considering whether to join halfway through the academic year.
Once in the open house, seeing the pictures of the students on the trips, just the
looks the expressions on their faces, doing certain things and hearing the
stories... hearing their stories, hearing the teachers’ stories and the enthusiasm of
the teachers for the program, you know...

Here Orbit shows how the stories from those already in the program have
influenced his decision to enter a new opportunity for his education; almost certainly
points of view that he had not seen or heard before the open house.

I discovered the minor theme, ‘Point of View’, that emerged from the study, to be
significant from a phenomenological viewpoint. It could be a by-product of the outdoor
experience given the compact and compressed community experience that I have felt as a
participant and as a leader on outdoor expeditions. The relationships and the intensity of
emotion and felt experience within the community serve to magnify some of the
dynamics that occur in other learning environments. Grace offered the most powerful
personal insight on the subject when I asked her if she thought that her learning of
leadership and learning of the syllabus proceeded alongside each other:

You learn from other people and so when you are leading you have to, you know,
um, sometimes you delegate, sometimes you actually do the work yourself – you
have to learn from other people’s mistakes... everyone has something to bring to
everyone else... and in a mainstream school you don’t usually get that: being able
to learn form other people because, you know, everyone is separate, you know
every one is, you know... this is your work, this is your work, you know you’re
doing your work and you don’t really work with every one else but when you’re
on the trips and stuff, you’re in a group so you have to work together. And so rather than having your ideas, you’re having your ideas and that person’s ideas and that person’s ideas and you’re having different perspectives of everything and that’s giving you a better learning understanding because you’re looking at it from more than one angle. Whereas when you’re doing...let’s say I’m doing a report for a school and I’m in a mainstream school and I’ve just got textbooks and books and stuff like that, that’s all I’m doing, I’m getting that information and that’s it. But when I’m in a group with other people then I’m getting other people’s opinions and other people’s views on whatever reading...when we are in a group at the outdoor school, you’re getting everybody’s opinions and everybody’s outlook and different perspectives and then you can learn more because you are getting a better understanding of everything that you’ve learned.

I asked Grace if this approach was more applicable to the informational side of the syllabus, and maybe that part of the syllabus that was more oriented towards the learning of ‘scientific’ facts.

Yes, well you do because there’s different ways to describe something...when you are in a group or whatever, one person says how you do it and you didn’t understand then you can go to another person, ok, well, can you explain it and they explain it differently and then you understand. And within a mainstream school, usually the teacher teaches it one way and if you don’t understand then they repeat the same way. Whereas this way, you’ve got more of a, more of an in-depth understanding and more of an opportunity to understand things...
As a child in an authoritarian all-boys school in the UK, there was little opportunity to speak up freely without fear of recrimination and I do not remember being able to contribute verbally to the class momentum or even my own learning. (One’s ability to speak of understanding of process or fact is a process that helps the learner anchor their learning). Although I did ask questions in class and volunteer answers to questions, I knew that the class environment and culture was not set up to include individual contributions as part of a valuable group dialogue on a particular topic. I was trying to operate verbally in a culture of silence, an environment implied by the characteristics of didactic ‘chalk and talk’ teaching in (mainstream) schools that seeks compliant silence in order that the teacher completes his/her task of ‘teaching.’ Grace’s experience talks of a culture where school necessarily includes group dialogue on all levels of learning. My experience includes the facilitation of discussion around group decisions. The students have been able to see their role in the decision making process and usually contributed to the discussion in some way. Transferred into the classroom section of the program, I saw a culture of inclusion and dialogue invaluable to the learning process and to the general feeling of safety within the classroom.

You guys were doing the same thing. Taking everyone’s opinion, putting it all together and saying ok, this is now [sic]...here’s another way to look at it. What if we did this? Get the same answer but it’s another way to look at it, you know, and that way, you know, one person might do it this way and get that answer and you might do it this way and get the same answer. It’s just different paths to one answer, you know...Learning more in depth: not learning more, understanding more. Because you can learn a lot but not understand it...
You learn the basic facts; in every school you’ll learn the basic facts but what the Outdoor School did for me was to take those basic facts and actually understand them. Because, I mean I know a lot of things, I learnt a lot of things but whether or not I can understand and apply them, and that’s what the Outdoor School for me, I found, did a lot was helping me to apply and understand everything that I was learning...It made me confident...I felt good...I was doing stuff that I was enjoying...I was having fun doing school and that, you know, it made things more interesting and it made me want to do it...when I wanted to do it I did well because I was enjoying what I was doing and then I did better.

Grace here touches on the wider context of meaning. She tells us that as well as knowing things, it is important for her to understand them. She states directly that this means knowing how to apply what she has learnt and that how she felt about her learning was crucial for her motivation to ‘do well.’ Willie comments on the cognitive aspects of retention: “You can get a whole image in your mind instead of just thinking that was box number two that we were looking at, that black thing, what was that thing? It’s all lost in the muck”. Here Willie seems to have to apprehend a memory as he thinks through a box-like system of his memory. The outdoor experience seems to generate an image that is both unique and instantly accessible. I got the impression during the interviews that this ready retrieval brought a higher level of joy to the individual. There seemed to be both delight in the ability to access the memory more quickly whilst enjoying the memory itself. Amara’s comments as mentioned previously in this paper help to support this point of view.
Likewise, Grace’s comments give us great insight into the consequential social structuring of learning in an outdoor program. The resulting cohesion created from venturing out together into wilderness environments creates a culture of co-operation and understanding: in the sense that one is now able to understand what it is to both give and receive help, how this process works and knowing that this will indeed lead to a greater learning of some of the more traditional aspects of the high school syllabus. There is not only an increased sense of awareness of the location of the other people in the class/group/school but also an awareness that the synergy created is best harnessed to assist each other in contributing their respective points of view. Also apparent therefore is each individual’s willingness to accept the other point of view. Such social structuring is seldom seen in mainstream school classrooms unless deliberately contrived as part of an activity. This sharing of each other’s points of view acts as a conduit for the conscious co-construction of knowledge by a student body. This sharing might be improved if there had been enough psychic room within the confines of the public education system to co-construct a curriculum with students. It is this area that I would like to work on in the future: the conscious co-construction of curriculum within which students can co-construct their own knowledge through this sharing of each others’ points of views – a viable continuation of this thesis if ever there was one.

The following commentary by Amara describes how exposure to different points of view not only aided students in helping them learn but also challenged students to consider differing points of view in a way that predicated them having to genuinely listen and consider what was going on.
...And you guys presented that to us every day, you know it was like, let's take this out of the classroom, you know, let's do it in the classroom but take it out of the classroom and look at it from another point of view, You know, if you see something from only one angle, you know, you're entire life then you are going to be a very closed minded person, you know, that's how we get things like prejudice and that kind of stuff. There has to be more than one way of looking at something, more than one way of experiencing something to really understand the fullness of that thing.

**And Here I Interject...**

I found myself stumped in attempting to describe this phenomenon. Even more salient, I have found no literature that sufficiently embodies what I am trying to communicate in this section, specifically from a phenomenological point of view. So I have been left stumped as to what to write. My usual process so far has been to weave literature and alternative view points into the text to suspend for the reader something that s/he might be able to walk into as a felt experience, albeit one of reading the written page. Suddenly I am confronted with the fact that this approach is not going to work on this occasion and that I am going to have to break off and theorize as to the nature of this idiosyncratic topic. There is real irony here: I have been able to weave in other (supporting) points of view into the narrative but when it comes to actual discussion about 'Point of View', I have to break and generate theory in a piecemeal fashion. Here, I must also acknowledge the help of the friends and colleagues that allowed me to present my results so far and at the same time 'gave me permission’ to further diversify in propagating this narrative.
In the final portion, I will propose a phenomenological model for outdoor education delivery that embraces the difficulty of delivering education in this manner. The process, I have found so far is rich in uncertainty and fluid in its approach to the point of being in danger of being completely unanchored and disembodied from its own being and nature. The reason I describe this aspect of the model and its generation is that the concept of ‘Point of View’ in this model remains a little enigmatic as to where exactly it should fit. I shall continue this topic later in the results and recommendations but suffice it to say now it remains a peculiar aspect of the overall topic and one that I am happy to spend time theorizing as part of this ongoing narrative.

It has been suggested to me by my supervisor that part of the students’ ability to fathom the depths of their learning ‘reservoirs’ has something to do with the co-creation of knowledge. Teenage students enjoy well-constructed discussion and in classrooms I think this is what it has to be – constructed. But the comments above are more about culture than they are about teaching methods and I think this is the crucial link. The most important thing here is that the students have access to each other equally. The ‘geography’ of a wilderness expedition exemplifies and facilitates students’ freedom to roam and select the person they most wish to interact with as part of the interlocutor (learning) experience. The mainstream school experience denies the individual this freedom and I think it is this aspect of the ‘right to roam’ both geographically, socially, intellectually and metaphorically that is the defining aspect of the outdoor (social) learning experience. There is a sense here that the facets of our society that locks us into prescribed patterns of behaviour and thought are the ones that are the silent and, I would argue, most destructive fabric of our everyday lives. The ‘silent’ and geographically static
classroom is an example of such organizations. The lack of cognisance of these features is the facet that keeps us ignorant of other ways of educating, other ways of learning and, of course, other ways of Being.

The students' 'Right to Roam' represents their right to explore themselves as developing adults. Their 'Right to Roam', intellectually, is the most important facet of the more cerebral aspects of their education, the consideration of ideas and alternate points of view. It is related to one's 'right' to autonomy and the freedom to think. But most powerfully represented is the structural metaphor of such a program that features the students right to interact with all manner of educational viewpoints. Implicit within this structure is the same invisibility of being that I described earlier in discussing the regular classroom, and it is the same invisibility that the culture of outdoor program has in delivering the invisible culture of freedom – freedom to roam, think, intellectualize, learn and even just screw around to experience the joy of just having fun. Who wouldn't want to generate an invisible culture of freedom that becomes part of the automatic flow of outdoor educational experiences?

Returning to this section some months later has led me to consider the work of Daloz (2004). His thoughts provide a competent summary to the preamble above but in particular with respect to the process of individual transformation. He discusses Robert Frost’s poem about a doing work to make a living with doing work that one loves – a quest coincidentally enough commensurate with my own current search for ‘sustainability’.

This capacity to generate a novel possibility from the creative intersection of more limited perspectives lies at the heart of transformation, for in this kind both-and
thinking lies the power to move through the impasse that often marks the last

This process requires some maturity on the part of the individual to make
conscious to himself or herself this process, and willingly embrace this process paradigm
in order to explore uncharted territory – the very physical aspects of wilderness
expeditioning that create and so is mirrored by a new internal landscape. Indeed, Daloz
discusses Kegan’s call “…for a way of making meaning in which we can even embrace
contradictory systems simultaneously and ultimately become conscious participants in
our own evolution.” (Daloz, 2004, p. 38).

The interaction ‘with all manner of view points’ I mention above includes the
viewpoint of the environment, the spiritual interaction with wildlife and the forest, each
other and of course the teacher in all manor of situations formal and informal, contrived
and spontaneous, teacher-student, apprentice-guide and even friend. It is to the role of the
different members of the (outdoor) community that I now turn.

Practising Community

It has been interesting to observe some of the phenomenological changes and
facets of writing this paper and the experience of the phenomenon of writing. Typically,
as an individual, I have been happy to ‘go with the flow’ and generate that which is
required in the moment. Occasionally, as in the last section, I have had to structurally
change some aspects of the writing although nothing that I would say is too significant,
although there have been sensations and changes to the flow that have interrupted my
writing and thought processes. (Why is this so? - Maybe I am so complex in my make up
and experience that new ideas and thoughts have come into conflict with old ones and have represented themselves as valid yet opposing ‘truths’. It would seem that I have engineered my own states of cognitive dissonance. In a lot of ways I have found that reassuring. I am secure in the knowledge that experiential outcomes might need a change in original goals and intentions, hence the restructuring – much like an outdoor course. If the students are able to respond to the environment and learn from their experiences then the intentions have to necessarily change.

I have chosen to start with the briefest of introductions to the literature of Community of Practice and allow the students’ narrative to speak of this introduction:

- The community creates the social fabric of learning. A strong community fosters interactions and relationships based on mutual respect and trust. It encourages a willingness to share ideas, expose one’s ignorance, ask difficult questions, and listen carefully. Have you ever experienced this mixture of intimacy and openness to inquiry? Community is an important element because learning is a matter of belonging as well as an intellectual process, involving the heart as well as the head.

- The practice is a set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles, language, stories, and documents that community members share.

(Wenger, 2002)

This simple quote embodies everything I want to say about the community at New Ventures Outdoor School. I will let the students tell the rest.
The issue of community is a repeating theme for all aspects of our society. Schools are concerned at all times with the issue of community in two main ways: presenting a public face that the school is an internally thriving community, and externally that it is a thriving and integral part of the community at large. With my experience in outdoor education programs, alternative programs and mainstream school, both here and in Great Britain, I found myself struck by the sometimes simple yet effective personal insights that the former students had in understanding their community, the outdoor school, compared with their previous education institutions. There was also interesting discussion that arose with respect to becoming better learners.

Willie starts the ball rolling with an excellent quote about coming into a new program such as an outdoor school. Initially I asked Willie how far the teachers went to provide a different learning experience. He replied, “They pretty much put you in an environment that none of the students were really that used to, so it started every one off at an even ground and it just built them up from there all as equals.” This comment is significant. Most students recognise the hierarchy within the student body and within any one particular classroom but here Willie illustrates how the novelty of the outdoor experience serves to activate some kind of ‘reset’ button. Suzie lays the issue out further with her simple yet effective comments:

You kind of got us all involved and, you know, you could just ask questions, you weren’t afraid to ask questions. I remember when I was in the high school I was afraid to put up my hand – someone might think I’m stupid if I don’t know what I’m learning but at that school it wasn’t even an issue like that. Every one was just
so close together, right, it didn’t become an issue... I mean, you could even go and ask one of the students and they’d help right away, so that was always good.

The role of the teachers was crucial. I am not sure that I served to create anything magnificent but I did have a sound understanding of what to do to generate excellent outdoor experiences from my training in the UK and my experience as an instructor, both in the UK and here in B.C. I have managed to make sure that groups have been up to the task of their common goals on wilderness expeditions. Overtly and simply these were to get to the top of the mountain or to travel from ‘A’ to ‘B’ with the minimum of discomfort and the maximum of fun. But facilitating learning from these experiences, particularly when the experiences are less than pleasant, is the key to successful teaching on such trips. Role modelling is everything. Being able to function successfully in the outdoors in a way that includes developing respectful relationships and integrating group problem solving skills is a function of the successful community in the outdoors. It is this role that I felt I managed to successfully fulfill as a teacher/facilitator in the outdoor program. In the introduction to Vygotsky’s book, “Educational Psychology,” Davydov (1990) writes a summary of Vygotsky’s approach to the student-teacher relationship that I think summarizes the outdoor partnerships well:

… Vygotsky did not recognize the existence of any kind of separate reality that would reduce to the pair “teacher-student”, rather he was always identifying and investigation the dynamic social environment that linked the two together. The special complexity of the work of a teacher springs from the fact that, on the one hand, the teacher has to have a good idea of the laws governing the child’s activity, i.e., he has to know the child’s psychology. On the other hand, however,
he has to be oriented towards the dynamic features of the child's social environment in order if he is to guide the overall flow of the child’s activity in a pedagogically proper course... (Vygotsky, 1926).

Willie continues with this theme:

Well, in class it helps because you’re not so nervous, I mean when it’s all of your friends that are around you and you feel like they’re your friends if you’re closed up it feels like, uh, that nobody likes you because you never talked with anyone and, of course, uh, if you don’t talk to the person it’s pretty difficult to become friends with them right. So if it’s all your friends that are around you then it’s easier to ask questions and you feel a lot more comfortable doing that.

In the interview I tried to summarize Willie’s comments in the context of the outdoor experience:

So what you’re saying is, the whole experience of the outdoor trip – you’re squashed together with people, you end up pretty comfortable to share things as a result of that sharing you feel more comfortable with them and that means you are more prepared to step ahead and trade even more stuff with them to learn, is that what you are saying?

Willie: yeah, and you know that they’re there to back you and help you learn things... In [school name deleted] I never wanted to ask questions. I always felt I’d be holding the class up. I was pretty self-conscious about that, so that held me
back in a lot of ways but if I felt open enough to ask questions then, definitely, that’s when you would [indecipherable]...so that helped a lot.

I am struck by a number of things: the importance and desire of these students to ask questions and the felt restrictions inhibiting the asking of questions in previous learning environments. The very initiative that students take to advance their learning in any one particular moment, namely, asking questions, is thwarted by the very social structure of the school and the class environment itself. Moreover, that the outdoor school environment is one where both these students perceive themselves to have a much larger number of friends in their learning environment. These friends also act as a learning resource for help, support and care for themselves as individuals as well as their learning.

My dialogue with Orbit on this matter summarizes the generation of the culture of help and support that comes out of the group wilderness experience:

You go out into the backcountry with this group of people and you spend a week with this group of people, you gotta to get close to them. You know you don’t really have a choice. And after a while you just build certain relationships and have certain understandings with people, you know.

Sean: OK, so what you mean by understandings with people, ways of thinking, ways of being together, ways of communicating?

Orbit: Yeah, the relationship with the other students and the teachers in general. Being out in the field like that brought everything a lot closer, a little more
together...the relationships of the school, the mechanics of the school, you know, how it worked.

Orbit makes the link between the synergy created in the relationships, encompassing both the students' relationships and the relationships with the teachers as a function of the culture. Not only is it crucial for these relationships to be smooth to get the most out of the experience but this smoothness is a composite of the working part of the school system itself, a system that automatically embraces the humanity of the learner and those humans' need for quality relationships in the form of genuine friendships. Orbit continues on later in the interview:

There was [sic] a lot of different aspects but they were very easy to grasp. A far as the mechanics of the school goes it was just, once again, like the relationships between the students, the teachers and pretty much everyone that was a part of the school.

Sean: And you felt a part of that school?

Orbit: Very much so, you know. That was one of the things I liked about it as well. It was kind of like some sort of... I can't think of the right word – a surrogate family – people to lean if you needed to but that along with the learning as far as the mechanics goes. I believe that those friendships and stuff and just being closer together, a peer could help me understand a problem just as much as you could because they can see I'm having trouble with something and, you know, through their experience maybe can decipher it and relay it in a different way.
Sean: And that peer would be more interested in doing that or would be, because you were, they were part of that mechanic, a little more able to help you?

Orbit: Just because if they wanted the group to get along out in the field they would, you know, go out of their way to make people happy.

Such a pathway to cooperative learning partnerships seems so simplistic yet so absent from the mainstream school system.

Group outdoor experience ——> generation of quality relationships out of necessity to enjoy and function in the wilderness ——> transference of these relationships into the mainstream school environment ——> help and learning support form one learner to another.

Almost every student’s discourse on community included the teachers as an integral part of the learning experience. They were not only considered to be another vehicle for learning and another source of information but also were included as part of the friendship grouping. Suzie’s thoughts concur:

We all had such a good relationship, you guys as teachers... it was more than teachers in a way we were kind of friends as well. It’s a totally different relationship with your teacher and I think that plays a big role in it too because you don’t sit down and have an awesome chat with your teacher at the regular high school. He does his lecture, he writes on the board, you know... but it was different with you guys... you guys were our teachers but at the same time, like, you were our friends and you were there for us - just a way better relationship.
As a teacher and instructor in the outdoors I have found a radical change in the nature of the relationship with students. The experience itself and the proximity in which one works with young people necessitates the bringing of one’s self to the teaching/learning experience that results in becoming a mentor to young people. It is apparent from the above dialogue that the students entered into this type of relationship willingly, with renewed enthusiasm and recognition of authenticity that I think is important to facilitate and optimize organic learning about self and the environment. The role played by the teacher in this respect is still one of teacher. There is, however, a new recognition that the teacher is not only party to the students’ life experience of learning but an integral part of their development as a part of their wilderness journey. It is here that the student incorporates the teacher into their lifelong development and learning journey in the same way that the high school experience denies it. Amara again describes the synergy created in simple terms:

I would describe it as a family, you know. I have all my brothers and sisters around me and we have our two daddies [we both laugh], kind of helping us along, it was totally a family. It was totally a family situation. It was just like, you know, we were all learning together…we were all just creating this little community that was a really intense little community and that was very unique, that was very special.

Suzie describes how she feels and connects with this notion of family:

I just felt more of a belonging, in general just more of a belonging; not only in the school but with the people and you guys as teachers…I wanted to go to school,
right. It wasn’t an issue about not going to class for that day. It was like I’m going to go to class…

I asked Suzie if that sense of belonging enabled her to deal with the more mundane classes that were perhaps necessarily didactic in nature.

Oh yeah, and then like you said in the back of your head you’re like ok this is going to be one class I am going to get it over with, I am going to get as much work as I can [sic] and then I am going to get ready to either leave or for the next trip…

This sense of belonging is not something that we consciously work on as educators: we expect our students to automatically belong to our institutions, yet the outdoor experience fosters this sense of belonging automatically via a sense of shared experience. This sense of belonging transferred itself to every arena in the outdoor school and pervaded its very being in a way that personified the incorporation of individuals into a cohesive and self-understanding community. Keeter summarizes: “we leave the craziness of our cities in a small group and we are able to rely on each other and trust each other and grow and feel free and learn and open up…”

I am not sure I would have been able to quantify effective learning as a function of intimacy between group members. Today I am still struck by this one single fact that students’ willingness to live, eat, sleep, walk, learn, discover and endure together is a part of outdoor learning and is a phenomenon that I need to understand further. I have viewed education as a technical function for too long, as a way of downloading the most information in the shortest time to impress the most perfunctory of personnel within a
system that neglects to realise this aspect of the caring community. It is this that I now attempt to write into the most practical part of this paper – the recommendations.
CHAPTER 3 – WHAT TO DO WITH NEW SNOW – A MODEL FOR FUTURE OUTDOOR LEARNING

Returning to the metaphor that started the first two chapters, we now have a landscape that has been covered with snow. There is a new albeit temporary purity to this landscape that we are able to morph and use – a white board on which to transcribe new ideas, thoughts and actions. How do I play in this new landscape and most of all how do I give instructions to others to ‘play’ in this new landscape? Snow is a great medium for playing and for discovery and extremely forgiving: if we crash we know we’ll be ok; we are continually allowed to explore new facets of the terrain beneath the snow and if are uncomfortable with the texture of feel of these particular granules, then we may wait until it snows once more. Once tracks have been laid in fresh snow it is easy to see where you have been, although environmental change, intellectual thawing and fresh snow/ideas quickly ‘re-form’ the landscape.

The Purpose of this Study

When readdressing this topic, I naively expected to find an easy way of connecting human experience and the ‘informational’ curriculum - the body of facts that make up the content of the grade eleven and grade twelve curriculum - in such a way that ‘knowledge’ could be practically ‘downloaded’ so automating the act of learning. Of course this is impossibly unrealistic. The metaphor of downloading is so insufficiently organic. The discoveries that I made in this research show that the learning process in the outdoors is profoundly a human experience: difficult to predict, full of emotion and one
that is often co-created by all participants (including the environment) in the moment. I make these statements for a reason:

If we simply try to forget or ignore what we already “know”, we may find that the presuppositions persistently creep back into our reflections. It is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, not in order to forget them again, but rather to hold them deliberately at bay and even to turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing nature (Van Mannen, 1990, p. 47).

I discovered the social and personal conditions under which some students could realise once again their own human capacity to learn. I have to admit, I had lost faith in humankind’s natural ability to learn and to want to learn. Many of today’s youth are out of touch with this sensation, this fascination for the world around them, a fascination that was once so endearingly part of the soul in their first years as children. Outdoor education experiences have the ability to return people to this innate feeling with the support and common understanding of each other’s wilderness experience. Dewey identified this sharing of each others’ common experience early: “Human learning and habit-forming present thereby an integration of organic-environmental connections so vastly superior to those of animals without language that its experience appears to be super-organic” (Dewey, 1958, p. 280).

The original intention for writing this thesis was to find new innovative ways of teaching both informational learning and transformational learning to the students. With
respect to transformation and the nature of flow activity, Csikszentmihalyi has enabled us to recognize the state of higher order transformational experiences.

In our studies, we found that every flow activity...had this in common: It provided a sense of discovery, a creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality. It pushed the person to higher levels of performance, and led to previously undreamed-of states of consciousness. In short, it transformed the self by making it more complex. In this growth of the self lies the key to flow activities. (1993, p. 74).

But it is also in how outdoor experiences and the re-construction of self align with how others perceive their general personal transformations. Takahashi speaks of his never-ending journey and the increase in his perspective, and is a reflection of the students' comments about how their points of view continually shifted.

I also believe it is the constant challenge that makes me fully appreciate those wonderful moments when I am able to experience, not just conceptually understand, my deep connection to the rest of the world. (Takahashi, 2004. p. 180)

Most of all I conducted this thesis inquiry to find out if these two purposes for educating, the informational and the transformational, could be carried out in the same moment. The answer is no. The situation of the outdoor environment creates an arena for educating students so that they are in fact ready to learn and this is an ongoing process that establishes a culture of learning. This culture is generated as students cycle through each of the seven areas of the outdoor learning phenomenon I describe below. Once a
culture is established then one can teach almost anything although those topics that are
‘...right in front of you...’ are the easiest ones to create attention and interest in.

Relevance to one’s life is not a major issue given that very few students are actually ever
going to use knowledge about river erosion, glacial processes, moss biology or insect
physiology in their daily lives. The more human aspects of the ‘Outdoor Leadership’
course and First Aid are useful for the students’ lives and are possibly the trickiest though
most sought after set of skills to acquire.

So Where Does it all Lead?

This is the section of the thesis that addresses the part of the title “…and how it
informs pedagogy”. My belief is that theory must hit the ground with some pragmatic
outcomes to make the life of the teacher easier and be congruent with his/her teaching
practices and purposes for educating. Theory also needs to enable the students to
establish more meaning in their lives so that their innate ability to learn is re-invigorated.

Emerging from the interviews were seven major themes that speak to theory and
practice (praxis). These themes were as follows:

- Space
- Relationships & Community
- Connections and curriculum
- The senses and feelings (and immersion)
- Experience
- Personal Development
Out of these themes emerged the seven avenues of study below that have been included in the narrative. It is also fair to say that these are avenues of study spoke to me, and as the researcher, I fully acknowledge my inclusion in the study, both as researcher with a view to investigating emerging themes, but also as a student of wilderness – one who learns and grows by participating in wilderness experiences – and who has something to contribute in the way of text and narrative. For me, wilderness is much bigger than me and represents the universe here on earth. It is the place where the mysteries and misunderstandings about the phenomena of the cosmos assemble to entertain us in our wider appreciation of life, a place to ponder our reasoning for our place and purpose on earth. It is the very place where I surrender and submit to the reality of the wilderness from bountiful beauty to bad blister.

As I wrote the narrative from these coloured themes above, I found myself concentrating on particular phenomenological threads and these became the seven titles of my narrative. It was the act of writing that created the titles:

1. Disaffection with Current Schooling
2. Opening up
3. New (Head) Space
4. Experiential Participation
5. Retention - "...another thing was the retaining of the knowledge..."
6. The Right to Roam with my Own Point of View
7. Practising Community
These facets of experience were combined into a model representing the best of student learning in the outdoors for this particular population – the optimum conditions for learning. I have discovered so far that these conditions are considerably shaped by the power of the community and the role that it plays in each individual’s learning experience. So what of pedagogy? How has all this affected my decisions about how to teach in the outdoors?

The other purpose for this study was to work out the practice (or how to teach) in the outdoors. During my Outward Bound days I learned how to facilitate others’ experiences and did it well. Teaching in the outdoors is different than teaching in other environments. As well as facilitating others’ experiences it also means imparting a body of facts to students for the purposes of delivering the BC curriculum. Delivery alludes to my previous predisposition for finding ways of downloading data in order to please others that ‘real education goes on here.’ I have discovered that learning was in fact going on beyond my realisations. Facts were learned and the BC syllabus at grade 11 and 12 was ‘covered’. Still beyond my earlier realisations, it was the deeper humanistic interactions with the learning environment and the power of the community generated from this that were the most effective catalysts to learning.

The culmination of this thesis is the realization of a new understanding of the flow of growth in outdoor and wilderness environments. It necessitates an arrival point or a point of entry – the disaffection with current schooling and the willingness to explore an alternative. Students then enter an outdoor experience and initiate a number of other phenomena. Most notable is the experience of ‘Opening Up’ as it leads to a ‘clearing’ of one’s mind and an uncluttered mental landscape. This process is synchronous with the
entry into the ‘Practising Community’ and the appropriation of autonomy as part of an intellectual freedom. One is able to converse with different viewpoints as a function of interactions with the environment and his/her community in the environment. The experience, the practise of community, the ‘opening up’ and the adoption of varying viewpoints focus on one’s ability to become immersed in the experiential practice of learning. With an uncluttered mind and a focus on experiential learning and participation, one realises the actualization of a life long learner and a life without ‘teacher’. The ability and fondness with which students retain knowledge form their outdoor experiences provides a feedback loop for the quality of agency and autonomy of the learner.

Figure 2 is designed for the reader, to ‘tear out’ and put on your classroom wall. Ideally it would have a perforated line along one side. I will be using it to remember that a number of criteria have to be fulfilled for a student to actuate and realize their own innate ability to learn and that the outdoor environment, in my experience, has been one of the best arenas in which to accomplish this. It represents the study’s culmination and could in effect stand alone to represent this final chapter. It is the new conceptual framework that I was seeking at the beginning of the study and I use it in describing what my thesis is ‘about’, to show, simply and effectively, what it was I discovered.

Being Honest About Teaching

The one thing we know now is that the students’ experience happens. I could facilitate the wilderness experience well and was very conscious of the Outward Bound metaphor to life in practice but really, I wanted to discover how to teach to the *experience* thus broadening the horizons of the teaching and the broader landscape of learning. As
each student embarked on a new trip their viewpoint of their learning horizons seemed to expand. The role of the teacher is to unite the students with their own experience enabling them to broaden the view of both landscapes – the real wilderness landscape and their own landscape of learning. However it is important to differentiate between the purpose of being in the wilderness (to develop us as individuals) and the absorption of the BC syllabus (facts or learning outcomes). Once this distinction is made clear to the students there is no more need for me to try and integrate something that does not belong. To explain further: although the outdoor experience creates a more open individual this does not mean it is an opportunity for me, as teacher, to maximize student learning - that is not the role I see for the teacher. Bringing honesty to the process and saying, “I am now going to tell you about this – it is part of the Earth Science syllabus -listen and it will help you pass this course...” this is a true statement of what actually goes on. (There have already been a number of authors (Priest & Gass (1997); Nadler and Luckner (1992); O’Sullivan; Bowers) who have pioneered various eco-techniques for teaching in natural surroundings and they need to be taught continually. I was amazed to find that I could discover no extra teaching techniques to emerge from this research although I think I have identified the phenomenon of the improved learner). Indeed it has transpired that relationality is what is most important and significant in this discovery. What actually happens is that students who choose to actively participate in this point of learning have the wherewithal to incorporate it into their experience. This trait is a characteristic of the responsibility of the learner to make efforts to learn. (All too often in my time teaching in mainstream institutions, I have seen teachers take on the responsibility of making the student ‘do’ certain things in order to maintain the appearance that students are learning.
The Flow of Growth in Outdoor and Wilderness Environments

Opening Up

The Clouds are clearing – my mind can breathe

Disaffection with Current Schooling – an Entry Point

The Experience

A Life Without 'Teacher'

Experiential Participation

Practising Community

The Right to Roam with my own Point of View

Retention as a Marker for Positive Feedback and Agency
They have failed to recognise that it is the student that is responsible for their own learning. I am of course talking beyond the usual encouragement from teachers to push those who want to learn the material but fail to recognize their role in learning it.) What follows is a discussion of some peripheral issues.

Novelty as a Barrier to Authentic Experience and Learning

Students experience a certain degree of novelty out on wilderness expeditions. It is something with which the teacher wishing for a more purposeful experience to an expedition has to deal. In my experience, students’ thoughts and behaviours are lead by the sheer surprise of being in an unusual environment organised through ‘school’. I have a 19-month-old toddler who is fascinated by her daily experience of the world. She has no higher cognitive ability to make any meaning out of her experience other than to satisfy her ability to fulfill her natural curiosity and predilection for having unfettered fun. Everything she discovers and interacts with helps satisfy her natural desire to learn. She is enamoured by all of it. This same child-like fascination with every thing that is new stimulates the students’ natural disposition to discover again their innate ability to learn. What is crucial however is that my daughter does not have the ability to generate more complex meanings out of her experience – in fact, she doesn’t have language for it.

Often I felt the student population at NVOS reject my ‘stand and deliver’ style of teaching the syllabus in the outdoors. Students’ peak experiences should not be made to suffer any ‘interjections’ on the part of the syllabus. Indeed I have found that these two facets of education collide and conflict with each other. So it begs the question now, what
does teaching in the outdoors look like if I am to expand the students’ view of their own landscape and their ability to make higher meaning of their experience?

Framing the Experience for Purposeful Learning

Teaching belongs in this model or else the role would be superfluous. Moreover the students have already identified the importance of having the teacher as the one that interconnects the threads of experience and it is this aspect of being teacher that is crucial to the running of such a program.

The best ‘teaching’ I have done has involved framing the students’ experience. A large amount of outdoor literature seeks to assess the experience after it has occurred (Nadler & Luckner, 1992), Greenaway, 1993) where framing is the scaffolding applied to a group’s experience in order that students view their surroundings with a certain lens. By this I mean providing a conscious and articulated purpose for venturing into any particular area proposed by a wilderness expedition. It entails mapping out the voyage for the students without describing everything that they are going to feel and experience on their way. More importantly framing the experience allows the student to realise consciously their learning, as it lies connected to the local environment. As an instructor I am expected to know the surrounding area of a wilderness expedition well and therefore should know how to delineate some learning objectives that are compatible with those outlined in government documentation quantifying what has to be learned

The syllabus as outlined in government documents (prescribed learning outcomes) requires considerably more preparation for teaching in the outdoors than for other teaching environments. During the experience, the teacher serves only as a guide to meet
objectives set out in the initial framework. Students have to be part of the planning of the experience. The experience is exclusively their own and their 'review' of their experiences serves to qualify learning as it relates to their experiences. The informational curriculum however, needs to be planned with foresight. There must be considerable pre-experience teaching and a detailed introduction as to the nature of the 'real' environment that will be included as part of the information.

Figure 3: Model Used by Staff at Outward Bound Wales for Facilitating Group Learning and Processes

It is the student who decides how they integrate this informational aspect of the curriculum into their current time experience, if at all. As a concluding synopsis, I would suggest there are too many learning styles, too many perceptions, and too many personal histories for the teacher to be responsible for integrating informational learning with transformational learning experiences. The best one can do is facilitate this process when and where ever possible.
Practically speaking I have plans to create a new school. It is my objective to take this research and re-establish NVOS in another context for those particularly disillusioned with the mainstream school system. The development of a curriculum to facilitate this process is key and I fully intend to meet the demands of the BC syllabus for graduation later whilst providing an opportunity for students to transform themselves and re-conceptualize themselves the paradigm of outdoor and wilderness education.

Epilogue

As I complete the writing process, I am already left with a project full of areas that suggest avenues for further study. Like many graduate students before me, I have generated more questions than I have answered. Given the power of the student experience in outdoor and wilderness environments and their inherent connection it would be worth extending this study to finally include students where I think they rightfully belong in the education system – co-constructing curriculum with the help of teachers so that students take responsibility for what and how they learn.

I will leave the last word to the author whose contribution to learning and education represents a fine conclusion for this thesis.

The most important attitude that can be formed is that of the desire to go on learning... What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul; loses appreciation of the things worth while, of the values to which these things are relative; if he loses desire to apply what he has
learned and, above all, loses the ability to extract meaning from his future experiences as they occur? (Dewey, 1998, pp. 49-50).
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*Shin shin toitsu Aikido and ki training*. (n.d). (Vancouver Ki Society) [Brochure.]

## APPENDIX ONE

Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YELLOW</td>
<td>Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLUE</td>
<td>Relationships &amp; Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GREEN</td>
<td>Connections and curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAVEN</td>
<td>The senses and feelings (and immersion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GREY</td>
<td>Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORANGE</td>
<td>Personal Development</td>
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</table>

### TIME COMMENT - ONE

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-25</td>
<td>Fitting in at new school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:35</td>
<td>SPACE to learn in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-50</td>
<td>Meeting students who are wild and different. Open-minded. You can tell by the peer structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-40</td>
<td>Student stories and teacher stories and their energies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-45</td>
<td>Responsibility that students showed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-38</td>
<td>The teachers' story – the liberalism/FREEDOM (How is that related to O. Ed?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-42</td>
<td>Feeling of not being confined. (Related to space?) – but he relates it directly to the curriculum.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TIME COMMENT - TWO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-40</td>
<td>Hand-on learning. Teaching 4 classes a day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-37</td>
<td>It made sense but it did not click to me – ref to sinking in IMMERSION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-40</td>
<td>Synergy – a good question by Sean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-10</td>
<td>Relationships. Out in the field. Closer more together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-30</td>
<td>Relationships in school. Bring closer helps you help others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-42</td>
<td>Sean – What do you mean by the learning? – Of academic subjects and surviving in the wilderness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-35</td>
<td>One type of learning more important/ ‘No’. The dynamic – be more responsive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Commitment to same direction…to graduate…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-43</td>
<td>Map and Compass…valuable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-45</td>
<td>More to education than what is in a book (Continue tape to drawing trees…)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-53</td>
<td>Look at the bigger picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-50</td>
<td>AND the word TO BE ABLE TO FEEL. Play on the word FEEL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-10</td>
<td>The role of teachers’ confidence. Role models. Lock charge of education. (He made no connection).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INCIDENTAL QUESTION: WHEN IS A CLASSROOM FORMAL TECHING MORE APPROPRIATE WITHIN A DISCIPLINE COMPARED TO THE MORE AESTHETIC PERSONAL PATHWAY OR DO WE ALWAYS STAY WITH THE PERSONAL PATHWAY...

BODY DID NOT PLAY A PART. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE MIND

GREAT FOR AN INTRO.
Compartmentalisation. Orbit and me. In a sq. You do not have time to grow.

Circular learning - needs to be expanded.

Got to have the classroom as the foundation.

Scan - balanced connectedness.

How you look at life, God changed the way I thought of the world around me.

EXTENDED Personas identity. Downward spiral. Where will you be. Physicalised with an option.

The role of emotion. Expand on something NEW.

Other ways of being & how you learn curriculum. Feed the mind, feed the soul including education of the soul.

My summary of different areas of mind body and soul.

The nature of the question of the soul. You wanted to help your soul grow. Is it by options?

Educating the soul. The soul, and granite. GOOD QUESTIONS TO PUT INTO THE ESSAY.

Areas should now mix and mingle and they should be attended to.

Dalai Lama educating the heart.

TIME COMMENTS: FIVE

0:00 The role of Janet??? I'm excited and scared.

TIME COMMENTS: SIX

0:00 Nothing special.
## Appendices

**Orbit**

### TIME COMMENT - ONE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:35</td>
<td>SPACE to learn in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:42</td>
<td>Feeling of not being confined. (Related to space??) – but he relates it directly to the curriculum.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TIME COMMENT - TWO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23:50</td>
<td>Meaningful connection. &quot;Taking our own space&quot; – hit the books after the trip.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TIME COMMENT - THREE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20:49</td>
<td>The geography of separateness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TIME COMMENTS - FOUR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4:39</td>
<td>Compartmentalisation. Orbit and me. In a sq. You do not have time to grow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Amara**

### TIME COMMENT - ONE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>COMMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:10</td>
<td>A place to be. A place to learn. It clicked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30</td>
<td>The environment is a completely different opportunity for learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30</td>
<td>Good juxtaposition wrt connection &amp; curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:35</td>
<td>The dimensions of being on top of a mountain + disorientation =&gt; internal struggle COGNITIVE DISSONANCE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:00</td>
<td>Place &amp; origin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE

TIME COMMENT - THREE

23-45  Arrived geographically

Suzie

TIME COMMENT - ONE

12-36  What part did you body play? More interactive. IN A BETTER STATE. Better
and more beautiful environment. Describe your head it's a better place to take in

What you are learning.

14-55  More mental space. It was a different.

16-00  Mental space => I stuck with mind. (THIS PROBABLY DOES NOT MEAN
THAT SUZIE UNDERSTANDS EVERY ASPECT OR TERM OF WHAT IS
INVOLVED IN A GLACIAL TERRAIN BUT THAT IT ERTAINLY
CONTRIBUTED TO HER TRANSFORMATIONAL EXP IN SUCH A WAY
THAT IT HAS BEEN WOVEN INTO THE VERY FABRIC OF HER BEING
THROUGH THE PROCESS OF GROWTH-LEARNING.)

TIME COMMENT - SIX DICTATION

0-51  What you put in that mental space as teacher is CRUCIAL.

Gwendolyn  NOTHING IN THE YELLOW COMPARTMENT

Keeter

TIME COMMENT - ONE

3-51  The classroom was an environment was a lot more OPEN. With those things
gone the line between student/teacher was softened.

16-35  Emulates disconnectedness from the natural world. Ask people out of the city -
kids in natural places. They could think about their lives. That was huge.

TIME COMMENT - TWO

15-10  What if the Govt. allowed kids to direct their own funding into what they wanted

in learn - eg. HIred a biologist and went down coast of California

21-30  A good sch should not be visible. Kids having more power as a reflection of
provincial and federal power. A community and a free education can really help

Grace

TIME COMMENT - ONE

2-29 Being in a DIFF place intrigued me - diff place is a recurring theme - I THINK IT REPRESENTS AN OPPORTUNITY TO START OVER FROM 'A DIFFERENT PLACE'. Hands-on learning - everybody does better that way. That was the major thing that attracted me to the school. 'A change of pace at the way that I was learning...'

Willie – NOTHING FOR YELLOW